The Cattle

*al-Anʿām*

Revealed in the Makkah period, *al-Anʿām* clearly addresses the challenges faced by the Prophet and the Muslims engaged in a religious struggle with the idolatrous Makkans. The *sūrah* takes its name from the discussion of idolatrous ritual prohibitions on the consumption of certain kinds of cattle and the Quranic assertion, in response, that God puts no such restrictions on the cattle He has created and allowed for human consumption (vv. 136–45). The primary concern of the *sūrah* is to refute through powerful arguments various kinds of idolatry in general—including the worship of idols, celestial bodies, and jinn—and to discredit the idolatrous and humanly invented ritual practices of the Makkans in particular. Many consider this *sūrah* to be a late Makkah one and thus to reflect the culmination of the Prophet’s struggle and effort to persuade the Makkans to abandon idolatry and follow the Quranic message prior to his migration from Makkah to Madinah in 622. The Prophet is directly addressed throughout the *sūrah* and given specific arguments and challenges to pose to the disbelievers in Makkah. Its verses collectively sum up the Quranic argument against all forms of idolatry.

According to a ḥadīth, “*Sūrat al-Anʿām* was sent down all at once, accompanied by seventy thousand angels, hymning glorifications and praises” (IK, Q, Z). A longer version of this ḥadīth cited by al-Zamakhsharī adds, “So whoever recites *al-Anʿām*, praise and blessings be upon him; these seventy thousand angels seek forgiveness for him with each verse of *Sūrat al-*
Anʿām, day and night.” Another report mentions that one particular verse (v. 59, which begins, And with Him are the keys of the Unseen. None knows them but He) was sent down with twelve thousand angels of its own (Q). Some early authorities, however, considered certain verses, perhaps vv. 20, 23, 91, 93, 114, 141, and 151–53, to have been revealed in Madinah (Z). Some consider v. 145, which designates four kinds of meat forbidden to Muslims, to have been revealed during the Farewell Pilgrimage on the Day of ʿArafah (Q).

The sūrah begins with a powerful statement of God as the universal and omniscient Creator (vv. 1–3). After rejecting the Makkans’ excuses for not heeding the warning of the Prophet Muhammad, the sūrah continues with a reminder of the fate that befell previous generations who had ignored the warnings of the messengers God had sent them and a preview of the fate that awaits them in the Hereafter (vv. 4–31). Vv. 32–36 seek to console the Prophet in the face of the Makkans’ rejection, and vv. 37–73 include a series of arguments and statements that the Prophet is instructed to present in the face of the idolaters’ continued rejection of the Quranic message. In vv. 74–83, there is the account of Abraham’s argument against worshipping anything other than God, in which he points out to his people that even the celestial bodies, which they considered to have great power over the earth and its inhabitants, were ephemeral and changing. This pericope about Abraham is followed by a mention of the prophets and revelations that came after him, concluding with a mention of the Quran as part of, and a confirmer of, this prophetic and scriptural legacy (vv. 84–92).

Vv. 95–99 discuss God as the giver of both life and death, in this world and the next. Several verses in the latter half of the sūrah address the arbitrary restrictions on the consumption of certain kinds of meat as observed by the Makkan idolaters—along with the pre-Islamic Makkan practice of “slaying their children” (vv. 137, 140)—and counters with a simpler set of dietary restrictions as revealed to the Prophet (vv. 116–21, 136, 138–50) and a concise list of Divinely imposed commands and prohibitions (vv. 151–53). After further warnings to the Makkans about the consequences of rejecting the Quranic message, the sūrah concludes with a powerful statement of monotheistic belief and utter devotion to the One God that the Prophet is instructed to issue in the face of continuing Makkan resistance (vv. 161–64).
Perhaps by way of warning, the final verse (v. 165) invokes the idea that God causes generations to succeed one another in the life of the world, whose vagaries are merely a test of individual human character.

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Praise be to God, Who created the heavens and the earth, and made darkness and light. Yet those who do not believe ascribe equals to their Lord! He it is Who created you from clay, then decreed a term. A term is appointed with Him—yet still you doubt! He is God in the heavens and on the earth: He knows your secret and that which you make public, and He knows that which you earn. Never did a sign from among the signs of their Lord come unto them, but that they turned away from it. They indeed denied the truth when it came unto them, but tidings will soon come to them of that which they used to mock. Have they not considered how many a generation We destroyed before them? We had established them on the earth more firmly than We have established you, and We sent the sky upon them with abundant rains, and made rivers flow beneath them. Then We destroyed them for their sins, and brought into being after them another generation. Had We sent down unto thee a Book inscribed on parchment, such that they could touch it with their hands, those who do not believe would have said, “This is naught but manifest sorcery.” And they would say, “Why has not an angel been sent down unto him?” Had We sent down an angel, then the matter would be decreed, and they
would be granted no respite. Had We made him an angel, We would have sent him as a man, thus obscuring for them that which they themselves obscure. Messengers have surely been mocked before thee. Then those who scoffed at them were beset by that which they used to mock. Say, “Journey upon the earth and behold how the deniers fared in the end.” Say, “Unto whom belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and on the earth?” Say, “Unto God. He has prescribed Mercy for Himself. He will surely gather you on the Day of Resurrection, in which there is no doubt. Those who have lost their souls, they do not believe. Unto Him belongs all that dwells in the night and in the day, and He is the Hearing, the Knowing.” Say, “Shall I take as a protector anyone other than God, the Originator of the heavens and the earth, who feeds and is not fed?” Say, “I was commanded to be the first of those who submit.” And be not among the idolaters. Say, “Truly I fear the punishment of a tremendous Day should I disobey my Lord.” Whosoever is spared on that Day, He has certainly been merciful unto him, and that is the manifest triumph. If God should touch thee with affliction, none can remove it save He, and should He touch thee with goodness, then He is Powerful over all things. He is Dominant over His servants; and He is the Wise, the Aware. Say, “What thing is greatest as testimony?” Say, “God is Witness between you and me. And this Quran has been revealed unto me, that thereby I may warn you and whomsoever it may reach. Do you truly bear witness that there are other gods beside God?” Say, “I bear no such
witness.” Say, “He is only One God, and truly I am quit of that which you ascribe as partners unto Him.”

Those unto whom We gave the Book recognize it as they recognize their own children. Those who have lost their souls, they do not believe. Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God or denies His signs? Surely the wrongdoers will not prosper. And on the Day when We shall gather them all together, We shall say unto those who ascribed partners unto God, “Where are those partners whom you claimed?” Then their contention will be but to say, “By God, our Lord, we were not idolaters.” Behold how they lie against themselves, but that which they used to fabricate has forsaken them. Among them are those who listen to thee, but We have placed coverings over their hearts, such that they understand it not, and in their ears a deafness. Were they to see every sign, they would not believe in it, so that when they come to thee, they dispute with thee. Those who disbelieve say, “This is naught but fables of those of old.” And they forbid it, and keep away from it, and they destroy none but themselves, though they are unaware. If thou couldst see when they are arraigned before the Fire, whereupon they will say, “Would that we were sent back! Then we would not deny the signs of our Lord, but we would be among the believers!” Nay, but it has now become clear to them what they used to hide. And even if they were sent back, they would return to the very thing they had been forbidden. Truly they are liars. They say, “There is naught but our life in this world, and we shall not be
If thou couldst see when they are arraigned before their Lord, He will say, “Is this not the truth?” They will say, “Yea, indeed, by our Lord!” He will say, “Then taste the punishment for having disbelieved.” Lost indeed are those who deny the meeting with God till, when the Hour comes upon them suddenly, they say, “Alas for us, that we neglected it!” They will bear their burdens upon their backs. Behold! Evil is that which they bear! The life of this world is naught but play and diversion. Better indeed is the Abode of the Hereafter for those who are reverent. Do you not understand? We know well that what they say grieves thee. Yet, it is not thee that they deny. Rather, it is the signs of God that the wrongdoers reject. Surely messengers were denied before thee, and they bore patiently their being denied and persecuted till Our help came to them. None alters the Words of God, and there has already come unto thee some tidings of the messengers. And if their turning away is distressing to thee, then seekest, if thou canst, a tunnel into the earth, or a ladder unto the sky, that thou mightest bring them a sign. Had God willed, He would have gathered them all to guidance—so be not among the ignorant. Only those who hear will respond. As for the dead, God will resurrect them, and unto Him they shall be returned. They say, “Why has no sign been sent down unto him from his Lord?” Say, “Surely God has the power to send down a sign.” But most of them know not. There is no creature that crawls upon the earth, nor bird that flies upon its wings, but that they are communities like yourselves—We
have neglected nothing in the Book—and they shall be gathered unto their Lord in the end. 39. Those who deny Our signs are deaf and dumb, in darkness. Whomsoever God will, He leads astray, and whomsoever He will, He places him upon a straight path. 40. Say, “Think to yourselves: were the Punishment of God to come upon you, or were the Hour to come upon you, would you call upon anyone other than God, if you are truthful?” 41. Nay, but it is upon Him that you would call, and He would remove that which had caused you to call upon Him, if it be His Will, and you would forget whatever partners you had ascribed unto Him. 42. We have indeed sent messengers unto communities before thee, and We seized them with misfortune and hardship, that they might humble themselves. 43. If only, when Our Might came upon them, they had humbled themselves. But rather their hearts hardened, and Satan made all they used to do seem fair unto them. 44. So when they forgot that whereof they had been reminded, We opened unto them the gates of all things, till, as they exulted in what they were given, We seized them suddenly, whereupon they came to despair. 45. Thus was cut off the last remnant of the people who did wrong. Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds! 46. Say, “Think to yourselves: were God to take away your hearing and your sight and seal your hearts, what god other than God would restore them unto you?” Behold how We vary the signs; yet still they turn away. 47. Say, “Think to yourselves: were the Punishment of God to come upon you suddenly or openly, would any be destroyed save the
wrongdoing people?” We do not send the messengers save as bearers of glad tidings and as warners. Thus whosoever believes and makes amends, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve. But as for those who deny Our signs, the punishment shall befall them for the iniquity they committed. Say, “I do not say unto you that with me are the treasuries of God; nor do I know the unseen; nor do I say unto you that I am an angel. I follow only that which is revealed unto me.” Say, “Are the blind and the seer equal? Will you not, then, reflect?” Warn hereby those who fear that they will be gathered unto their Lord—they have, apart from Him, no protector and no intercessor—that they might be reverent. And drive not away those who call upon their Lord morning and evening, desiring His Face. Naught of their reckoning falls upon thee and naught of thy reckoning falls upon them, such that thou shouldst drive them away and thus become one of the wrongdoers. Thus did We try some of them by means of others, that they might say, “Are these the ones whom God has graced among us?” Does God not know best those who are thankful? When those who believe in Our signs come to thee, say, “Peace be upon you! Your Lord has prescribed Mercy for Himself, that whosoever among you does evil in ignorance and thereafter repents and makes amends, He is truly Forgiving, Merciful.” Thus do We expound the signs, that the way of the guilty may be made clear. Say, “I am forbidden to worship those whom you call upon apart from God.” Say, “I will not follow your caprices, for then I would have gone astray, and I would not
be among the rightly guided.”  

Say, “Truly I stand upon a clear proof from my Lord, and you have denied Him. That which you seek to hasten is not within my power. Judgment belongs to God alone, He relates the Truth, and He is the best of deciders.”  

Say, “If that which you seek to hasten were within my power, then the matter would be decreed between you and me, and God knows best the wrongdoers.”  

And with Him are the keys of the Unseen. None knows them but He; and He knows what is on land and sea; no leaf falls but that He knows it, nor any seed in the dark recesses of the earth, nor anything moist or dry, but that it is in a clear Book.  

He it is Who takes your souls by night, and He knows what you commit by day. Then by day He resurrects you, that a term appointed may be fulfilled. Then unto Him shall be your return, and He shall inform you of that which you used to do.  

And He is Dominant over His servants. He sends guardians over you, till, when death comes unto one of you, Our messengers take him, and they neglect not their duty. Then they are returned unto God, their true Master. Surely judgment belongs to Him, and He is the swiftest of reckoners.  

Say, “Who saves you from the darkness of land and sea, when you call upon Him humbly and in secret [saying], ‘If only He saves us from this, we shall surely be among the thankful’?”  

Say, “God saves you from this and from every distress; yet you ascribe partners unto Him!”  

Say, “He is the One Who has power to send a punishment upon you from above you or from beneath your feet, or to confound you as discordant factions and make you taste the might of one
another.” Behold how We vary the signs, that they may understand. Thy people have denied it, though it is the truth. Say, “I am not a guardian over you. For every tiding there is a fixed setting, and soon you shall know.” And when thou seest those who engage in vain discussion about Our signs, turn away from them till they engage in other discourse. And if Satan should cause thee to forget, then once thou hast remembered, sit not in the company of wrongdoing people. Their reckoning falls not upon those who are reverent, but [upon them is] a reminder, that they might be reverent. Leave those who take their religion to be play and diversion, and who are deluded by the life of this world, but remind them with it, lest any soul be delivered to ruin because of what it has earned—it has no protector apart from God, nor any intercessor, and though it should offer every kind of ransom, it shall not be accepted from it. Those are the ones delivered to ruin for that which they have earned. Theirs shall be a drink of boiling liquid and a painful punishment for having disbelieved. Say, “Apart from God, shall we call upon that which neither benefits nor harms us, and be turned back on our heels after God has guided us, like one bewildered, seduced by satans on the earth, though he has companions who call him to guidance, ‘Come to us!’?”" Say, “Indeed, the Guidance of God is the true guidance, and we are commanded to submit to the Lord of the worlds, and to perform the prayer and to reverence Him; it is unto Him that you shall be gathered.” He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in truth; and on the day
He says “Be!” and it is, His Word is the Truth. And
sovereignty is His on the Day when the trumpet is blown,
Knower of the Unseen and the seen; and He is the Wise,
the Aware. 74 And when Abraham said unto his father,
Azar, “Do you take idols for gods? Truly I see you and
your people in manifest error.” 75 Thus did We show
Abraham the dominion of the heavens and the earth, that he
might be among those possessing certainty. 76 When the
night grew dark upon him, he saw a star. He said, “This is
my Lord!” But when it set, he said, “I love not things that
set.” 77 Then when he saw the moon rising he said, “This
is my Lord!” But when it set, he said, “If my Lord does not
guide me, I shall surely be among the people who are
astray.” 78 Then when he saw the sun rising he said, “This
is my Lord! This is greater!” But when it set, he said, “O
my people! Truly I am quit of the partners you ascribe.
79 Truly, as a ḥanīf, I have turned my face toward Him Who
created the heavens and the earth, and I am not of the
idolaters.” 80 His people disputed with him. He said, “Do
you dispute with me concerning God, when He has guided
me? I fear not the partners you ascribe unto Him, save as
my Lord wills. My Lord encompasses all things in
Knowledge. Will you not, then, remember? 81 How should
I fear the partners you ascribe, when you do not fear
ascribing partners unto God for which He has sent down to
you no authority? So which of the two parties has greater
right to security, if you know? 82 Those who believe and
who do not obscure their belief through wrongdoing, it is
they who have security, and they are rightly guided.” 83
That was Our argument, which We gave unto Abraham against his people. We raise in degrees whomsoever We will. Truly thy Lord is Wise, Knowing. And We bestowed upon him Isaac and Jacob, each We guided. And We guided Noah before, and among his progeny, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, and Aaron—thus do We recompense the virtuous. And Zachariah, John, Jesus, and Elias—each was among the righteous. And Ishmael, Elisha, Jonah, and Lot—each We favored above the worlds. And from among their fathers, and their progeny, and their brethren, We chose them and guided them unto a straight path. That is the Guidance of God, with which He guides whomsoever He will among His servants. But were they to ascribe partners unto God, all that they were doing would have come to naught. They are those to whom We have given the Book, judgment, and prophethood. So if they do not believe in them, We have entrusted them to a people who will not disbelieve in them. They are those whom God has guided, so follow their guidance. Say, “I ask not of you any reward for it. It is naught but a reminder for the worlds.” They did not measure God with His true measure when they said, “God has not sent down aught to any human being.” Say, “Who sent down the Book that Moses brought as a light and a guidance for mankind, which you make into parchments that you display, while hiding much? And you were taught that which you knew not, neither you nor your fathers.” Say, “Allāh,” then leave them to play at their vain discourse. And this is a blessed Book that We have sent
down, confirming that which came before it, that thou mayest warn the Mother of Cities and those around her. Those who believe in the Hereafter believe in it, and they are mindful of their prayers. Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God, or says, “It has been revealed unto me,” though naught has been revealed unto him, and one who says, “I will send down the like of what God has sent down”? If thou couldst see when the wrongdoers are in the throes of death, and the angels stretch forth their hands, “Yield up your souls! This day shall you be recompensed with the punishment of humiliation for having spoken untruth against God, and for waxing arrogant against His signs.” And [God will say], “Now you have come unto Us alone, just as We created you the first time, and you have left behind that which We had bestowed upon you. We see not with you your intercessors—those whom you claimed were partners [unto God]. Now the bond between you has been severed, and that which you once claimed has forsaken you.” Truly God is the Cleaver of the grain and the fruit stone. He brings forth the living from the dead, and He is the One Who brings forth the dead from the living. That is God—how, then, are you perverted—Cleaver of the dawn. He has made the night for repose, and the sun and the moon for reckoning. Such is the decree of the Mighty, the Knowing. He it is Who has made for you the stars, that you might be guided by them amid the darkness of land and sea. We have expounded the signs for a people who know. And He it is Who brought you into being
from a single soul, and then [has given you] a dwelling place and a repository. We have expounded the signs for a people who understand. And He it is Who sends down water from the sky. Thereby We bring forth the shoot of every plant, and from it We bring forth vegetation, from which We bring forth grain in closely packed rows; and from the date palm and from its sheaths, [We bring forth] clusters of dates hanging low, and gardens of grapes, olives, and pomegranates, like unto one another and yet not alike. Look upon their fruits, as they grow and ripen! Truly in that are signs for a people who believe. They make the jinn partners unto God, though He created them, and falsely attribute sons and daughters to Him, without any knowledge. Glory be to Him! Exalted is He above that which they ascribe! The Unique Originator of the heavens and the earth! How should He have a child when He has no consort, and He created all things, and He is Knower of all things? That is God, your Lord, there is no god but He, Creator of all things. So worship Him. And He is Guardian over all things. Sight comprehends Him not, but He comprehends all sight. And He is the Subtle, the Aware. Insight has come to you from your Lord. So whosoever sees clearly, it is to the benefit of his own soul. And whosoever is blind, it is to its detriment, and I am not a keeper over you. Thus do We vary the signs, lest they should say, “You have studied,” and that We might make it clear for a people who know. Follow that which has been revealed unto thee from thy Lord—there is no god but He—and turn away from the idolaters. Had God willed,
they would not have ascribed partners unto God. We have not made thee a keeper over them, nor art thou their guardian.  

Do not revile those whom they call upon apart from God, lest they should revile God out of enmity, without any knowledge. Thus have We made the deeds of every community seem fair unto them. Then unto their Lord shall be their return, and He will inform them of that which they used to do.  

They swear by God with their most solemn oaths that were a sign to come unto them, they would surely believe in it. Say, “Signs are with God alone.” What will make you realize that, even if they were to come, they would still not believe?  

We shall cause their hearts and their sight to waver, as they did not believe in it the first time, and We shall leave them to wander confused in their rebellion. Even if We were to send down angels unto them, and the dead were to speak to them, and We were to gather all things in front of them, they would still not believe, unless God wills. But most of them are ignorant.  

Thus have We made for every prophet an enemy—satans from among mankind and jinn, who inspire each other with flowery discourse in order to deceive. Had thy Lord willed, they would not have done so. So leave them and that which they fabricate, so that the hearts of those who believe not in the Hereafter may incline toward it, and be content with it, and so commit that which they commit.  

][Say,] “Shall I seek a judge apart from God, when it is He Who has sent down unto you the Book, expounded?” Those unto whom We have given the Book know that it has been sent down from thy Lord in truth; so
be not among the doubters. The Word of thy Lord is fulfilled in truth and justice. None alters His Words, and He is the Hearing, the Knowing. Wert thou to obey most of those on earth, they would lead thee astray from the way of God; they follow naught but conjecture, and they do but surmise. Surely thy Lord knows best those who stray from His way, and He knows best the rightly guided. So eat of that over which the Name of God has been invoked, if you are believers in His signs. What ails you that you eat not that over which the Name of God has been invoked, when He has expounded for you that which He has forbidden you, unless you are compelled thereto? Indeed, many lead astray through their own caprices, without any knowledge. Surely thy Lord is He Who knows best the transgressors. Forsake sin, both outward and inward. Surely those who commit sin shall be recompensed for that which they used to do. And eat not of that over which the Name of God has not been invoked; truly it is iniquity. Indeed, the satans inspire their friends to dispute with you, and if you obey them, you are surely idolaters. Is he who was dead, and to whom We give life, making for him a light by which to walk among mankind, like unto one who is in darkness from which he does not emerge? Thus for the disbelievers, what they used to do was made to seem fair unto them. And thus have We made great ones among the guilty in every town, that they may plot therein. But they only plot against themselves, though they are unaware. And when a sign comes unto them, they say, “We will not believe till we are given the like of that which was
given to the messengers of God.” God knows best where to place His message. Humiliation before God and a severe punishment shall soon befall the guilty for that which they used to plot.  

Whomsoever God wishes to guide, He expands his breast for submission. And whomsoever He wishes to lead astray, He makes his breast narrow and constricted, as if he were climbing to the sky. Thus does God heap defilement upon those who do not believe.  

This is the path of thy Lord, made straight. We have expounded the signs for a people who take heed. Theirs shall be the Abode of Peace with their Lord, and He shall be their Protector, because of that which they used to do.  

On the Day when He shall gather them all together [He shall say], “O company of jinn! Many among mankind have you claimed.” And their friends among mankind will say, “Our Lord! We have profited from each other, but now we have reached our term which Thou hadst appointed for us.” He will say, “The Fire is your abode, to abide therein, except as God wills. Truly thy Lord is Wise, Knowing.”  

Thus do We make the wrongdoers allies of one another because of that which they used to earn. “O company of jinn and human beings! Did not messengers come unto you from among yourselves, recounting unto you My signs, and warning you of the meeting with this your Day?” They will say, “We bear witness against ourselves.” The life of this world deluded them, and they bear witness against themselves that they were disbelievers. That is because thy Lord would never destroy towns for their wrongdoing while their people were heedless. Unto each are degrees
in accordance with that which they have done, and thy Lord is not heedless of that which they do. Thy Lord is Self-Sufficient, Possessed of Mercy. If He will, He can remove you, and in your place appoint whomsoever He will to succeed you, just as He brought you into being from the progeny of another people. Indeed, that which you are promised shall come to pass, and you cannot thwart it. Say, “O my people! Work in accordance with your ability; I, too, am working. Soon you shall know whose end is the Abode. Surely the wrongdoers will not prosper.” And they dedicate to God a share of the crops and cattle He created, saying, “This belongs to God”—or so they claim—“and this belongs to our partners.” But that which is for their partners does not reach God, and that which is for God does reach their partners. Evil indeed is the judgment they make! Likewise have their partners made the slaying of their children seem fair unto many of the idolaters, that they may ruin them and confound them in their religion. Had God willed, they would not have done so. So leave them and that which they fabricate. And they say, “These cattle and crops are sacrosanct; none shall eat of them save whom we will”—or so they claim—and [there are] cattle whose backs are forbidden, and cattle over which they do not invoke the Name of God, fabricating against Him. Soon will He recompense them for that which they used to fabricate. And they say, “That which is in the bellies of these cattle is reserved for our males, and forbidden to our wives, but if it be stillborn, then all shall have a share therein.” Soon will He recompense them for
that which they ascribe. Truly He is Wise, Knowing. Lost indeed are those who slay their children foolishly, without knowledge, and make forbidden that which God has provided them, fabricating against God. They indeed have gone astray, and were not rightly guided. He it is Who brings into being gardens, trellised and untrellised, and the date palm and crops with diverse produce, olives and pomegranates, like unto one another and yet not alike. Eat of their fruit when they grow, and pay the due thereof on the day of its harvest, but be not prodigal. Truly He loves not the prodigal. And [He produces] the cattle, some for burden and some for slaughter. Eat of that which God has provided you, and follow not the footsteps of Satan. Truly he is a manifest enemy unto you. Eight pairs: of sheep, two, and of goats, two. Say, “Is it the two males He has forbidden or the two females, or that which the wombs of the two females contain? Tell me with knowledge, if you are truthful.” And of camels, two, and of oxen, two. Say, “Is it the two males He has forbidden or the two females, or that which the wombs of the two females contain? Or were you present when God enjoined this upon you?” Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God, that he may lead men astray without knowledge? Truly God guides not wrongdoing people. Say, “I do not find in that which is revealed unto me anything forbidden to one who would eat thereof, save carrion or blood poured forth, or the flesh of swine—for that is surely defilement—or a sinful offering made to other than God. But whosoever is compelled by
necessity, without willfully disobeying or transgressing, truly thy Lord is Forgiving, Merciful.”

And unto those who are Jews, We forbade every animal with claws; and of oxen and sheep We forbade them the fat thereof, save that upon their backs or their entrails or that which is mingled with bone. Thus did We recompense them for their willful disobedience, and surely We are truthful. But if they deny thee, say, “Your Lord is Possessed of vast Mercy, but His Might will not be averted from the guilty people.”

Those who ascribe partners unto God will say, “Had God willed, we would not have ascribed partners unto God, nor our fathers, nor would we have forbidden anything.” Those who were before them had similarly denied, till they tasted Our Might. Say, “Do you have any knowledge that you can produce for us? You follow naught but conjecture, and you merely surmise.” Say, “Unto God belongs the conclusive argument. Had He willed, He could surely have guided you all.” Say, “Bring forward your witnesses who can bear witness that God has forbidden this.” Then if they bear witness, do not bear witness with them, and do not follow the caprices of those who deny Our signs, nor those who believe not in the Hereafter and ascribe equals unto their Lord. Say, “Come, I will recite that which your Lord has forbidden you: that you ascribe nothing as partner unto Him, and that you be virtuous toward parents, and that you slay not your children for fear of poverty—We will provide for you and for them—and approach not indecencies, whether outward or inward, and slay not the soul that God has made inviolable, save by right. This He
And approach not the orphan’s property, save in the best manner, till he reaches maturity. And observe fully the measure and the balance with justice. We task no soul beyond its capacity. And when you speak, be just, even if it be [against] a kinsman, and fulfill the pact of God. This He has enjoined upon you, that haply you may remember.

This indeed is My path made straight; so follow it, and follow not other ways, lest they separate you from His way. This He has enjoined upon you, that haply you may be reverent.

Then We gave unto Moses the Book, complete for those who would be virtuous, as an exposition of all things, and as a guidance and a mercy, that haply they might believe in the meeting with their Lord.

And this is a blessed Book that We have sent down; so follow it and be reverent, that haply you may receive mercy.

Lest you should say, “The Book was only sent down upon two groups before us, and we were indeed heedless of their study.” Or lest you should say, “If the Book had been sent down upon us, we would surely have been better guided than they.” Now there has come unto you a clear proof from your Lord, a guidance and a mercy. So who does greater wrong than one who denies the signs of God and turns away from them? Soon shall We recompense those who turn away from Our signs with a terrible punishment for their having turned away.

Do they await aught but that the angels should come upon them, or that thy Lord should come, or one of the signs of thy Lord should come? On the day that one of the signs of thy Lord...
does come, believing will be of no avail to any soul that did not believe beforehand and did not earn some goodness in its belief. Say, “Wait! We, too, are waiting.” 9 Truly those who have divided their religion and become factions, thou hast nothing to do with them. Their matter rests with God alone; then He will inform them about that which they used to do. 10 Whosoever brings a good deed shall have ten times the like thereof; but whosoever brings an evil deed shall be recompensed only with the like thereof, and they shall not be wronged. 11 Say, “Truly my Lord has guided me unto a straight path, an upright religion, the creed of Abraham, a ḥanīf, and he was not of the idolaters.” 12 Say, “Truly my prayer and my sacrifice, my living and my dying are for God, Lord of the worlds. He has no partner. This I am commanded, and I am the first of those who submit.” 13 Say, “Shall I seek a lord other than God, while He is lord of all things? No soul does evil, save against itself, and none shall bear the burden of another. Then unto your Lord is your return and He will inform you of that wherein you differed.” 14 He it is Who appointed you vicegerents upon the earth and raised some of you by degrees above others, that He may try you in that which He has given you. Truly thy Lord is Swift in retribution, and truly He is Forgiving, Merciful.

**Commentary**

1 Praise be to God, Who created the heavens and the earth, and made darkness and light. Yet those who do not
believe ascribe equals to their Lord!

1 This sūrah opens with a reference to God as Creator of the heavens and the earth and of darkness and light. Invoking the heavens and the earth and darkness and light highlights both the duality of the created world in relation to God’s Oneness and the totality of His creative Power. That the Makkans ascribe equals to their Lord is thus made to seem absurd in the face of their own recognition of His all-encompassing creative Power. Some early commentators noted the similarity of this opening verse to the opening section of the Torah (Genesis 1:1–5), with its reference to God’s creation of the heavens and the earth and separation of light from darkness (Ṭ). As throughout the Quran, the word for light (nūr) is singular, but darkness is rendered in the plural (ẓulumāt), implying that although there are multiple kinds of darkness, light is one, just as there are multiple kinds of falsehood, but Truth is ultimately one (R, Z; see also 5:16c), even if there are degrees of light, and on the level of the created order there can be said to be multiple truths.

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2 He it is Who created you from clay, then decreed a term. A term is appointed with Him—yet still you doubt!

2 Adam is described as being made of clay over a dozen times in the Quran. The clay from which Adam and here, by extension, all human beings are created is variously described in the Quran as being like potter’s clay (55:14); as dried clay, made of molded mud (15:26); as a draught of clay (23:12); and as viscous clay (37:11). As for all created things, God has decreed a term for human beings, that is, an earthly life span (cf. 11:3; 30:8; 39:42; 46:3). The second reference to a term, a term is appointed with Him, may be a further description of the “decreed term” that precedes it, although most commentators distinguish between these two “terms”: the first refers to one’s earthly life span set by God, and the second, to the final moment of reckoning (IK, Q,Ṭ); for other references to an “appointed term,” see 6:60; 7:34; 10:49; 14:10; 16:61; 35:45; 71:4. When the two “terms” are understood as referring to death and the moment of reckoning, respectively, the verse can be read as parallel to 2:28: How can you disbelieve in God, seeing that you were dead and He gave you life; then He causes you to die; then He gives you life; then unto Him shall you be returned? (Ṭ). It is also consistent with verses that mention God bringing forth the living from the dead (as when He brings living human beings forth from dead clay or resurrected beings forth from the dead...
on the Day of Judgment) and bringing forth the dead from the living (as when He causes human beings to die, ending their earthly life); see 6:95; 10:31; 30:19.

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3 He is God in the heavens and on the earth: He knows your secret and that which you make public, and He knows that which you earn.

Although the Quran mentions repeatedly that all that is in the heavens and on earth belongs to God and that He knows whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth (3:29; 5:97; 29:52; 58:7; 64:4), this is the only place where He is described as being God in the heavens and on the earth. Some commentators, perhaps concerned that the reference to God being on the earth might compromise His Transcendence, explained this part of the verse as meaning that He is “called God” or “worshipped as God” in the heavens and on the earth (IK). That which you earn refers to the deeds one chooses to perform in life and the corresponding reward or punishment that they entail.

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4 Never did a sign from among the signs of their Lord come unto them, but that they turned away from it.

5 They indeed denied the truth when it came unto them, but tidings will soon come to them of that which they used to mock.

4–5 Never did a sign . . . come unto them, but that they turned away from it (cf. 26:5–6; 36:46) refers to an idea reiterated in the various Quranic accounts regarding people of previous ages who rejected the messengers and signs that were sent to them and so were destroyed by that which they used to mock; see 6:10; 11:8; 16:34; 21:41; 26:5–6; 39:48; 40:83; 45:33; 46:25. The present verse served as a direct warning to the Quraysh, who rejected the message of warning brought by the Prophet and “mocked” the idea of resurrection, that they might likewise be besieged by a Divine reckoning. Taken more specifically and in the historical context in which it was revealed in the Makkani period, those who denied the truth...
when it came unto them may refer to the Quraysh, who denied the Prophet Muhammad and the Quran. The tidings that would come to them would thus refer to their defeat at the hands of the Muslims at the Battle of Badr (2/624; Q,Ṭ). Commentators generally read v. 5 as warning of an earthly, rather than an otherworldly, punishment to come (IK), although others say it may refer to punishment in either this world or the next (Z).

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6 Have they not considered how many a generation We destroyed before them? We had established them on the earth more firmly than We have established you, and We sent the sky upon them with abundant rains, and made rivers flow beneath them. Then We destroyed them for their sins, and brought into being after them another generation.

6 The Quran frequently mentions previous peoples destroyed for their iniquity and refusal to accept the teachings of their prophets, mentioning both towns (7:4; 21:11; 22:45, 48; 47:13; 50:36) and whole generations (17:17; 19:74, 98; 20:128; 32:26; 36:31; 38:3) that had been destroyed. This is a theme more common in the Makkan sūrah than in the Madinan ones, and in the present context the warning is likely addressed to the Quraysh, who may have thought themselves too powerful to suffer destruction. Thus the Quran, here and elsewhere, warns that some of the destroyed peoples were stronger and better established than the Quraysh, but were nonetheless utterly destroyed (cf. 19:74; 47:13; 50:36). God may choose to allow disbelievers or wrongdoers to dwell in comfort or even in prosperity for a while, leading them to think that they have been blessed with good fortune, in this case in the form of abundant rains and rivers, before unexpectedly destroying them for their sins; see also 2:266; 15:3–4; 16:54–55; 22:48; 23:54–56; 44:25–28; 68:17–20; especially 43:51, where Pharaoh invokes the streams watering his domain as proof of his sovereignty and, mistakenly, of his imperviousness to the destruction of which Moses had warned him. Generation translates qarn, which can also mean “century” (Q). The idea that God replaces an iniquitous people or generation with another is found elsewhere in the Quran (5:54; 7:169; 23:28–31, 41–42), for it is God who brought into being the generations (28:45).

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Had We sent down unto thee a Book inscribed on parchment, such that they could touch it with their hands, those who do not believe would have said, “This is naught but manifest sorcery.”

Although all the prophets are said to have brought evidentiary miracles to support their missions, the Quran often suggests that such miraculous signs have little effect on entrenched disbelievers and that their requests for “signs” of various types are made disingenuously, serving only as excuses for not accepting God’s message. For examples of such requests, see 2:118; 10:20; 13:7; 20:133; 25:21; 29:50. The present verse may be a response to those who expected the Prophet to bring a complete scripture, in writing, as did Moses. See 25:32, where the disbelievers ask why the Quran has not been sent down as a single whole, and 28:48, where they ask why the Prophet was not given the like of that which was given to Moses. Given the Makkah context, this verse may be a response to those disbelievers in Makkah who said to the Prophet, And we shall not believe in your ascension till you bring down unto us a book we can read (17:93; Q). In the Quran such displays of the prophets’ evidentiary miracles often result in accusations of “sorcery” by those who deny their prophethood (see, e.g., 10:2; 21:3; 20:57; 28:36; 37:15; 5:110c).

And they would say, “Why has not an angel been sent down unto him?” Had We sent down an angel, then the matter would be decreed, and they would be granted no respite.

Had We made him an angel, We would have sent him as a man, thus obscuring for them that which they themselves obscure.

Here, as in several other verses, the disbelievers question why God has not sent an angel either with the Prophet or instead of the (human) Prophet (cf. 11:12; 15:7; 17:92–95; 25:7, 21; 43:53). The response in v. 8 is that were an angel to be sent down the matter would be decreed, meaning that either their own...
punishment or the Final Hour would be at hand and they would be granted no respite such that they might repent and come to believe (Ṭ). Some commentators say that this is because the descent of an angel would be such a clear and incontrovertible sign of the truth of the message that, were they to disbelieve after this, they would surely be destroyed without the opportunity to repent (Ṭ, Z); others suggest that the very sight of the angel might be powerful enough to cause their immediate death (Q, Z). For this reason, v. 9 indicates that, even were God to send down an angel as a messenger, He would send him in the outward form of a human being, lest the sight of the angel overwhelm and destroy people (Ṭ). When the Archangel Gabriel appeared to the Prophet and occasionally to his Companions at the same time, he is said to have done so in human form, and when the angelic messenger, understood to be Gabriel, visits Mary, he assumed for her the likeness of a perfect man (19:17). Being sent in the form of a man, however, the angelic messenger would be no more convincing to the disbelievers than a human messenger, leaving them further confused about the true nature of the message and the messenger. Moreover, the human form of the angelic messenger would give the leaders of the disbelievers another means of discrediting the message in the eyes of their followers, since they could argue that even this additional confirming messenger was merely human, like themselves (Q).

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10 Messengers have surely been mocked before thee. Then those who scoffed at them were beset by that which they used to mock.

10 The warning that those who mock the prophetic warners and their messages will be beset by that which they used to mock is also found in 11:8; 16:34; 21:41; 39:48; 40:83; 45:33; 46:26.

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11 Say, “Journey upon the earth and behold how the deniers fared in the end.”

11 The Quran repeatedly reminds its listeners that the guilty, the corrupt, the schemers, and those who denied the warnings they had been sent by God did not fare well in the end (3:137; 7:84–86, 103; 10:39, 73; 12:109; 16:36; 27:14, 51, 69; 30:9, 42; 35:44; 37:73; 40:21, 82; 43:25; 47:10). This verse follows upon the
warning in v. 6 about previous generations destroyed in this world for their rejection of the prophets. The command to **behold how the deniers fared in the end** was directed at the Arabs who would have passed the ruined remains of bygone towns and settlements on their frequent travels. Such sites have been invoked widely in Islamic literature as sources of admonition and warning, insofar as they were occasions to learn about the destruction that befell people of earlier ages.

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12 Say, “Unto whom belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and on the earth?” Say, “Unto God. He has prescribed Mercy for Himself. He will surely gather you on the Day of Resurrection, in which there is no doubt. Those who have lost their souls, they do not believe.

13 Unto Him belongs all that dwells in the night and in the day, and He is the Hearing, the Knowing.”

12–13 The Prophet is here instructed to remind the disbelievers of God’s Sovereignty and His ability to destroy them at will by posing and answering the question, **Unto whom belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and on the earth?** (Q). The question may have been rhetorical for the idolatrous Makkans, since despite their mocking of the Prophet and the warning he brought, some did acknowledge **Allāh** as the Creator of the heavens and the earth (see also 31:25; 39:38; 43:9, 87), although not in the sense understood in the Abrahamic traditions. That all things belong to God is then reiterated in v. 13.

That God **has prescribed Mercy for Himself** (see also v. 54) indicates that although God remains absolutely free, He has nonetheless obligated Himself to act with mercy toward His creatures. A well-known **ḥadīth qudsī** (sacred **ḥadīth**) conveys the same message, “When God decreed the created realm, He prescribed for Himself in a Book that is with Him, ‘Truly My Mercy prevails over My Wrath,’” (Q); and in another **ḥadīth qudsī**, God says, “My Mercy has precedence over My Wrath.” The Prophet reportedly would pray during his daily devotions, “O God, I seek refuge in Thy Contentment from Thine Anger, and in Thy Forgiveness from Thy Punishment, and in Thy Mercy from Thy Wrath.” See also 7:156, where God speaks, saying, **I cause My Punishment to smite whomsoever I will, though My Mercy encompasses all things.** Mercy is therefore the dominant aspect of God’s relationship with His creatures, as established by His own self-obligation.
In the context of implicit warning about the destruction that awaits those who reject the warnings of the messengers, this statement that God has prescribed Mercy for Himself explains why He does not bring the punishment down upon the disbelievers immediately, but rather gives them a period of respite, that they might repent and come to believe (Q, Ṭ). More generally, the Mercy God obligates for Himself may refer to His having undertaken to guide His creatures to an understanding of His Oneness (Z). Although God is described by many Attributes in the Quran, “Mercy” is the only one that He is said to have “prescribed” for Himself, indicating that Mercy has a unique and supreme status among all His Attributes. That God “prescribes” Mercy for Himself also indicates that Mercy is an intrinsic or essential quality of God, not merely a way of relating to His creatures, since it could only be an essential “mercifulness” that prescribes Mercy as a principle of God’s acts in the first place. Although God’s Mercy continues into the Hereafter, the period of respite and guidance for human beings on earth will eventually come to an end when God gathers all on the Day of Resurrection. Here and elsewhere, this day is described as one in which there is no doubt (2:2; 3:9, 25; 4:87; 22:7; 40:59; 45:26).

Those who have lost their souls by ascribing equals to God (v. 1), turning away from His signs (v. 4), and mocking the message of the Prophet (vv. 5–10) do not believe; that is, their lack of faith can be seen as a result of these ruinous actions and beliefs (Z). This statement is repeated in v. 20, but in the present context, some commentators read those who have lost their souls as a description of those whom God will gather . . . on the Day of Resurrection (Ṭ).

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Say, “Shall I take as a protector anyone other than God, the Originator of the heavens and the earth, who feeds and is not fed?” Say, “I was commanded to be the first of those who submit.” And be not among the idolaters.

14 The Prophet is told to respond to the demand of the Makkan idolaters that he recognize the deities they worship besides God by pointing out the inanity of worshipping anything that is not totally independent of all need and by identifying himself as the first of those who submit (on this statement, see 6:162–63c). The Prophet is then warned personally by God to be not among the idolaters.

Originator translates Fāṭir, a Divine Name, which is derived from a verb meaning to “split” or “cleave.” In the Quran, the term always occurs as part of the larger phrase Originator of the heavens and the earth (see 12:101; 14:10; 35:1;
39:46; 42:11). The verbal form of this word, however, is also used in the context of God’s creation of human beings (11:51; 17:51; 20:72; 32:22; 43:27), whence its etymological relation to the fitrah, or primordial nature, which God creates in all human beings (see 30:30 and commentary).

That God feeds and is not fed refers simultaneously to God’s provision of sustenance for all things and to His utter independence of all need (3:97; 4:131; 10:68; 29:6; 31:26). According to a ḥadīth, the Prophet rose to wash his hands after finishing a meal and said, “Praise be to God who feeds and is not fed” (IK). Cf. 51:56: I did not create jinn and mankind, save to worship Me. I desire no provision from them, nor do I desire that they should feed Me. See also 5:75, where it is said of Jesus and his mother that both of them ate food, indicating that their dependence upon earthly sustenance serves as an argument against their divinity.

That the Prophet was commanded to be the first of those who submit (cf. v. 163; 39:12) may indicate that he was the first among the people of his time to submit to God, setting an example that his contemporaries would follow (R, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z), or that he was the “first” in rank among those who submitted (Ṭb), or that he alone received Divine Revelation (Ṭs). See also 7:153 and 26:51, where Moses makes a similar claim.

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Say, “Truly I fear the punishment of a tremendous Day should I disobey my Lord.”

15 In this verse, the Prophet is told to affirm his own fear of God’s punishment, and hence his susceptibility, along with all human beings, to God’s Judgment. In a ḥadīth, the Prophet says, “I have the best knowledge of God among [the people ], and I fear Him most among them.”

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Whosoever is spared on that Day, He has certainly been merciful unto him, and that is the manifest triumph.

16 Whosoever is spared from punishment on the Day of Resurrection has attained the manifest triumph. Salvation in the Hereafter is described as a manifest triumph or a great triumph in over a dozen verses and is often associated, as it is here, with God forgiving people’s sins or otherwise sparing or shielding them from
the Fire, suggesting Divine Mercy toward those whose deeds may have made them liable to punishment (Z); see 3:185; 40:9; 44:56–57; 48:5; 61:12; 64:9.

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17 If God should touch thee with affliction, none can remove it save He, and should He touch thee with goodness, then He is Powerful over all things.

17 Although this verse is addressed specifically to the Prophet, it has a more general application and affirms that God alone has power over all benefit or harm that may come to a human being and that none can alter the benefit or harm He may decree for a person. Nonetheless, Divine Mercy is always operative, for God has prescribed Mercy for Himself (v. 12) and His Mercy encompasses all things (7:156). See also 3:160 and commentary; 10:107; 28:71; 35:2; 39:38; 48:11. Elsewhere in the Quran, idols and false deities are dismissed as those who do not possess the power to either aid or harm their human devotees (5:76; 10:18, 106; 13:16; 20:89; 21:66; 22:12; 25:55; 26:73); the Prophet proclaims that he has no power to bring benefit or prevent harm to himself (7:188; 10:49); and even sorcery is said to have no power to harm save by God’s Leave (2:102).

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18 He is Dominant over His servants; and He is the Wise, the Aware.

18 He is Dominant over His servants, a statement that recurs in v. 63, means that all things are humbled and abased before God, that He alone is truly worshipped (T), and that all things are subservient to Him (Z) and under His ultimate Authority and Power. This verse thus represents a culmination of the discussion of God’s absolute Sovereignty and Power begun in v. 12.

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19 Say, “What thing is greatest as testimony?” Say, “God is Witness between you and me. And this Quran has been revealed unto me, that thereby I may warn you and
whomsoever it may reach. Do you truly bear witness that there are other gods beside God?” Say, “I bear no such witness.” Say, “He is only One God, and truly I am quit of that which you ascribe as partners unto Him.”

19 God is described as *Witness* in several places (3:98; 4:33, 79, 166; 10:46; 22:17; 33:55; 34:47; 41:53; 58:6; 85:9), and “Witness” (*Shahīd*) is considered one of the Names of God. The prophets sometimes invoke God as “Witness” between themselves and their wrongdoing people; see 5:117, where Jesus, when questioned by God about the claims of divinity his later followers made for him and his mother, says, *I was a witness over them, so long as I remained among them. But when Thou didst take me [to Thyself], it was Thou who wast the Watcher over them. And Thou art Witness over all things;* and 17:96, where the Prophet is told to say that God is a sufficient witness between himself and the disbelievers among his people. The Prophet is instructed to tell his people that the Quran was revealed to him so that he might thereby warn them and *whomsoever it may reach*, indicating that the Quran has a universal message that is operative beyond the Prophet’s own community and that it serves as a Divine warning to all whose ears or eyes it may reach (*T*).

According to a report, the Prophet is here told to ask, *Do you truly bear witness that there are other gods beside God* in response to some disbelievers among his people who asked him if he really believed that there were no other gods beside God (*T*). Like Abraham, also raised among idolaters, the Prophet directly dissociates himself from the beliefs of his people, saying, *I am quit of that which you ascribe as partners unto Him.* See v. 78 for Abraham’s identical claim, and also 11:54–55, where the pre-Islamic Arabian prophet Hūd similarly dissociates himself from the idolatry of his people.

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20 Those unto whom We gave the Book recognize it as they recognize their own children. Those who have lost their souls, they do not believe.

20 The assertion that the People of the Book *recognize it*—that is, the Quranic message—*as they recognize their own children* is also made in 2:146 (see commentary on this verse). The statement *those who have lost their souls*—that is, through willful rejection of the Prophet’s clear message—*do not
believe is also found in v. 13 (see commentary).

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21 Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God or denies His signs? Surely the wrongdoers will not prosper.

21 The rhetorical interrogative who does greater wrong than is found in several places, frequently in reference to those who fabricate lies against God (6:93, 144; 11:18; 18:15; 61:7); to those who deny God’s signs or the truth (6:157; 18:57; 32:22); or, as in this case, to both (7:37; 10:17; 29:68; 39:32). Elsewhere it applies to those who bar [entrance to] the mosques (2:114) or conceal testimony (2:140). To fabricate a lie against God is to commit some form of religious error, specifically to hold a false belief or engage in a false religious practice, while claiming that one is following Divine guidance in doing so, as in 7:28: When they commit an indecency, they say, “We found our fathers practicing it, and God has commanded us thus.” Say, “Truly God commands not indecency. Do you say of God that which you know not?” Their “fabricating a lie against God” may also refer to any of the idolatrous practices attributed to the pre-Islamic Arabs, from their worship of false deities to their imposition of arbitrary religious restrictions upon themselves (see 5:103; 6:139), and perhaps also to certain Islamically unacceptable Jewish and Christian religious claims mentioned in the Quran (R), although the latter seems less likely, given the Makkan context of this sūrah. The verb prosper is often used in relation to those who prosper morally by believing and following right guidance in this life and who will thus be rewarded for their faith and good deeds in the Hereafter (see, e.g., 2:5; 7:8; 23:1–11). By contrast, wrongdoers, and elsewhere disbelievers (28:82), prosper not, meaning that they will not find what they seek in this world or the next (R).

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22 And on the Day when We shall gather them all together, We shall say unto those who ascribed partners unto God, “Where are those partners whom you claimed?”

23 Then their contention will be but to say, “By God, our
Lord, we were not idolaters.”

24 Behold how they lie against themselves, but that which they used to fabricate has forsaken them.

22–24 Several Quranic passages depict those who ascribed partners unto God being asked on the Day of Judgment about the false idols they worshipped (16:27; 28:62–65; 28:74–75; 40:73–74; 41:47–48). In some cases, they continue to call upon those false deities to no avail, while in others they admit their religious error. Here, however, their response is to deny that they were idolaters and so to lie against themselves, just as they had lied against God and His signs in v. 21. Here as elsewhere, the Quran warns that all false authorities and deities worshipped in this life will “forsake” their worshippers in the next (cf. 6:94; 7:37; 10:30; 14:22; 16:86–87; 40:73–74).

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25 Among them are those who listen to thee, but We have placed coverings over their hearts, such that they understand it not, and in their ears a deafness. Were they to see every sign, they would not believe in it, so that when they come to thee, they dispute with thee. Those who disbelieve say, “This is naught but fables of those of old.”

25 The concept of individuals or their hearts being “veiled” or “covered” in such a way as to prevent comprehension of God’s signs and the Quranic verses (both referred to as āyāt) is found in several other places; see 2:7; 17:46; 18:57, 101; 36:9; 41:5; 45:23; 50:22; 83:14–15. Deafness is similarly used to signify spiritual deafness in 2:18, 171; 5:71; 6:39; 8:22; 17:97; 18:57; 41:5, 44; 47:23. God’s signs have no effect upon those who are spiritually “veiled” and “deaf” and do not bring them to belief (cf. 2:145; 7:146; 10:96–97). For example, when the moon was split by the Prophet in response to the disbelievers’ request for a “sign,” they dismissed it as mere sorcery (see 54:1–2; 54:1c). The present verse was reportedly revealed about the leaders of the Quraysh, including Abū Sufyān and Abū Jahl, who listened to the Prophet and the Quran, but could not comprehend or accept its meaning (Z).

Since it is God who is said to have placed coverings over their hearts, and
thus their understanding, as well as in their ears a deafness, some commentators who subscribe to a more predestinarian view of God’s relationship to human beings understand the verse to mean that God prevents some people from believing. For them, the verse serves as proof that the belief or disbelief of individuals comes from God; the “veil” over their hearts serves as a metaphor for an innate predisposition toward disbelief (R). Others, however, note that calling people to a message of belief that they have been predisposed not to understand would seem inconsistent with the Quranic assertion that God tasks no soul beyond its capacity (2:286); it would also grant the disbelievers an argument against God and the Prophet since they could claim that they are not responsible for following something they have been prevented from understanding (R).

The verse can also be understood, however, to mean that the stubbornness of such people in rejecting the message served to create within them a negative moral state that further prevented their acceptance of the message; or similarly, that God deprived them of His necessary guidance and left them to their own intellectual devices as a consequence of their evil actions and false beliefs (R; see 2:26; 14:27; 40:34, 74; 45:32, where this is clearly indicated). It may also simply indicate that their refusal to benefit or be guided by the Quranic message put them in the same position as one who was indeed blinded by a veil or is “deaf” to it (Q). The “veil” can also be said to be a reference to a “darkness of soul” that obscures the light of the message for the individual (Aj). The disbelievers’ attempt to dismiss the Quranic message, particularly its warnings about Resurrection and Judgment, as fables of those of old is also mentioned in 8:31; 16:24; 23:83; 25:5; 27:68; 46:17; 68:15; 83:13.

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26 And they forbid it, and keep away from it, and they destroy none but themselves, though they are unaware.

26 This verse likely continues the discussion of those Makkans and leaders of the Quraysh who refused to heed the Quranic message brought by the Prophet. They both forbid it—that is, they forbid others from following it—and keep away from it, or “flee from it” themselves (Ṭ, Ṭs). An alternate interpretation attributed to some early exegetes understands they forbid it to mean they forbid that any harm come to the Prophet, while nonetheless “keeping away from” or refusing to accept the content of his prophetic message. As such, they consider it a reference to the Prophet’s uncle, Abū Ṭālib, who was the guardian of the Prophet when the latter was a young boy and served as a crucial protector of the Prophet in the early years of his prophetic mission, but who, many believe, refused to become a follower of
his message (IK, R, Ṭ, Z). Interpreting the verse as referring to Abū Ṭālib’s “forbidding” harm to the Prophet, however, does not seem consistent with the situation of this verse within a lengthy passage chastising the Makkans generally or with the verse’s condemnation of this action as spiritually destructive (they destroy none but themselves), since protecting the Prophet would be a meritorious act. Shiite exegetes also reject this interpretation, since they believe that Abū Ṭālib did embrace Islam (Ṭs).

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27 If thou couldst see when they are arraigned before the Fire, whereupon they will say, “Would that we were sent back! Then we would not deny the signs of our Lord, but we would be among the believers!”

28 Nay, but it has now become clear to them what they used to hide. And even if they were sent back, they would return to the very thing they had been forbidden. Truly they are liars.

27–28 The claim made in the words of those arraigned before the Fire can be read in two ways. The first, as reflected in the translation, indicates that if they were sent back, they would not deny the signs and would be among the believers (cf. 26:102). With different voweling, however, it could yield the meaning “Would that we were sent back and that we did not deny the signs of our Lord and that we were among the believers” (Ṭ). Although both readings are possible, the first rendering seems more consistent with the statement in v. 28 that even if they were sent back, they would return to their former ways, which would then be understood as a response to their claim in v. 27. In v. 28, what they used to hide refers to their evil deeds in the life of the world, which in the Hereafter become clear to them or are manifested clearly before them (Ṭ). The consequences of their evil deeds are also now likewise apparent as they stand in or before the Fire.

Some say that these two verses refer to the hypocrites, who hid their disbelief in earthly life, but whose disbelief was made clear in the Hereafter; or to the People of the Book whose error in rejecting the prophecy of Muhammad would be made clear to them in the next life (Z). This latter does not seem consistent with the context of this sūrah and passage, which is clearly aimed at the pagan idolaters of
Makkah.

What they used to hide may also refer to their attempt to hide their polytheism, or *shirk*, from God on the Day of Judgment (see vv. 23–24) or to the Makkans’ attempt to hide the reality of Resurrection and Judgment from their followers (R). The verse may well be alluding to all that was hidden on earth, but will be made manifest in the Hereafter, since the Quran elsewhere describes the Day of Resurrection as the *Day when the secrets are tested* (86:9). The disbelievers’ assertion in v. 27 that, if sent back, they would not deny the signs of God and would be believers is presented as nothing but a ruse, for their promise is made because of fear of the Fire, not because of true desire for belief, and thus brings no spiritual benefit (R). Moreover, v. 28 asserts that if they were sent back, *they would return* to their former deeds, and as such it declares them *liars*. For those who held that human moral destiny and belief were matters of Divine Decree (*qaḍāʾ*), this verse could serve as proof that a second chance at belief would not avail disbelievers, even after seeing the consequences of their disbelief, since their disbelief was a matter already decreed before their initial temporal existence (R).

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29 They say, “There is naught but our life in this world, and we shall not be resurrected.”

This is one of several places in the Quran where the disbelievers explicitly deny the Resurrection (see 23:36; 44:35; 64:7); and their skepticism about resurrection is a key element of their disbelief in the Quranic message as a whole (see, e.g., 17:49, 98; 23:82; 37:16; 56:48).

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30 If thou couldst see when they are arraigned before their Lord, He will say, “Is this not the truth?” They will say, “Yea, indeed, by our Lord!” He will say, “Then taste the punishment for having disbelieved.”

This verse returns to the image in v. 27 of the disbelievers *arraigned* for judgment in the Hereafter. After a life of disbelief in God’s signs, and particularly in the reality of resurrection and judgment, they are now asked, *Is this not the truth?* Experiencing the Resurrection and Judgment, they now affirm their reality,
but to no avail, and they are told to taste the punishment for having disbelieved (see 46:34 for a nearly identical passage). See also 7:44, where those of the Garden call out to those in the Fire, saying, *We have found that which our Lord promised us to be true. Have you found that which your Lord promised to be true?* They respond in the affirmative, but are immediately cursed. That the punishment in the next world is “tasted” is mentioned in over two dozen verses and alludes to the idea that the Reality of God, His Judgment, and the consequences of human actions will be known by the disbelievers experientially, and thus undeniably, after having scoffed at the prophetic warnings about them during their earthly lives (see, e.g., 3:181; 4:56; 7:39; 8:14; 32:21 and commentary). Even in this world, certain forms of atonement for sin are said to have the intended effect of making transgressors taste the evil consequences of their transgression (5:95; 59:15; 64:5; 65:9).

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Lost indeed are those who deny the meeting with God till, when the Hour comes upon them suddenly, they say, “Alas for us, that we neglected it!” They will bear their burdens upon their backs. Behold! Evil is that which they bear!

31 The Quran commonly refers to those who disbelieved in this life as being lost or “losers” in the Hereafter. *Those who deny the meeting with God,* thinking *there is naught but our life in this world* (v. 29), will have the realization of their error “come upon them suddenly” with the coming of the Hour (see also 7:188; 12:107; 21:40), meaning the Day of Resurrection and universal judgment. Their cry, *Alas for us,* expresses their regret over failing to prepare for this day. Al-Rāzī explains this as a deep, existential regret, as disbelievers realize that they have squandered the intellect and other faculties bestowed upon them by God, through which they were meant to realize the truth and develop virtuous character. Using a commercial metaphor, al-Rāzī describes it as the regret of those whose poor choices have caused them to lose not only the anticipated return on an investment, but the borrowed principal as well. The burdens they bear upon their backs may be their sins and transgressions themselves (Ṭ); or the burden of wrath from God that is earned as a result of those sins (see 2:61, 90; 3:112, 162); or the burden of the warning and reminders they refused to heed in their earthly lives (cf. 20:100–101, where the reminder becomes a burden in the Hereafter for those who ignored it during their lives).
32 The life of this world is naught but play and diversion. Better indeed is the Abode of the Hereafter for those who are reverent. Do you not understand?

32 This world is described as mere play and diversion (see also 29:64; 47:36; 57:20) insofar as play and diversion involve a certain delusion in which the inner reality of things is obscured by outward appearances (R). The pejorative description of the world as play is meant not to disparage play of any sort, which is certainly permissible in Islam, but rather to make the point that many of those things accorded great weight and significance in this world are as mere child’s play in relation to the reality of the Hereafter. Cf. 3:185, where the life of this world is said to be naught but the enjoyment of delusion, and 57:20, where it is more expansively described as play, diversion, glitter, mutual boasting, and vying for increase in property and children.

At the same time, however, the Quran affirms that this world was created with Divine purpose and that God did not create Heaven and earth and whatsoever is between them in play (21:16; 44:38). Thus it is not the purposeful “life in the world” that is dismissed here, but rather an attachment to its fleeting rewards and satisfactions (R). The Quran frequently warns against seeking the ephemeralities of the life of this world at the expense of morality, virtue, or the pursuit of spiritual concerns (e.g., 4:94; 7:169; 8:67; 24:33; 75:20–21), and against taking religion itself as mere play and diversion (6:70; 7:51). That the Abode of the Hereafter is better for the reverent, since its enjoyments are both more noble and more lasting, is repeated in several places (4:77; 7:169; 9:38; 12:109; 13:26; 16:30; 17:21; 29:64; 40:39), emphasizing the foolishness of those who would purchase the world at the price of the Hereafter (2:86; 14:3) or prefer the goods of this world to those of the next (3:145; 16:107; 86:16–17). A well-known hadith makes a similar point: “The world is the prison of the believer and the paradise of the disbeliever” (R).

33 We know well that what they say grieves thee. Yet, it is not thee that they deny. Rather, it is the signs of God that the wrongdoers reject.

33 The Prophet was reportedly saddened by those who rejected his message,
in both Makkah and Madinah, and the Quran frequently consoles him, telling him not to grieve for those who reject the message (3:176; 5:41, 68; 10:65; 16:127; 18:6; 26:3; 27:70; 31:23; 35:8; 36:76). This is the only instance, however, when the Prophet is comforted by being told that he should not consider their denial a personal rejection of him as a messenger or as a truthful person, since his truthfulness was widely acknowledged by the people of Makkah and Madinah, as reflected in his having been given the name al-Amīn (“the trustworthy”) by his fellow Makkans even prior to his prophetic mission (Ṭ, Z). Rather, their denial should be understood as a rejection of the message itself, of the very signs of God, because of their own moral stubbornness (Ṭ). The implication that one’s reaction to or attitude toward the Prophet is indicative of one’s attitude toward God is also found, for example, in 48:10: Truly those who pledge allegiance unto thee (Muhammad) pledge allegiance only unto God. The Hand of God is over their hands; and in 3:31, where the Prophet is instructed to say, If you love God, follow me, and God will love you. That the disbelievers’ rejection is ultimately directed at God and His signs, not at the Prophet himself, and that many of them rejected the Quranic message while acknowledging the personal truthfulness of Muhammad indicate the seriousness of their spiritual recalcitrance (Z).

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Surely messengers were denied before thee, and they bore patiently their being denied and persecuted till Our help came to them. None alters the Words of God, and there has already come unto thee some tidings of the messengers.

34 In this verse, the Prophet is reminded that the messengers who preceded him were similarly denied and persecuted, a consolation and encouragement also offered to the Prophet in 3:184; 6:10; 13:32; 21:41; 35:4; 38:12; 40:5. These earlier prophets bore patiently their rejection, and thus the Prophet is implicitly instructed to show similar patience and confidence that God’s help will come, as it had unfailingly come in the past. The idea that all prophets eventually receive Divine help is connected with the Islamic belief that all prophetic missions are ultimately victorious (37:171–73; 58:21). For none alters the Words of God, see also 6:115; 10:64; 18:27. Here the Words of God may refer to the Quran (Th), in which case the assertion that none alters it would indicate the Divine protection God gives to both His Word and to the Prophet who delivers it. The Words of God might also refer to God’s promise of deliverance and eventual victory to the
Prophet, indicating that it has been Divinely decreed and so will inevitably come to pass (IK, R). Some have understood the Words of God here as referring to God’s Decree for all things, suggesting that the disbelief of the disbelievers has also been decreed by God and that nothing the Prophet or anyone else can do will ultimately change their rejection of the message (R). Some tidings of the messengers refers to the Quranic accounts of previous prophets, some of which had already come as revelation to the Prophet by this point in his mission, that is, while he was still in Makkah.

And if their turning away is distressing to thee, then seekest, if thou canst, a tunnel into the earth, or a ladder unto the sky, that thou mightest bring them a sign. Had God willed, He would have gathered them all to guidance—so be not among the ignorant.

35 As a further response to the Prophet’s sadness over the disbelievers, this verse presents him with the challenge seekest, if thou canst, a tunnel into the earth, or a ladder unto the sky, that thou mightest bring them a sign. It is understood that the Prophet cannot do such things (Z), and thus the rhetorical challenge serves to reinforce the idea that the Prophet has no personal control over the acceptance or denial of the Divine message he brings, as the ultimate effect of religious guidance lies with God alone. Had God willed, He would have gathered them all to guidance is similar to other verses suggesting that human religious diversity—including both those guided by other religious paths and those who refuse all such guidance—is providential. See 5:48; 16:93; and 42:8, which indicate that had God willed, He could have made mankind a single religious community; and 6:107, where had God willed, the idolaters would not have ascribed partners to God. The present verse and those that make similar statements about God’s Will regarding the religious orientation of human beings were seen by some theologians and commentators as proof that God “creates” human acts, or at least the irresistible drive to do those acts, good or bad, and thereby decrees the ultimate moral destiny of His creatures (R); others read them in the precisely opposite way to mean that had God willed, He could have “compelled” all human beings to guidance or to a single religious community, but did not do so (R, Z), so that they might choose their religious destiny freely.
36 Only those who hear will respond. As for the dead, God will resurrect them, and unto Him they shall be returned.

36 Only those who hear will respond is understood to mean that only those to whom God has given the ability to hear the call of the Prophet and the Quranic message and to understand it will respond. As such, it expresses the idea found in other verses that there are some people whom God has made spiritually “deaf” and lacking in understanding, and that such people will remain impervious to revelation (see 6:25 and commentary). The dead whom God will resurrect may refer specifically to the disbelievers, meaning that when they are dead, they will be resurrected along with all other human beings and judged for their disbelief (Ṭ). It may also mean that the disbelievers are “dead” in a spiritual sense, through disbelief, ignorance, and heedlessness (Aj, R). The connection between being spiritually “deaf” and spiritually “dead” is also made clearly in 27:80: Surely thou dost not make the dead hear, nor dost thou make the deaf hear the call when they turn their backs. Like the present verse, 27:80 is situated within a larger passage explaining the Prophet’s inability to guide those whom God has made impervious to His Guidance.

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37 They say, “Why has no sign been sent down unto him from his Lord?” Say, “Surely God has the power to send down a sign.” But most of them know not.

37 The Quran makes repeated reference to the disbelievers’ skepticism about why no sign has come to prove the reality of Muhammad’s prophethood and the truthfulness of the message with which he had been sent (2:118; 7:203; 10:20; 13:7, 27; 20:133). But it also indicates in various ways throughout this sūrah (vv. 4, 25, 35, 46, 109, 124) and elsewhere (e.g., 7:132, 146; 10:97, 101; 12:105) that such signs are of no avail for those who stubbornly refuse to believe. According to Muslim tradition, all prophets are sent with “signs,” often understood to mean “evidentiary miracles” (mu‘jizāt), that serve as proof of their prophethood. The Prophet Muhammad’s true “sign” and “miracle” is believed to be the Quran itself, whose verses are referred to as “signs” (āyāt) and whose beauty and power, of both language and meaning, are considered “inimitable” (cf. 2:23; 10:38). This “sign,” however, was not sufficient for the disbelievers, perhaps because their requests for “signs” were disingenuous and driven by an attitude of spiritual stubbornness that the “signs” alone could not overcome (R). Moreover, the Quran
affirms that the “signs” of God’s Power and Benevolence can be found all around, in nature and in human beings themselves, for those who genuinely wish to see them (see, e.g., 12:105; 16:10–13, 65–69; 26:7–8; 30:21; 34:9; 36:33–35; 41:53; 45:12–13).

Surely God has the power to send down a sign implies that God sends such signs according to His own Will and for His own purposes, rather than in response to human requests (cf. 26:3). God’s refusal to honor their request for a sign might also be a demonstration of His Mercy (R), for as indicated in v. 8, once a clear sign, such as a visible angel, is sent, people no longer have any excuse for disbelief, and so become liable to immediate punishment if they do not believe thereafter (cf. 5:114–15). Thus withholding such a sign can be understood as an act of Divine respite (IK, R), particularly if such a sign would be unlikely to have a positive effect on belief or if it might render its recipient more liable to immediate punishment; see 17:59; 26:4.

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38 There is no creature that crawls upon the earth, nor bird that flies upon its wings, but that they are communities like yourselves—We have neglected nothing in the Book—and they shall be gathered unto their Lord in the end.

38 This is one of several verses indicating that nonhuman creatures have a relationship with God that is in some ways analogous to that of human beings. See 16:68–69, where God reveals knowledge to the bees; 17:44 and 24:41, where it is said that all things in Heaven and on earth glorify God; and 38:18–19, where the mountains and the birds hymn God’s praises along with David. The present verse seems to go farther, however, indicating that all animals constitute communities like yourselves; in Quranic usage “community” (ummah) usually denotes a specifically religious community (see, e.g., 3:110; 10:47). Insofar as the Quran asserts that at least some animals receive revelation and glorify God, they can be described as religious communities, that is, as groups of beings defined by a certain mode of relating to God as their Creator. Some commentators assert that animals are aware of God and His Oneness (R, Th), suggesting that they praise and glorify Him consciously. Some suggest that the description of animals as communities is merely a way of saying that animals are creatures (khalq) of God (IK) or that they, like human beings, are the recipients of God’s Mercy, Succor, and Bounty (R); see 11:6; 29:60. Such a basic and straightforward notion, however, seems rather pointless (R) and does not fully explain the use of the important term ummah in
relation to animals or account for all its implications. For example, in 10:47 the Quran states that for every community (ummah) there is a messenger. Reading 10:47 in conjunction with the present verse suggests that every animal “community” received a Divinely sent message, just as did all human communities (R).

The indication in the present verse that these various animal groups constitute “communities,” specifically “religious communities (umam)” like those of people, and the clear mention in other verses that all creatures “praise God” (17:44; 24:41) and thus exist in some sort of conscious relationship with their Creator together make a strong argument for the necessity of giving ethical consideration to the rights and needs of all creatures, not only to those of human beings. If all creatures enjoy such a relationship with their Creator and were created to praise Him, then it cannot be assumed that human beings alone enjoy the right to ethical treatment and consideration in His religion. Even if the Quran asserts that God has made natural phenomena subservient to human beings (14:32; 16:14; 22:36–37, 65; 31:20)—that is, He has provided them to human beings for their benefit and use—human beings must consider what right they have to treat God’s creatures cruelly or without regard for their innate spiritual value or to utterly destroy them by using or consuming them rapaciously, irresponsibly, or wastefully.

Moreover, shall be gathered (yuḥsharūn) unto their Lord employs a verb used over twenty times in the Quran to denote the universal Resurrection of human beings on the Last Day for Final Judgment. Commentators do not agree on whether this means that animals will, like human beings, be resurrected and face judgment or whether it simply means that they will be gathered to their deaths (IK, Ṭ, Th). One hadīth quoted by some in connection with this verse indicates that the final gathering will entail some moral resolution or meting out of justice even for animals (IK, Ṭ, Th); another suggests that human beings will be held accountable for those animals they have killed in vain (R). Yet another hadīth states that after rendering judgment upon and for the animals, God will simply command them to return to dust, at which point the disbelievers will wish that they too could be returned to dust rather than face punishment (an allusion to 78:40; IK, R, Ṭ, Th).

The idea that God’s “gathering” and perhaps His reckoning encompass all the beasts of land and air suggests His limitless ability to keep account of His creatures and should thus increase human beings’ certainty of their own resurrection, accounting, and judgment (Ṭ, Z). The second-/eighth-century scholar Sufyān ibn Uyaynah considered the beasts and birds of this verse to refer to different moral categories of human beings, who in their earthly lives and habits have come to resemble certain animals (R), an idea also found in more sophisticated form in the philosophical writings of Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 1050/1640), for whom the resurrection or otherworldly return of various animals represents the return of certain lower aspects of individual human beings (al-Hikmat al-ʿarshiyyah). Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī also presents a philosophical argument for the resurrection of
animals, and indeed of all animate and inanimate creatures in their own right (see Risālat al-ḥashr, Tehran: Intasharat-i Mawla, 1984, pp. 92–117). The idea that animals will be “gathered” to resurrection may seem to be supported by 81:5, where one of the events of the Last Day is said to be that the wild beasts will be gathered (using the same verb).

The reference to the Book here may be a reference to either the Preserved Tablet (85:22), in which the destiny of all created things has been written (Th), or the Quran (R). Although the Quran cannot be said to contain detailed knowledge of all things, many would argue that it contains the essential and principal knowledge from which all the Islamic sciences, and indeed all spiritually beneficial knowledge, may be derived (R). For example, the Quran does not stipulate all of the commands and prohibitions that became part of Islamic Law (Sharīʿah), many of which were derived from Prophetic precedent, from the consensus of the believing community, or forms of human reasoning, such as reasoning through analogy (qiyās) or on the basis of the principle of equity (istihsān); yet the authority of these other sources of law can be derived from the Quran (R). For example, the Quran indicates the necessity of following the commands and the practices (Sunnah) of the Prophet (e.g., 33:21; 47:33; 59:7) as well as the reliability of the believing community (3:110).

Those who deny Our signs are deaf and dumb, in darkness. Whomsoever God will, He leads astray, and whomsoever He will, He places him upon a straight path.

For other references to the spiritual “deafness” that leads some to deny God’s signs, see 6:25c; for other references to the combination of spiritual “deafness” and “dumbness,” see 2:18, 171; 8:22; 17:97. In darkness refers to the state of being misguided or astray, as the Quran frequently juxtaposes darkness to light to refer to the state of being astray in contrast to being guided by God (e.g., 5:16; 14:1; 33:43; 57:9). That God leads astray certain people and guides others is mentioned in several verses. In some cases, He leads astray those already in a state of disbelief or wrongdoing (2:26; 14:27; 40:34, 74; 45:23), although elsewhere the “leading astray” is considered to be either explicitly or implicitly a matter of His Will (7:155; 14:4, 27; 16:93; 35:8; 74:31); and His “leading astray” is represented as decisive, for those without His Guidance have no way, no guide, and no protector (4:88, 143; 7:186; 13:33; 17:97; 18:17; 30:29; 39:23; 40:33; 42:44–46). These Quranic verses led to serious theological questions about God’s role in human moral choice and destiny as well as the meaning of God’s “Will.” The
Muʿtazilites argued that God’s “leading astray” is not an act of direct misguidance, but rather a withholding of Divine Favor, or *lutf* (Z), by which God gives human beings guidance and makes them receptive to it; or this “misguidance” or “leading astray” refers to the Hereafter, when, as a result of their disbelief or misdeeds, He will lead them away from Paradise and toward Hellfire (R). Ashʿarites, however, held that God created human acts and that guidance or misguidance, faith or disbelief, were ultimately determined by His Will (R).

Say, “Think to yourselves: were the Punishment of God to come upon you, or were the Hour to come upon you, would you call upon anyone other than God, if you are truthful?”

Nay, but it is upon Him that you would call, and He would remove that which had caused you to call upon Him, if it be His Will, and you would forget whatever partners you had ascribed unto Him.

40–41 Many of the pagan and idolatrous Makkans, to whom this *sūrah* is primarily addressed, referred to the Creator as *Allāh*, although they worshipped other deities in addition to Him. As a means of demonstrating to them that *Allāh* is not one among many gods, but indeed the one and only God, these verses ask the idolaters to think about whom they would call upon for deliverance were the Punishment of God to come upon them suddenly. This Punishment might refer to the coming of a catastrophic worldly destruction of their communities such as befell peoples in the past (cf. 7:65–79; 11:50–68; 54:18–29) or to the Hour, the universal apocalypse (Ṭ). The question is a rhetorical one, and the answer given in v. 41 is that in such an existential crisis, they would undoubtedly call upon God (*Allāh*), their Creator. These verses are similar to others in which people in situations of grave peril are moved to call upon God to save them (see 6:63–64; 7:189–90; 10:22–23; 17:67; 29:65; 30:33; 31:32).

In v. 41, God’s saving them offers hope that they will forget whatever partners they had ascribed unto Him and abandon the false deities they had worshipped alongside God, realizing that they bring no benefit (R). In other verses, however, such supplicants often forget God once they have been saved or go on to worship
other gods after that; and even in the present verses, the implication may be that they merely forget their false deities temporarily during their moment of peril (Z). These verses contribute to the Quran’s pervasive argument that false deities have no power to help those who worship them, in either this life or the next (see, e.g., 6:71; 7:37, 194–95; 28:64; 46:4) and thus that such deities are worshipped purely in vain. In v. 41, God may remove the peril that had moved them to supplicate Him if it be His Will, suggesting that He may or may not respond to such a prayer for deliverance. Elsewhere, however, the Quran affirms that God responds to those who call upon Him (cf. 2:186; 40:60). For Ashʿarites, God’s response to a supplicant is dependent purely upon His Will, and v. 41 supports their argument; for Muʿtazilites, God responds or does not respond depending upon which ultimately serves the greater good (R).

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42 We have indeed sent messengers unto communities before thee, and We seized them with misfortune and hardship, that they might humble themselves.

43 If only, when Our Might came upon them, they had humbled themselves. But rather their hearts hardened, and Satan made all they used to do seem fair unto them.

44 So when they forgot that whereof they had been reminded, We opened unto them the gates of all things, till, as they exulted in what they were given, We seized them suddenly, whereupon they came to despair.

42–44 Cf. 23:75–76; 44:12–16. The Quran mentions misfortune (baʾsāʾ) and hardship (darrāʾ) together elsewhere as means by which human beings are tested (2:177). Many commentators suggest that the first refers to loss of wealth and straitened circumstances, and the second to illness and physical suffering (R, Ṭ, Z). Encounters with both good and evil serve as tests of faith (7:168; 21:35), since ease may make people overly exultant or forgetful (see v. 44), while adversity can make them despairing or ungrateful (see 11:9–10; 28:58; 41:49–51). Tests of adversity or ease are sometimes mentioned, as here, in connection with the sending of prophets and messengers; the circumstances of either hardship (2:214) or an
alternation between hardship and ease serve to deepen the spiritual test brought by the prophet (see, e.g., 7:94–95, 130–35). In v. 43, when people fail to respond to such tests of adversity with humility, their hearts are hardened (cf. 2:74; 5:13; 10:88; 57:16), while Satan causes their actions to seem fair unto them, so that they see their evil actions as good. Although this is a Satanic tactic (see 15:39; 27:24), the Quran also suggests that this delusion is a general human tendency (see 2:212; 3:14; 6:108, 122, 137; 8:48; 9:37; 10:12; 13:33; 16:63; 27:4; 29:38; 40:37; 41:25; 47:14).

They forgot that whereof they had been reminded—that is, they forgot the lesson they should have learned from their misfortune and hardship (R, Z) regarding their utter dependency on God, or they forgot the message brought by the messenger (Ṭ). In response, God did not send immediate punishment, but rather opened unto them the gates of all things, removing their suffering and granting them ease and prosperity. This Divine interweaving of hardship and ease is likened by some to the actions of a caring father, who is by turns harsh and gentle with his child, seeking to cultivate moral character (R, Z). Alternately, God’s temporarily granting ease to those who reject His messengers and allow their hearts to be hardened rather than humbled by adversity can be understood as a means by which they are lured further toward the world (Ṭ). A ḥadīth states, “When you see that God has given much to one of His servants in this world, despite his disobedience, it is only as a temptation” (IK, R, Ṭ).

Like those before them, they exulted, thinking they had been blessed and that their actions were therefore fair, in the sense of beautiful and good. Came to despair renders mublisūn, which also connotes those in a state of regret or those who are dumbfounded, unable to speak in defense of themselves. It is said to be related to the name Iblīs (Ṭ), a name of Satan in the Quran (2:34; 7:11; 15:31; 17:61; 18:50; 26:95; 34:20). Their sense of despair, when God seized them suddenly, was heightened because of the contrast with the ease and prosperity they had enjoyed previously (R), just as Iblīs’s banishment is more dramatic in contrast to the nearness to God he had previously enjoyed. The overall effect of these verses, and others like them, is to encourage detachment in relation to adversity and prosperity in this world, avoiding both bitterness and self-satisfaction, and to engender an awareness that the vicissitudes of earthly life are merely a Divine test and do not necessarily reflect either Divine pleasure or dissatisfaction.

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Thus was cut off the last remnant of the people who did wrong. Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds!
To cut off the last remnant of a people (cf. 7:72; 8:7; 15:66; 69:6–8) means to “uproot” and eliminate them entirely as a people, in this case through a sudden punishment, such as that mentioned in v. 44 (R). This terrible warning is followed by a formula of praise to God in recognition of God’s many merciful efforts to bring these people to guidance before their destruction (R, Ṭs).

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Say, “Think to yourselves: were God to take away your hearing and your sight and seal your hearts, what god other than God would restore them unto you?” Behold how We vary the signs; yet still they turn away.

In several places, the Quran mentions that God may thwart people’s appreciation of spiritual truth by blocking their hearing, sight, or hearts—the latter understood to be the seat of spiritual understanding—or otherwise rendering them ineffective (cf. 2:7, 17; 7:100–101; 16:108; 45:23; for the “sealing of hearts” specifically, see 4:155; 9:87, 93; 10:74; 30:59; 40:35; 42:24; 47:16; 63:3). God’s power over human affliction and deliverance and the inability of any but God to remove an affliction He Himself has ordained are also mentioned in 6:17 and 10:107; and in 28:71–72 and 39:38 they are presented, as here, in the form of a rhetorical question addressed to the disbelievers. To vary the signs means to present them in different forms or to bring out all their aspects; see also 6:65, 105; 7:58; 17:41; 46:27. Signs (āyāt) may refer to Quranic verses, but can also refer to all means of Divine revelation and theophany, including the marvels of the created order and the interior dimensions of the human soul (cf. 41:53). That God “varies the signs” may refer to the manner in which the Quran invokes various images and created phenomena or explains them in different ways as repeated proofs of God’s Oneness. Similarly, the Quran’s parables and warnings are said to be presented in various ways; see 17:89; 18:54; 20:113.

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Say, “Think to yourselves: were the Punishment of God to come upon you suddenly or openly, would any be destroyed save the wrongdoing people?”

That the punishment may come upon the wrongdoers suddenly or openly
means that it may befall them either when they are unaware, for example, at night while they are sleeping, or in broad daylight, coming unexpectedly before their very eyes (Z); that is, it may come upon them either with or without warning (R). The rhetorical question would any be destroyed save the wrongdoing people seems to indicate that only wrongdoers would suffer destruction in the face of such a Divine punishment, though in the Quran worldly destruction usually comes upon whole peoples (save for their prophets and the few righteous people who followed them), as we see in the case of the people of Noah and Lot as well as that of the Arabian tribes the ġād and the Thamūd (see, e.g., 7:59–93; 11:25–95). See also 8:25: And be mindful of a trial that will not befall only those among you who do wrong. Al-Rāzī argues that even in cases where worldly punishment comes upon a people as a whole, the righteous will ultimately receive their reward with God in the Hereafter, as suggested in v. 48, while the wrongdoers will have lost “both this world and the next” (R).

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48 We do not send the messengers save as bearers of glad tidings and as warners. Thus whosoever believes and makes amends, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve.

49 But as for those who deny Our signs, the punishment shall befall them for the iniquity they committed.

48–49 Messengers and prophets are referred to repeatedly as bearers of glad tidings and as warners (see 2:119, 213; 4:165; 5:19; 7:188; 11:2; 17:105; 18:56; 25:56; 33:45; 34:28; 35:24; 48:8). That those who believe and are righteous are spared fear and grief is similarly repeated in over a dozen verses (2:38, 62, 112, 262, 274, 277; 3:170; 5:69; 7:35, 49; 10:62; 43:68; 46:13). In v. 48 it is those who both believe inwardly and demonstrate righteousness outwardly through acts of obedience who are spared fear and grief, whereas in v. 49 the punishment befalls those who both reject faith by “denying God’s signs” and commit iniquity. These verses, and others like them, demonstrate the deeply interconnected reality of faith and acts, indicating that both the inward and outward aspects of one’s spiritual state determine one’s ultimate spiritual punishment or reward.

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Say, “I do not say unto you that with me are the treasuries of God; nor do I know the unseen; nor do I say unto you that I am an angel. I follow only that which is revealed unto me.” Say, “Are the blind and the seer equal? Will you not, then, reflect?”

As an argument for their rejection of Muhammad’s prophethood, the disbelievers repeatedly cited the Prophet’s human rather than angelic nature (6:91; 11:12; 15:7; 17:94–95; 21:3; 25:7, 21; 43:53), his inability to foretell the precise coming of the Hour or the Day of Judgment (7:187; 10:48–49; 67:25–26), and his failure to produce miraculous worldly goods (17:90–91). Elsewhere they claimed that his message was not accompanied by a miraculous sign (2:118; 10:20; 13:7; 17:92–93; 20:133; 29:50)—although for Muslims the Quran itself is the greatest miracle, inimitable through mere human effort (2:23–24; 10:38; 11:13–14), and also the Prophet reportedly split the moon as a miraculous sign to the disbelievers (as mentioned obliquely in 54:1–2).

In the present verse, the Prophet is instructed to respond to similar criticisms issued by the disbelievers in vv. 8–9 and 37 by asserting that he does not claim to be an angel (cf. 17:93; 18:110; 41:6) and that he follows only that which is revealed to him (cf. 46:9), not his personal whim. In words identical to those of Noah in 11:31, he rejects any notion that he possesses the treasuries of God—that is, the power to bring worldly provision and benefit to himself or others (R, Ṭ)—or that he knows the unseen, such as the timing of future events through which he or others could profit (R). The Quran elsewhere indicates that the unseen is known only to God (6:59; 10:20; 27:65), save for what He chooses to reveal to His messengers (3:44; 11:49; 12:102; 72:26–27).

The rhetorical question are the blind one and the seer equal (also found in 11:24; 13:16; 35:19; 40:58) pertains to spiritual, not physical blindness. It asks whether the believers who are guided to and understand the truth of the Quranic message are like the disbelievers who are blind to it. See 22:46: Truly it is not the eyes that go blind, but it is hearts within breasts that go blind. As “seeing” here is a metonym for possessing spiritual knowledge and understanding, the rhetorical question in this verse is also similar to that in 39:9: Are those who know and those who do not know equal? Here as elsewhere, the Quran invites its audience to reflect upon its verses, parables, and proofs or upon God’s creation in order to facilitate spiritual understanding (see, e.g., 3:191c; 11:24, 30; 16:17; 30:8; 37:155; 45:23; 56:62).
Warn hereby those who fear that they will be gathered unto their Lord—they have, apart from Him, no protector and no intercessor—that they might be reverent.

51 Warn hereby—that is, with the Quran (IK)—those who fear that they will be gathered unto their Lord on the Day of Judgment. Those may refer to either Muslims who believe in their own resurrection and fear God’s Judgment, but are deficient in their works; or the People of the Book, who believe in the Day of Judgment, but have not accepted the prophethood of Muhammad; or those idolaters who harbor a hidden fear of the reality of the Day of Judgment and may thus be amenable to the Prophet’s warning (Z). That there is no protector and no intercessor in the Hereafter other than God (see also 6:70; 32:4) is consistent with other verses that limit intercession to God or those to whom He has given the power to intercede, such as the Prophet, according to the majority Muslim opinion. For a fuller discussion of intercession, see 2:48c; 2:255c. Ja’far al-Ṣādiq, the sixth Shiite Imam, understood the intercessor in this verse to be the Quran itself, saying, “Warn by means of the Quran those who anticipate the meeting with their Lord [cf. 50:45 for similar wording] and make them long for what shall be at that time, for truly the Quran is an intercessor which will intercede on their behalf” (Ṭṣ, Ṭū).

And drive not away those who call upon their Lord morning and evening, desiring His Face. Naught of their reckoning falls upon thee and naught of thy reckoning falls upon them, such that thou shouldst drive them away and thus become one of the wrongdoers.

52 This verse was reportedly revealed when a group of prominent Makkans indicated that they wished to join the Prophet’s teaching circle, but were loathe to sit among and be associated with some of Muhammad’s other followers who were of low social standing (including Bilāl and other freed slaves) and so asked the Prophet to send them away. Some reports indicate the Prophet was not asked to send away these followers altogether, but rather to send them to the back rows of prayer, so that the prominent Makkans would not be seen standing or praying behind those of lower social status (Ṭ). The Prophet refused to “drive away” his poorer followers (in 11:27–29 and 26:111–14 Noah refuses to do the same), but
was prepared to agree to have these followers temporarily depart when the prominent Makkans came to sit with him. This verse was then revealed forbidding him from “driving away” his pious followers who call upon their Lord morning and evening (IK, R, Ṭ, W). See also 18:28: Make thy soul patient with those who call upon their Lord morning and evening, desiring His Face, reportedly revealed in a similar circumstance (Ṭ, W); and 80:1–10c, about the incident in which the Prophet is admonished for registering displeasure when his teaching attracted a poor blind man rather than the wealthier Makkans.

These passages raise the question of how the Prophet could seem to favor these prominent Makkans, who were still preoccupied with worldly status, over his sincere followers and how his actions should be evaluated, considering that the verse here indicates that, were he to drive away his followers, as he may have been prepared to do temporarily, he would become one of the wrongdoers. Al-Rāzī argues that even if the Prophet were initially prepared to accede to the Makkans’ demand, his intention was only to facilitate their acceptance of Islam, and since the Prophet could continue to instruct his poorer followers at another time, there would be no spiritual harm to them either. Moreover, the Prophet, according to al-Rāzī, cannot be said to have sinned in his apparent initial willingness to accommodate the Makkans’ demand (R), since his intention was good.

That God should be “called upon,” “glorified,” or “invoked” morning and evening (see also 19:11; 33:42; 48:9; 76:25) can be said to refer to praying the five canonical prayers at their prescribed times, to performing supererogatory acts of invoking God (dhikr Allāh) or reciting the Quran, or to all of them (R, Ṭ). To do so desiring His Face (cf. 2:272; 30:38–39; 76:9) may mean, literally, with the hope of seeing God’s Face, for any sincere lover longs to see the face of the beloved (R), but also it refers metaphorically to sincerity of intention among the Prophet’s followers (IK, R). Naught of their reckoning falls upon thee echoes the Quranic idea that none shall bear the burden of another (6:164; 17:15; 35:18; 39:7; 53:38). In the syntactical context of the verse, their reckoning seems most likely to refer to the reckoning of those who call upon their Lord morning and evening, meaning that the Prophet need only judge his followers’ piety on the basis of their outward actions (Z).

Some commentators explain this as a response to an accusation made by some of the Quraysh that the poor followed the Prophet not out of religious sincerity, but only because they hoped to be fed and clothed by him. According to this interpretation, the verse was meant to indicate that the Prophet had no responsibility to assess the possible ulterior motives behind his followers’ apparent piety (R). Others suggest, more plausibly, that it refers to the reckoning of the prominent Makkans who made the request regarding the Prophet’s followers. The verse indicates that the Prophet need not be so concerned with their embracing Islam that he should accede to their demand and “drive away” his pious followers.
Thus did We try some of them by means of others, that they might say, “Are these the ones whom God has graced among us?” Does God not know best those who are thankful?

53 That God tries some of them by means of others (cf. 47:4) refers generally to the idea that the discrepancies in wealth and power among human beings serves as a trial for all (T); the strong are tested with regard to their responsibility toward the needy, and the needy with regard to their trust in God and their humble acceptance of others’ charity. In this context, it refers specifically to the way in which the humble social status of the Prophet’s early followers constituted a “test” for the prominent Makkans, who had to overcome their false association of spiritual worth with social standing, an association indicated in the contemptuous question, Are these the ones whom God has graced among us? It was also a test of their attachment to their own social status, since as new followers of the Prophet, they would have to accept being instructed to some extent by the Prophet’s poorer followers, who had preceded them in adopting the religion (R) and were thus more firmly rooted in it. At the same time, this was also a test for the needier followers of the Prophet, who watched the disbelieving Makkans continue to prosper, while they themselves remained poor and vulnerable to persecution at the hands of the powerful who disparaged their faith (R). These needier followers could also ask, in reference to the wealthy, disbelieving Makkans, Are these the ones whom God has graced among us? wondering why God continued to grant worldly prosperity to those who rejected His religion (R). It is unclear whether the question is posed by the poorer believers or the wealthier disbelievers and may well be understood as a question each group asked regarding the other.

When those who believe in Our signs come to thee, say, “Peace be upon you! Your Lord has prescribed Mercy for Himself, that whosoever among you does evil in ignorance and thereafter repents and makes amends, He is truly
Forgiving, Merciful.”

54 The saying Peace be upon you! or simply Peace! is mentioned several times in the Quran as the greeting for or between the people of Paradise (7:46; 14:23; 16:32; 19:62; 39:73; 56:26) and is thus the preferred greeting in Islamic society, even for those whose mother tongue is not Arabic. It is also a formula of blessing upon the prophets in the Quran (15:52; 51:25; 37:79, 109, 120, 130, 181) and Islamic tradition generally. This verse may refer to the same incident addressed in v. 53, instructing the Prophet to offer greetings of peace to those who believe, rather than “driving them away” (see v. 53); or it may mean that the Prophet should offer greetings of peace and hope for God’s forgiveness to those believers, reportedly including ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who initially counseled the Prophet to accede to the prominent Makkans’ demand (IK, Ṭ). Alternately, it may be related to a separate incident in which a group of believers confessed to the Prophet that they had committed terrible sins. The Prophet initially said nothing, but this verse was then revealed, instructing him to greet them as believers and offer them hope of forgiveness (Ṭ). For the statement that God has prescribed Mercy for Himself, see 6:12–13c. In a hadīth mentioned in connection with this verse the Prophet asks, “Do you know the right of God over the servants? [It is] that they worship Him and not ascribe partners unto Him.” Then he said, “Do you know the right of the servants over God if they do this? [It is] that He not punish them” (IK). For the reference to God’s forgiveness of one who does evil in ignorance and then repents and makes amends, see 4:17–18 and commentary as well as 16:119.

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55 Thus do We expound the signs, that the way of the guilty may be made clear.

55 That God “expounds the signs” is mentioned four times in the present sūrah and several times elsewhere; see 6:97–98, 126; 7:32, 52, 174; 9:11; 10:5, 24; 11:1; 13:2; 30:28; also 41:3, where it is the basis for the title of Sūrah 41, “Expounded.” In the present context, it refers to the variety of arguments and indications for the Oneness of God and the truth of Muhammad’s prophethood given throughout this sūrah in response to the disbelief, rejection, and false arguments of the Makkani idolaters (R, Ṭ).
56 Say, “I am forbidden to worship those whom you call upon apart from God.” Say, “I will not follow your caprices, for then I would have gone astray, and I would not be among the rightly guided.”

56 Having put forward a series of arguments against Makkan idolaters, the Prophet is told to make known his uncompromising rejection of the idolatry of his people (cf. 10:41, 104; 26:216; 40:66; Sūrah 109), stating that he is forbidden to worship their idols and false deities and that he refuses to follow their caprices, that is, their whims or desires, with regard to religion and worship. Elsewhere, the Quran warns the Prophet against acquiescing to the whims of the disbelievers; see 2:120, 145; 5:48–49; 6:150; 13:37; 42:15; 45:18.

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57 Say, “Truly I stand upon a clear proof from my Lord, and you have denied Him. That which you seek to hasten is not within my power. Judgment belongs to God alone, He relates the Truth, and He is the best of deciders.”

58 Say, “If that which you seek to hasten were within my power, then the matter would be decreed between you and me, and God knows best the wrongdoers.”

57–58 The claim to stand upon a clear proof from God is made by several prophets in the face of their people’s rejection (11:17, 28, 63, 88; 35:40; 47:14) and is an assertion of the prophet’s own clarity regarding the truth of the message he brings (Ṭ). The prospect of Divine punishment and the resurrection of human beings was consistently denied by the Makkan idolaters; yet the Quran suggests that the idolaters seem to want to hasten, or that they unwittingly hasten, the punishment precisely through their obstinate rejection of its reality and their insincere questions and assertions concerning both punishment and resurrection. For example, see 8:32: And [remember] when they said, “O God, if this be the truth from Thee, rain down stones upon us from the sky, or bring us a painful punishment” (cf. 26:203; 27:46; 27:71–72; 37:176; 51:59). The Prophet is instructed here to make it clear that he possesses no power over the timing of such punishment, for judgment
belongs to God alone (cf. 6:62; 12:40, 67; 28:88), a statement that serves as a Quranic basis for the sovereignty of Divine rather than human law in Islamic thought. In the present context, the judgment that belongs to God includes the determination of when His Punishment will descend (Z).

He relates (yaqūṣu) the Truth can be read with a slight orthographic change to mean, “He decrees (yaqā’dī) the Truth,” a reading preferred by some commentators (R, Ṭ, Z), given the context of this verse concerning God’s Judgment. That God is the best of deciders (fāṣilīn) indicates that He will decide between truth and falsehood and between the Prophet and those who reject his message (Ṭ). Cf. 7:87; 10:109; 11:45; 12:80; 95:8, where God is the best or most just of judges (ḥākimīn). In v. 58, the folly of the idolaters’ attempts to elicit the timing of Divine punishment is demonstrated by the warning that, were the timing in the hands of the Prophet, the matter would be decreed—that is, the punishment would have been called down upon them already (Ṭ, Z); but it is God who decrees the timing of His Punishment, and its postponement should be seen as an act of Divine Wisdom and Mercy.

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59 And with Him are the keys of the Unseen. None knows them but He; and He knows what is on land and sea; no leaf falls but that He knows it, nor any seed in the dark recesses of the earth, nor anything moist or dry, but that it is in a clear Book.

59 The Unseen (ghayb) refers to all realities beyond the reach of ordinary human perception: God Himself, the inner thoughts and intentions of others, the inner reality of things, future events, metaphysical realities, and the spiritual and psychic realms. That God alone knows the unseen is found in 6:50; 10:20; and 27:65, but this is the only verse that states that God possesses the keys of the Unseen (mafāṭih al-ghayb). A ḥadīth states, “The keys of the Unseen are five, which none knows but God: None knows what will happen tomorrow but God; none knows what is in the womb but God; none knows when it will rain but God; none knows in what place one will die but God; none knows when the Hour will be established but God” (cf. 31:34). The keys of the Unseen is commonly glossed as the keys to the storehouses or treasuries (khazā’īn) from which creation is originated (R, Ṭ, Z), perhaps in connection with a ḥadīth in which the Prophet says, “I have been given the keys of eloquent speech, and victory with awe, and while I was sleeping last night, the keys of the treasuries of the earth were brought toward
me till they were put in my hand.” Al-Zamakhsharī suggests that the keys of the Unseen are metaphorical images that grant access to otherwise inaccessible truths. Insofar as the keys of the Unseen (mafātiḥ al-ghayb) refers to something that makes difficult or hidden truths accessible, it serves as the title of several important works in Islamic intellectual history, including Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s Quranic commentary and a work on the Quran by Mullā Ṣadrā.

God also knows all aspects of “seen” reality as well, that is, what is on land and sea. He knows them not only in a general sense, but in their particulars: the falling of every leaf, and every seed in the dark recesses of the earth. His Knowledge of even the smallest things may serve as a warning to human beings that God is aware of all that they do, no matter how small or hidden (Ṭ). This verse also served as a scriptural basis for the criticism made by Islamic theologians against certain Muslim philosophers, such as Ibn Sīnā, who claimed that God knows only universals, but not particulars. The connection between God’s Knowledge and the statement that all realities are in a clear Book is also made elsewhere in the Quran (cf. 10:61; 11:6; 27:74–75; 34:3). Clear Book may be a reference to the Preserved Tablet (see 85:22c; Ṭ) or to the very Knowledge of God (Z), although it is used elsewhere to refer to revealed scripture in general (5:15; 12:1; 26:2; 27:1; 28:2; 43:2; 44:2).

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He it is Who takes your souls by night, and He knows what you commit by day. Then by day He resurrects you, that a term appointed may be fulfilled. Then unto Him shall be your return, and He shall inform you of that which you used to do.

*60* Takes your souls renders yatawaffākum, a verb commonly used to refer to the death of a person; here, however, it refers to sleep, for in sleep, as in death, one’s physical senses and limbs are rendered ineffective (R), and only the inner senses and movement of the soul continue. That God “takes souls” by night and then “resurrects” them during the day indicates an analogous relationship between sleep and death, and waking and resurrection. See also 25:47: And He it is Who made the night a garment for you, and made sleep repose, and made day a resurrection. This analogy is also present in the story of the People of the Cave (18:13–26). Likening sleep and waking to death and resurrection makes an implicit argument for the reality of resurrection on the basis of ordinary human experience in this world: if God can withhold the ordinary waking consciousness in sleep and
then return that consciousness and cause awakening on a daily basis, He can also withhold it permanently through death and cause people to “wake” through resurrection in the Hereafter (R, Ṭ).

Like Quranic arguments that invoke God’s ability to “resurrect” a withered land by sending Rain (7:57; 16:65; 22:5; 29:63; 30:24; 41:39), this verse argues for God’s power to resurrect by adducing His power over analogous phenomena experienced in worldly existence. God resurrects people by day, so that a term appointed may be fulfilled, that is, so that the duration of their earthly lives may be completed (Ṭ); see also 39:42: God takes souls at the moment of their death, and those who die not during their sleep. He withholds those for whom He has decreed death, and sends forth the others till a term appointed. In the Quran, individuals as well as communities (7:34; 10:49), and indeed all created phenomena (see, e.g., 13:2; 31:29; 35:13; 39:5; 46:3), have an “appointed term,” in keeping with the idea of Divine qadar, or God’s “measuring out” all things, including their temporal span of existence. The cycle of sleeping and waking also points to the vicissitudes of earthly life, characterized by alternation between God’s giving or expansion (bast) and withholding or contraction (qabd) of spiritual and physical provision. Both are ultimately transcended in the “return unto Him” either in the next world or, for the mystical seeker, in this life in the state of “union” with God that transcends the various spiritual stations (Aj).

In the Hereafter, God will inform you of that which you used to do (5:105; 9:94, 105; 10:23; 29:8; 31:15; 39:7; 62:8); that is, every soul’s deeds will be presented to it, sometimes metaphorically in the form of a “book” (17:71; 69:19, 25; 84:7, 10).

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61 And He is Dominant over His servants. He sends guardians over you, till, when death comes unto one of you, Our messengers take him, and they neglect not their duty.

62 Then they are returned unto God, their true Master. Surely judgment belongs to Him, and He is the swiftest of reckoners.

61–62 That God is Dominant over His servants (see also 6:18) means that He transcends them in both His Knowledge, for He alone possesses the keys of the Unseen (v. 59), and His Power, for He is able to take . . . souls and return them
again (v. 60). He is also Dominant in that He transcends all opposites and dualities, being an “ocean without a shore” (R). Dominant translates qāhir, which is derived from the same root as the Divine Name the Paramount (al-Qahhār) in 12:39; 13:16; 14:48; 38:65; 39:4; 40:16; and al-Qāhir is also considered by some to be one of the Divine Names.

Guardians refers to angels said to accompany each individual soul through earthly life, recording his or her deeds faithfully (Ṭ); see also 10:21; 13:11; 50:18; 82:10–12. Some say that each individual is accompanied by two angels, one to record sins and the other to record righteous acts (R). Given that God possesses knowledge of all things and thus has no need of such written records, it is understood that the benefit of the recording angels is for human beings themselves who, knowing that their deeds are being meticulously recorded, may be moved to avoid evil or dishonorable deeds (R, Z).

In the Quran, messengers (rusul) usually refers to prophets, but here and in several other verses it refers to angels; see 22:75: God chooses messengers from among the angels and from among mankind. In the present verse, it refers to angels sent by God to collect spirits of the deceased (Ṭ; cf. 7:37); see also 32:11, which mentions a single Angel of death, identified in Islamic angelology with ʿIzrāʾīl (Azrael). The angelic messengers in the present verse may be understood as assisting the angel of death; some say the messengers “take” the souls, and the angel of death carries them off (R, Ṭ). It is unclear whether the recording angels and the angels that take souls at death are the same angels performing different functions, although the predominant tendency has been to see them as separate angels (R); see 32:11c. Then they are returned unto God for judgment and recompense. That judgment belongs to God is repeated again (see vv. 57–58 and commentary). God’s “swiftness” in reckoning is also mentioned elsewhere (2:202; 3:19, 199; 5:4; 13:41; 14:51; 24:39; 40:17), as is His swiftness in retribution (6:165; 7:167).

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63 Say, “Who saves you from the darkness of land and sea, when you call upon Him humbly and in secret [saying], ‘If only He saves us from this, we shall surely be among the thankful’?”

64 Say, “God saves you from this and from every distress; yet you ascribe partners unto Him!”
The Quran gives several examples of people calling upon God for help in moments of great distress, only to forget and return to idolatry when the moment of need has passed (see, e.g., 7:189–90; 30:33). As in the present verse, some of these examples are connected with perils at sea (17:67; 29:65; 31:32). The darkness of land and sea may simply refer to the anxiety-producing vicissitudes of earthly life, or it may be a metaphorical reference to the different types of “darkness” human beings experience, including both inward and outward sources of fear and sadness. Some Sufi interpretations consider the darkness of land to represent the various forms of earthly adversity encountered by those following the Islamic exoteric Law (Sharīʿah) and the darkness of sea to represent the spiritual difficulties and challenges faced by those pursuing the mystical path (ṭarīqah; Aj).

Calling upon God humbly and in secret suggests supplication done in a private and sincere fashion (R), not merely for show (see also 7:55). This, together with the supplicants’ promise that, if God delivers them, they will be among the thankful, points to the spiritual benefits one may derive from the experience of danger or distress, including the motivation to call upon God as well as the humility, sincerity, and thankfulness such supplication engenders (R).

Say, “He is the One Who has power to send a punishment upon you from above you or from beneath your feet, or to confound you as discordant factions and make you taste the might of one another.” Behold how We vary the signs, that they may understand.

To send a punishment from above you or from beneath your feet (cf. 5:66; 29:55; 33:10) means, idiomatically, to cause it to come from all sides. It may also be a reference to the various ways in which punishment comes or threatens to come upon people in the Quran (IK, R): from above, as in the flooding rains upon Noah’s people, the rain of stones upon the people of Lot and others (15:74; 17:68; 26:173; 27:58; 29:33, 40; 54:34; 67:17), and the destructive cry or thunderbolt that destroys or accompanies the destruction of various peoples (2:55; 4:153; 11:67, 94; 15:73, 83; 18:40; 23:41; 29:40; 36:29, 49, 53; 38:15; 41:13, 17; 50:42; 51:44; 54:31; 80:33); and from beneath their feet, as in earthquakes (7:78, 91; 29:37) or being “swallowed up” by earth or sea (16:45; 17:68; 28:81; 29:40; 34:9; 67:16).

Dividing into discordant factions is mentioned elsewhere as an error committed by previous religious communities and something Muslims should strive to avoid (cf. 3:103–5; 30:32; 42:13–14; 98:4). The present verse warns that God
might confound you as discordant factions as a punishment; cf. 5:14, where the consequence of Christians forgetting their covenant with God is that He stirred up enmity and hatred among them. When the present verse was revealed, the Prophet was disturbed and requested through the Archangel Gabriel that God spare his community such punishments. Gabriel returned with the response that, although God would spare them the punishment from above . . . and from beneath their feet, He would not spare them the division into discordant factions and the consequent conflicts that would ensue; that is, they would taste the might of one another (IK, R, Ṭ). The Prophet thus said, “My community will divide into seventy-two sects, only one of which will be saved” (R; see also IK and Abū Dāwūd, K. Al-sunnah, where the Prophet predicts seventy-three sects). The Prophet’s mention of seventy-two sects into which his community would later divide was influential in the writings of later Islamic heresiographers, who attempted to classify different theological perspectives in Islam into seventy-two distinct “sects” (firaq). The Prophet also warned about the consequences of violence among his community, saying, “If the sword [of mutual fighting] comes down upon my community, it will not be removed until the Day of Resurrection” (IK, Ṭ).

Since this verse identifies factionalism in religion as a possible Divine punishment, some might argue that this verse should be read as prohibiting disagreements or debates concerning religious teachings entirely (Ṭ). It might therefore be interpreted as a scriptural basis for discouraging the establishment of different theological and legal schools in Islam, although the coexistence of different legal and theological schools has had a long and largely (although by no means entirely) peaceful history in Islam, and a well-known Prophetic hadīth describes differences among his community as a mercy (al-Suyūṭī, al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaghīr). However, the consensus of the Muslim community has long been that different theological and legal schools are acceptable within the large umbrella of Islam, so long as the basic principles of Islamic belief are upheld. The warning in this verse, moreover, seems to pertain primarily to factions engaged in mutual violence, since through them you taste the might of one another. We vary the signs renders nusarrifu’l-āyāt, which means literally to turn the signs about or move them in different directions and thus, figuratively, to show them in all their aspects; see 6:46c; 6:105; 7:58; 17:41; 46:27.

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66 Thy people have denied it, though it is the truth. Say, “I am not a guardian over you.

67 For every tiding there is a fixed setting, and soon you
That the Prophet Muhammad was not made a guardian over his people or, elsewhere, a keeper or watcher over them (cf. 4:80; 6:104, 107; 10:108; 17:54; 25:43; 39:41; 42:6, 48) indicates that the Prophet’s duty was only to convey the Divine message (cf. 3:20; 13:40; 29:18). He was not responsible for the acceptance or rejection of the message by people; that is their own moral responsibility as well as a matter that is ultimately in God’s Hands, for as it says in 10:100: It is not for a soul to believe, save by God’s Leave. Cf. 5:25 and 11:86 for this assertion in relation to other prophets.

For every tiding—that is, for every message of warning sent by God through the prophets—here referencing the Quranic warnings in particular, there is a fixed setting, meaning a period of time during which the warning is operative; after that, what has been warned about will come to pass. Soon you shall know warns that the punishment for rejecting the Prophet’s message is imminent, and when it comes, those who rejected it will know the truth of the warnings he brought (Ṭ). The imminent punishment refers, according to some, to the Battle of Badr (2/624), in which the Muslims inflicted a crushing defeat upon the Quraysh of Makkah, or to the Muslims’ eventual triumph over the idolaters with the conquest of Makkah (8/630); but it can also be a warning that death and Judgment are ever nigh, and when they occur, those who rejected the Quranic message shall know the truth of it and of its warnings (R, Ṣ).

And when thou seest those who engage in vain discussion about Our signs, turn away from them till they engage in other discourse. And if Satan should cause thee to forget, then once thou hast remembered, sit not in the company of wrongdoing people.

Their reckoning falls not upon those who are reverent, but [upon them is] a reminder, that they might be reverent.

The disbelievers engage in vain discussion about the signs of God, seeking to deny and deride them (Ṭ; cf. 4:140; 6:112). The Quran links such vain discussion elsewhere with “playing” in a pejorative sense (see 6:32c; 6:91; 9:65;
43:83; 52:12; 70:42), since one should not take religion as mere play and diversion (cf. 5:57; 6:70; 7:51). According to the Quran, vain discussion of any sort should be avoided (23:3), and 24:14–16 indicates that vain discussion in matters of religion and law can have serious consequences for the community, in that it can lead, for example, to false accusations of adultery, which may then give rise to serious miscarriages of justice and to mutual division and mistrust among believers. This verse thus counsels the Prophet, and by extension all believers, to avoid or remove themselves from groups engaged in vain discussion about religious matters, an idea supported by other Quranic verses (cf. 4:140; 6:91, 112; 7:180; 43:83; 70:42). Here, one need only turn away from them until they move on to another topic (Z). The Quran similarly counsels those who encounter such discussions: Say, “Allāh,” then leave them to play at their vain discourse (v. 91).

Some reports connect the warning in this verse regarding those who engage in vain discussion about Our signs to the discordant factions mentioned in v. 65, indicating that the warning pertains not only to the disbelievers, but even to those believers who would engage in fruitless and divisive debate about religion (Ṭ). Some literalists have taken this verse to mean a prohibition against all discussion and debate regarding religious issues, and thus as an indication that one should rely only on a literal reading of the scripture. But al-Rāzī rejects such an interpretation, indicating that the verb for “engaging in vain discussion” (yakhūḍū) means precisely to engage in discussion that is disrespectful and disparaging, and the warning thus does not pertain to sincere religious deliberation, which is encouraged in the Quran.

Addressing the Prophet specifically, but all believers as well, the verse indicates that Satan may cause people to forget the prohibition against sitting among those engaged in vain discussion of religion or perhaps make them unaware initially that the conversation has changed to a disparaging one, but as soon as they become aware of it, they should remove themselves from the discussion. Elsewhere in the Quran (cf. 12:42; 58:19), it is said that Satan causes people to forget but that he is capable of causing the Prophet to forget raises some difficult issues (Āl), although other verses in the Quran suggest that even the prophets can be the object of Satan’s whisperings; see 22:52: And no messenger or prophet did We send before thee, but that when he had a longing, Satan would cast into his longing, whereupon God effaces what Satan cast.

The reckoning of the disbelievers and those who engage in vain discussion about the signs of God will not fall upon those who are reverent, that is, those who fear God and are observant of His commands and prohibitions. Even if they temporarily find themselves among those engaged in such activity, they need not fear being judged by association, for none bears the burden of another (see 6:52c). But it is incumbent upon the believers to deliver a reminder to those engaged in such discourse; that is, believers should not only leave them, but also show their
displeasure with and opposition to the discussion and exhort them against it (Z).

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70 Leave those who take their religion to be play and diversion, and who are deluded by the life of this world, but remind them with it, lest any soul be delivered to ruin because of what it has earned—it has no protector apart from God, nor any intercessor, and though it should offer every kind of ransom, it shall not be accepted from it. Those are the ones delivered to ruin for that which they have earned. Theirs shall be a drink of boiling liquid and a painful punishment for having disbelieved.

One should leave not only those engaged in vain discussion of religion (v. 68), but all those who take religion to be play and diversion (see also 7:51). The latter phrase can refer to several types of people, among them those who do not take religious matters seriously; those who follow religions that are themselves nothing but folly, such as religions that entail idolatry; those who make judgments in religious matters based merely on their own whims and desires; those who take the religious festivals ordained by God as mere opportunities for play and diversion; or those who support religion only to attain worldly ends, such as power, authority, or wealth (R, Z). All such people can be considered deluded by the life of the world (cf. 6:130; 31:33; 35:5; 45:35). As in vv. 68–69, leaving those who treat religion disdainfully or without due seriousness should be accompanied by an admonitory reminder (remind them with it, i.e., with the Quran or religion itself; R), in the hope that they may become reverent (v. 69) or that they may become rightly guided and avoid being delivered to ruin for their sins.

Reminding people in this life is important, for there is no repentance or atonement for sins accepted in the next life; there they will have no protector and no intercessor (see also 6:51; 32:4) and cannot ransom themselves (cf. 2:48; 2:123; 3:91; 5:36; 10:54; 13:18; 39:47; 57:15; 70:11). Certain pious Sunni interpreters say that this verse was revealed in relation to the Prophet’s close Companion and first Caliph, Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, whose son tried to lure him back to idolatry (Z). Since the believers are told merely to avoid or warn the idolaters, some interpreters attribute this message to the weak position of the Muslim community when this verse was revealed, prior to the migration from Makkah to
Madinah in 622, and consider the nonconfrontational approach to the idolaters enjoined here to have been abrogated by a later Madinan verse that commands the believers to slay the idolaters wheresoever you find them (9:5; Q, Ṭ). The image of a drink of boiling liquid is used in connection with Hell in several verses (10:4; 18:29; 37:67; 38:57; 40:72; 44:44–46; 56:54, 93; 78:25; 88:54) and contrasts sharply with the cool and pleasing drinks of the Garden (cf. 37:45–47; 76:5–6; 17–18, 21; 83:25–28).

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Say, “Apart from God, shall we call upon that which neither benefits nor harms us, and be turned back on our heels after God has guided us, like one bewildered, seduced by satans on the earth, though he has companions who call him to guidance, ‘Come to us!’?” Say, “Indeed, the Guidance of God is the true guidance, and we are commanded to submit to the Lord of the worlds, and to perform the prayer and to reverence Him; it is unto Him that you shall be gathered.”

71–72 The folly of worshipping that which neither benefits nor harms is repeatedly mentioned in relation to idols and false deities; see 5:76; 10:18, 106; 13:16; 20:89; 21:66; 22:12; 25:55; 26:71–73. The futility of “calling upon” any other than God for help is evoked in 2:171: The parable of those who disbelieve is that of one who cries to that which hears only a call and a shout; and 13:14: Those to whom they supplicate apart from Him answer them not in the least, save as one who stretches forth his palms toward water that it may reach his mouth, though it never reaches him. To “turn back on one’s heels” means to return to a state of ignorance after having received God’s guidance. Satans, in the plural and general form, refers to the agents of Satan, who may be jinn in the service of Satan proper, or human beings who wittingly or unwittingly do his bidding (cf. 2:14, 102; 6:112, 121; 7:27, 30; 19:68; 23:97; 26:221). Satans, both human and jinn, are said to “seduce” human beings through “whispering,” evoking the subtlety with which they entice people away from the path of guidance (cf. 7:20; 20:120; 114:4). The Quran also mentions, however, satans in the service of the prophet Solomon (21:82; 38:37), suggesting that in some places they simply refer to jinn. Here the
The companions who call him to guidance can be understood as referring to sincere and rightly guided companions who try to persuade him to follow guidance, but their call goes unheeded. If v. 70 was revealed in relation to the attempt of Abū Bakr’s son to lure his father to idolatry, the present verse may refer to Abū Bakr calling his son to guidance (R). A minority, however, interpret the guidance to which the companions call to be false guidance (R, Ṭ). That God’s guidance is the true guidance (see also 2:120; 3:73) means that there is no guidance outside of His; all paths to which one may be “guided,” other than His, are paths that lead astray (Bḍ, R). The Prophet is instructed to respond to his people’s calls to idolatry by saying that he has been commanded to submit to the Lord of the worlds (see also 40:66), to perform the prayer—that is, the canonical prayer, performed five times a day (see 2:3c)—and to reverence God—that is, to be ever mindful of His unseen Presence and of His commands and prohibitions; for a longer discussion of the important Quranic concept of reverence (taqwā), see 2:2 and commentary. According to al-Rāzī, the three commands to submit (aslama) to God, to perform the prayer, and to reverence God represent the best of the various modes of human action: submission (islām) is, along with faith, the best of the “acts of the heart”; prayer is the best of the acts of the limbs; and reverence is the best of the “acts of omission,” insofar as reverence refers to the pious fear or mindfulness that helps one avoid sin.

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73 He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in truth; and on the day He says “Be!” and it is, His Word is the Truth. And sovereignty is His on the Day when the trumpet is blown, Knower of the Unseen and the seen; and He is the Wise, the Aware.

73 God created the heavens and the earth in truth (10:5; 14:19; 15:85; 16:3; 29:44; 30:8; 39:5; 44:39; 45:22; 46:3; 64:3), that is, in accordance with the nature of reality and with purpose (JJ) rather than in play (21:16; 44:38) or in vain (3:191; 38:27); this can also indicate that the world He has created is in itself good (R), not evil, and created in goodness. This sentence can also be read, “He it is Who created the heavens and the earth with the Truth,” that is, with His Word, for His Word is the Truth, as when He says [to something], “Be!” and it is (cf. 2:117c; 3:47, 59; 16:40; 19:35; 36:82; 40:68) or when He creates the heavens and the earth
by calling them to Himself (41:11; T). Muslim theologians debated whether the Speech (kalām) of God was created in time or was eternal and uncreated. Some have argued that this verse supports the latter theological position (although in this verse Word translates qawl, rather than kalām), since if it is by God’s Word that all things are created, then His Word must preexist creation and be therefore “uncreated” (T). According to some, the day on which He says “Be!” is ultimately the same as the Day when the trumpet is blown (T). The blowing of the trumpet is invoked in several verses as the herald of the apocalypse and the onset of the Day of Judgment (18:99; 20:102; 23:101; 27:87; 36:51; 39:68; 50:20; 69:13; 74:8; 78:18), and thus the Divine Creative Command here likely refers to the manner in which God will resurrect the dead on this day; He will create them anew using the command through which they were created the first time, “Be!”; see 17:51: Then they will say, “Who will bring us back?” Say, “He who originated you the first time” (T).

The word for trumpet, ṣūr, can be read with different voweling as ṣuwar, meaning “forms,” which would give the meaning: “And Sovereignty is His on the Day when the forms are blown upon,” that is, when God breathes His Spirit upon the forms of created things and brings them into being (R, T), although this is a minority reading. For breathing as a means of Divine creation, see 15:29; 21:91; 32:9; 38:72. Either interpretation makes the point that the world is brought into being and brought to a conclusion in an analogous manner, and that creation in this world and resurrection in the next are simply two modes of Divine generation. God is also referred to as Knower of the Unseen and the seen in 9:94, 105; 13:9; 23:92; 32:6; 39:46; 59:22; 62:8; 64:18.

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74 And when Abraham said unto his father, Azar, “Do you take idols for gods? Truly I see you and your people in manifest error.”

74–83 This pericope about Abraham and his people demonstrates in narrative form the Quranic argument for God’s Oneness and Transcendence in relation to created reality and is often cited as an indication that tawḥīd, or God’s Oneness, is evident to any who objectively and sincerely contemplate the nature of the universe. At the same time, the story has raised some theological difficulties, since Abraham appears to identify, at least temporarily, a star, the moon, and the sun, as “his Lord.” Some hold that Abraham did not make such claims sincerely, but only feigned them to make the point to his idolatrous people that all things are temporal and subject to change save for the One God (IK, R). Others suggest that this
pericope recounts a genuine process of intellectual deduction through which Abraham came to know the Oneness of God by observing the ephemerality of all created things (Sy, Ṭ, Ṭū).

Several commentators connect this passage with a legendary account of Abraham’s birth and early life. According to this account, when Abraham was born, the king in the region—whom some identify as Nimrod (also see 2:258c)—dreamed that a boy would be born who would usurp his power and so ordered all young boys in the kingdom to be killed. Abraham’s mother gave birth to Abraham in secret and hid him in a cave, where she occasionally visited him, but where he was fed and nurtured by the Archangel Gabriel. As a result, he grew up knowing that he had a Lord to whom he owed obedience and worship, and when he first emerged from the cave, he mistakenly identified a star as “his Lord,” then the moon, and finally the sun, before realizing that his Lord transcended all of these celestial bodies (R, Ṭ).

This story, which has no basis in the Quranic or Biblical accounts of Abraham’s early life, seems to amalgamate several thematic elements from other Quranic and Biblical prophetic narratives and has its own theological difficulties. Some objected to the idea that a prophet could mistakenly identify, even temporarily, a created reality, such as a star, with God, since this is a form of shirk, or idolatry. One response to this view has been to claim that Abraham made this erroneous identification when he was still a young child, before the age of religious responsibility and before he became a prophet (IK, R, Ṭū). Even if this is read as an account of Abraham’s own rational deduction of the Oneness of God, this reasoning process nonetheless has a revelatory aspect to it, since in v. 75 it is God who shows Abraham the dominion of the heavens and the earth, that he might be among those possessing certainty; and v. 83 identifies Abraham’s discourse with his people as Our argument, which We gave unto Abraham against his people. The two interpretations of this narrative may be reconciled, however: although Abraham may have been merely feigning worship of the celestial bodies to make a rhetorical argument about monotheism for the benefit of his people, his demonstration may reflect an earlier process of intellectual deduction that was inspired by his wonder at the celestial bodies, but ultimately ended in his certainty regarding tawḥīd.

Sufi commentators have tended to see this passage as a symbol for progressive spiritual illumination or increasing levels of spiritual certitude (yaqīn). Each of these celestial bodies represents a state of spiritual understanding attained by the seeker. The “setting” of each of these bodies represents the seeker’s realization of the limitations of his or her current spiritual station, engendering a period of darkness or trial from which he or she may emerge into a state of greater spiritual certainty and illumination. For al-Qushayrī, the star represents the intellect that first witnesses the truth through demonstrative proof (burḥān); the moon represents the
knowledge that is attained with increasing clarity and elucidation of thought; and the sun represents the brilliant light of gnosis (spiritual knowledge). Similarly, he interprets Abraham’s marveling at these three celestial bodies as his first seeing created things through God, then seeing them for God, and finally the complete effacement of all things in God (Qu).

74 Azar is given as the name of Abraham’s father in the Quran, although only in this verse. In the Biblical account, his father is Terah (Genesis 11:25–32), and some commentators suggest that Terah may have been a second or alternate name for him (IK, JJ, R,Ṭ). Some suggest that Azar was the name of an idol, and Abraham calls his father by this name as a way of disparaging his idol worship (IK, R,Ṭ). Others have suggested that Azar was Abraham’s uncle (R,Ṭū), who is referred to as his father in the general sense of an older paternal relative (cf. 2:133, where Jacob identifies Ishmael as among his fathers, although Ishmael was his uncle). This suggestion was driven, in part, by the fact that, although Terah is a spiritually neutral figure in the Bible, Azar is identified not only as an idol worshipper, but as a maker of idols (Ṭ). Some Muslims, particularly Shiites, hold that the father of a prophet cannot be a disbeliever or an idolater (Ṭū, R), citing a hadīth in which the Prophet says, “God transferred me from pure loins to pure wombs; I was not sullied by the filth of the jāhiliyyah [the Age of Ignorance, or idolatrous pre-Islamic Arabia]” (R,Ṭū). Moreover, if references to Azar and to Abraham’s father were really references to his uncle, it would explain why Abraham can dissociate himself from him (9:114) without contradicting the Quranic injunction to maintain good relations even with disbelieving parents (31:14–15; R). Nonetheless, the most literal reading of this and other verses is that Azar was Abraham’s father and that he was an idolater (R).

Thus did We show Abraham the dominion of the heavens and the earth, that he might be among those possessing certainty.

75 That God showed Abraham the dominion of the heavens and the earth may mean simply that Abraham witnessed the wondrous phenomena of the celestial and terrestrial realms that are also visible to human beings in general. The Quran indicates elsewhere that anyone who observes and reflects upon these phenomena with sincerity and a sound mind should come to the conclusion that there is an all-powerful God who is One (cf. 10:101; 34:9). Since Abraham was given sound judgment by God (21:51), he was able to apply reason to his observations of the world around him in order to arrive at the reality of monotheism (IK). Al-Rāzī
argues that the manifestation of God’s Being and Power in natural phenomena is always objectively observable, but is veiled for many by human error and the preoccupation with worldly things. When Abraham rejected his father’s idolatry (v. 74), he attained a new intellectual clarity that allowed him to see this Divine Self-Manifestation with the inner eye of his intellect (R). God’s showing Abraham the dominion of the heavens and the earth is, however, more widely associated with a miraculous and revelatory journey in which God split open the heavens, allowing Abraham to see all its levels up to the Divine Throne itself, and cleaved the earth so that he could see to its lowest level (IK, R, Ṭū, Z). Al-Rāzī suggests that though any thoughtful monotheist might see proofs of God’s Being in the created order, Abraham experienced this Divine Self-Manifestation to an extent that is made accessible to only the greatest prophets, such as Muhammad, citing the Prophet’s reported supplication, “O God, show me things as they truly (and really) are!” (R).

God shows Abraham the dominion in order to grant him certainty in his spiritual beliefs; certainty here refers to a kind of knowledge arrived at usually after a period of doubt or confusion has been overcome through reflection and contemplation (R) or as the result of a vision. Abraham’s initial aversion to idolatry and inclination toward monotheism are thus strengthened through this experience of Divine Self-Manifestation. This clause might also be read to mean that God showed Abraham the dominion, “because he was among those possessing certainty” (R), that is, as a reward for the spiritual insight he had already attained.

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76 When the night grew dark upon him, he saw a star. He said, “This is my Lord!” But when it set, he said, “I love not things that set.”

77 Then when he saw the moon rising he said, “This is my Lord!” But when it set, he said, “If my Lord does not guide me, I shall surely be among the people who are astray.”

78 Then when he saw the sun rising he said, “This is my Lord! This is greater!” But when it set, he said, “O my people! Truly I am quit of the partners you ascribe.

76–78 As noted above, commentators differed over whether the
demonstration of God’s Transcendence relative to temporal phenomena in these three verses represents Abraham’s own gradual realization of pure monotheism through a process of intellectual deduction or is simply Abraham’s rhetorical argument against his people’s idolatry. The latter interpretation seems to fit best the surrounding context, since Abraham’s discourse in these verses is preceded by his explicit criticism of idolatry (v. 74) and his being shown the dominions of the heavens and the earth (v. 75). According to this latter interpretation, Abraham’s statement This is my Lord! upon seeing the star, and then upon seeing the moon and the sun, was not made in earnest, but rather sarcastically or in jest—perhaps with a tone of incredulity, as if to say, “Is this my Lord?!” (T). Or it was said as a means of setting up his opponents in an argument by beginning with a repetition of his opponents’ own view, which would then be gradually disproved (R); see 21:51–67, where Abraham takes a similar approach. See also 37:88–89, where Abraham, while engaged in an argument with his people, glances at the stars and declares, I am sick, perhaps indicating his actual view concerning his people’s worship of the stars.

Abraham’s declaration in v. 77, If my Lord does not guide me, I shall surely be among the people who are astray, indicates, as in v. 71, that the only guidance is God’s guidance and it was perhaps meant to indicate to his people their own religious status (R). After the setting of the sun, Abraham declares himself quit of the partners his people ascribe to God; similar statements are made by Abraham in 43:26 and 60:4 as well as by Muhammad in v. 19 and the Arabian prophet Hūd in 11:54.

Abraham’s discourse regarding the celestial bodies was relevant to his people’s worship of stone idols either because the idols served as representations of celestial deities worshipped by his people (IK, R) or because he was making the point that, if even the celestial bodies, which travel through the sky and seem so sublime, can be shown to be ephemeral, it was all the more nonsensical to worship stone idols, which could not even move (Ṭū). Some commentators report that among Abraham’s people were astrologers (JJ, R), who considered a celestial body to be influential when it was waxing and weak and ineffectual when it was waning; thus according to al-Rāzī, Abraham’s argument about the waning of the celestial bodies should have been persuasive. The star, which some identify as Venus (IK, JJ), the moon, and the sun were the brightest and therefore considered the most powerful of the seven celestial bodies reportedly worshipped by Abraham’s people (IK).

For some, this passage serves as an argument that although religious truth is not entirely self-evident (R, Ṭū), neither can it be based simply upon blind imitation (R), such as was practiced by Abraham’s people in continuing to worship the idols of their fathers. Rather, religious certainty must be based upon sincere and objective reflection and upon clear proofs and arguments derived from
observations of the created order; otherwise there would be no point in Abraham issuing a proof of this kind (R).

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79 Truly, as a ḥanīf, I have turned my face toward Him Who created the heavens and the earth, and I am not of the idolaters.”

79 Cf. 10:105; 30:30. To “turn” or, variously, “submit” or “set” one’s face toward God means to orient one’s whole being toward the worship and obedience of God (R); see also 2:112; 3:20; 7:29; 31:22; 30:43. Ḥanīf is used predominantly in connection with Abraham in the Quran (2:135; 3:67, 95; 4:125; 6:161; 16:120, 123), but also elsewhere to denote a pure monotheism that avoids all manner of idolatry (22:31; 30:30; 98:5); it is also associated with the Prophet Muhammad both before and after the onset of his prophetic mission. For a fuller discussion of ḥanīf, see 2:135c; 30:30c.

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80 His people disputed with him. He said, “Do you dispute with me concerning God, when He has guided me? I fear not the partners you ascribe unto Him, save as my Lord wills. My Lord encompasses all things in Knowledge. Will you not, then, remember?

80 Abraham’s people disputed with him, by professing that they were merely following the traditions of their forefathers (cf. 21:53; 43:23); by expressing surprise that Abraham would limit worship to a single God (cf. 38:5); or by threatening that their false deities and idols would bring harm upon him for his rejection of them (R, Ṭ). Abraham wonders how his people think their vain disputations will have an effect upon one, such as himself, who has been guided by God, and how they can hope to frighten him by invoking the partners they ascribe unto Him, that is, idols who can bring “neither harm nor benefit” (R; cf. vv. 17, 71–72). His qualification save as my Lord wills indicates that he fears only what comes from God, and if he were to fear the partners his people ascribe to Him, it would only be as a result of God’s Will to test him in some way (R). That God
encompasses all things in Knowledge (20:98; 40:7; 65:12) means that everything occurs according to His Wisdom (R) and Knowledge. See 2:255: *He knows that which is before them and that which is behind them. And they encompass nothing of His Knowledge, save what He wills. His Pedestal embraces the heavens and the earth.*

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81 How should I fear the partners you ascribe, when you do not fear ascribing partners unto God for which He has sent down to you no authority? So which of the two parties has greater right to security, if you know?

82 Those who believe and who do not obscure their belief through wrongdoing, it is they who have security, and they are rightly guided.”

81–82 Abraham continues his argument with his people, expressing amazement that they could expect him to fear helpless idols, although they had no fear of ascribing partners unto God for which He has sent down . . . no authority, that is, no proof of their reality (R, T; see also 7:33, 71; 12:40; 22:71; 53:23). He challenges them as to which of the two parties, he or they, has greater right to security, meaning from Divine punishment. The answer is, *those who believe and who do not obscure their belief through wrongdoing,* that is, those who do not obscure their belief in God through shirk, or idolatry (IK, T). For some, this refers to those who combine their faith with good works of all kinds (R). When this verse came down, the Prophet’s Companions were reportedly fearful, asking the Prophet, “Who is it who believes and never does wrong [lit. never wrongs oneself]?” The Prophet responded by indicating that what is meant by wrongdoing here is precisely idolatry (IK, T). The Prophet is also reported to have said, “Those *who have security and are rightly guided* are those who are thankful when they receive, who are patient when they are denied, who seek forgiveness when they have done wrong, and forgive when they have been wronged” (IK).

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83 That was Our argument, which We gave unto Abraham
against his people. We raise in degrees whomsoever We will. Truly thy Lord is Wise, Knowing.

83 That was Our argument refers to either the argument about who should fear God’s punishment and who should feel secure from it, put forth by Abraham in vv. 80–82, or the argument regarding the celestial bodies in vv. 76–78, or both (R). The Quranic account of Abraham portrays him as engaging in several rhetorical and sometimes dramatic arguments with his people regarding the truth of monotheism and the inanity of idolatry (cf. 2:258; 19:42; 21:51–67; 37:83–96). Al-Rāzī observes that the Quran frequently invokes the story of Abraham in the context of the Prophet’s arguments with the Makkah idolaters (as is the case in this sūrah), because even the idolatrous Arabs had great respect for Abraham as their prominent and pious ancestor, and they were aware that he was held in great esteem by the Jews and Christians as well (R); given the latter, Abraham is also invoked in Quranic arguments against certain exclusivist religious claims attributed to Jews and Christians (cf. 2:135, 140; 3:65–68). In the Quran, then, Abraham is both the master of argumentation and an important example for the Quran’s own arguments against certain religious claims attributed to Jews, Christians, and idolaters. The Quran elsewhere enjoins the Prophet and the believers to argue with their religious opponents in a manner that is clear (18:22) and beautiful (16:125) and to know that unto God belongs the conclusive argument (v. 149).

We raise in degrees whomsoever We will may refer to degrees of provision and power apportioned in this life (6:165; 43:32); degrees of Divine reward for virtuous action (4:95–96; 9:20; 46:19); degrees of knowledge and wisdom (JJ), since elsewhere the idea of degrees or ranks is connected specifically with knowledge (12:76; 58:11); or degrees of prophethood, since the Quran mentions degrees or ranks among the prophets (2:253). In this context the implication is that God raised Abraham in degrees by virtue of the argument that He gave him against his people (R). For al-Rāzī, this verse is evidence that the literalists who disparage the use of argumentation in religion are wrong, for it is through this argument that God raises Abraham in degrees (R).

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84 And We bestowed upon him Isaac and Jacob, each We guided. And We guided Noah before, and among his progeny, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, and Aaron—thus do We recompense the virtuous.
And We bestowed upon him—that is, upon Abraham—his progeny, Isaac and Jacob, as a reward for his obedience and sincerity in worshipping the One God, after he had left his people (IK, Ṭ). All those mentioned by name in vv. 84–86 are considered prophets in Islam. Isaac is usually mentioned along with his father, Abraham, his brother Ishmael, or his son Jacob. Isaac and Jacob are also identified together as prophets in 19:49 and also as a Divine gift to Abraham in 21:72; see commentary on 51:27–30 for the account of Abraham and his wife Sarah receiving the news of Isaac’s impending birth. And We guided Noah before, since Noah predates Abraham. And among his progeny refers to the progeny of Noah, although most of the figures named in vv. 84–86 are also Abraham’s progeny. For the story of Noah, see 7:59–64; 10:71–73; 11:25–48; 23:23–30; 26:105–21; 37:75–82; 54:9–15; Sūrah 71. For David, see 2:251; 4:163; 17:55; 21:78–80; 27:15–16; 34:10–11; 38:17–26. For Solomon, David’s son, see 21:78–82; 27:15–44; 34:12–16; 38:30–40. For Job, who is said to be a descendant of Isaac through his son, Esau (Ṭ), see 21:83–84; 38:41–44. For Joseph, see Sūrah 12. Substantial Quranic narratives related to Moses and Aaron are found in 2:49–74; 5:20–26; 7:103–55; 10:75–90; 18:60–82; 20:9–99; 26:10–67; 27:7–14; 28:3–47; 43:46–56; 79:15–26. Thus do We recompense the virtuous, such as these prophets, who were recompensed because they were patient and obedient in times of trial (Ṭ).

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And Zachariah, John, Jesus, and Elias—each was among the righteous.

Zachariah is the uncle of Mary, the mother of Jesus, as well as the father of John; for accounts related to him and his son, John, see 3:37–41; 19:2–15; 21:89–90. For significant passages related to Jesus, see 2:253; 3:45–59; 4:157, 171–72; 5:110–18; 19:34–36, among others. Since this verse continues from the previous one, Jesus is identified as being among the progeny of Noah and Abraham; as Jesus’ only human parent is Mary, this identification demonstrates that progeny may be determined through the female as well as the male line (IK, JJ). This was a precedent of importance to Shiites and others who held the Prophet’s descendants in particular esteem, since all of Muhammad’s descendants come through the female line of his daughter Fāṭimah (Qm, Ṭ). Elias is also mentioned in 37:123–32; some commentators report that he was a nephew or descendant of Aaron (JJ,Ṭ), while others identify him with Idrīs (mentioned in 19:56–57 and 21:85), who some say was the grandfather of Noah (Ṭ, Ṭs).
And Ishmael, Elisha, Jonah, and Lot—each We favored above the worlds.

86  *Ishmael*, the first son of Abraham, is identified as both a messenger (*rasūl*) and a prophet (*nabī*) in 19:54, terms that have a technical distinction in Islamic theology. “Messengers” generally refers to prophets who bring a new religion, establish a religious community, or are recipients of a scripture that is revealed through them; the larger category of “prophet” includes messengers, but also all those sent by God to bring Divine tidings or warnings within the context of an existing religious community, rather than to establish a new one (see the essay “The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions”). See 2:125–28, where Ishmael and Abraham together raise the Kaʿbah from its foundations and thus reestablish this sacred sanctuary in Arabia. *Elisha* is described as *among the excellent* in 38:48. *Jonah* is mentioned in 10:98, that is, in the *sūrah* that bears his name, although his story is told in greater detail in 37:139–48. *Lot* is a nephew of Abraham, and his story is told in several places; see 7:80–84; 11:77–83; 15:57–77; 26:160–73; 27:54–58; 29:28–35; 37:133–38; 54:33–38; 66:10. Each of these figures is described as *favored* by God *above the worlds*, which is widely understood to mean “favored above all the people of their time” (T). The phrase is also used to describe the Children of Israel as a whole (2:47, 122; 7:140).

And from among their fathers, and their progeny, and their brethren, We chose them and guided them unto a straight path.

87  In addition to the figures named in vv. 84–86, some *from among their fathers, and their progeny, and their brethren* were “chosen” and *guided*, but not all, as some of their relatives and offspring were neither chosen nor guided, and in fact some became disbelievers (JJ). To be “chosen” here means chosen for God’s religion or chosen to bring His messages to people; it could also mean that God singled them out for His Love (T).
That is the Guidance of God, with which He guides whomsoever He will among His servants. But were they to ascribe partners unto God, all that they were doing would have come to naught.

That is the Guidance of God refers to the guidance that came through the prophets mentioned in vv. 84–87. God guides whomsoever He will is also mentioned in 2:142, 213, 272; 10:25; 14:4; 16:93; 22:16; 24:46; 28:56; 35:8; 39:23; 42:52; 74:31. But if those who were thus guided by God were to ascribe partners unto God, and therefore commit the sin of shirk, all good deeds they did or had done would come to naught; that is, such people would forfeit any reward they might have attained for their deeds, since good deeds are spiritually meaningless when accompanied by shirk.

They are those to whom We have given the Book, judgment, and prophethood. So if they do not believe in them, We have entrusted them to a people who will not disbelieve in them.

They—that is, the prophets mentioned in vv. 84–86—are those to whom God gave the Book and judgment. Book is a reference to scripture, and judgment to either the prophet’s knowledge of scripture and its decrees or the prophet’s innate intellect, which grants him profound understanding of the Book (Ṭ). See also 21:74, 79; 26:21; 28:14, where God grants various prophets judgment, usually in conjunction with knowledge. Somewhat analogously, the prophets are also given the Book and Wisdom (2:129, 151, 231; 3:81, 164; 4:54, 113; 5:110; 62:2), the latter term referring to the prophet’s knowledge of the scriptures. So if these—that is, the Makkans—do not believe in the Quran and the prophethood of Muhammad, the benefit of the Quranic revelation and Muhammad’s prophethood will be entrusted . . . to a people who will not disbelieve. The latter has been interpreted as a reference to the Makkan Emigrants and Madinan Helpers (JJ), to the Madinan Helpers specifically (Ṭ, Ṭū), or to the prophets themselves (Ṭū). Cf. 5:54: O you who believe! Whosoever among you should renounce his religion, God will bring a people whom He loves and who love Him.
They are those whom God has guided, so follow their guidance. Say, “I ask not of you any reward for it. It is naught but a reminder for the worlds.”

The Prophet is instructed to say that he seeks no reward, monetary or other, for the message he brings; the same assertion is made by the Prophet in 38:86 as well as by Noah (11:29; 26:109); Hūd (11:51; 26:127); Šāliḥ (26:145); Lot (26:164), and Shuʿayb (26:180). See also 36:21, where true messengers are described as those who ask not of you any reward and who are guided. The reminder for the worlds (cf. 12:104; 38:87; 68:52; 81:27) is the Quran, a description or title indicating that the relevance of its message is universal, not limited to a particular people (R).

They did not measure God with His true measure when they said, “God has not sent down aught to any human being.” Say, “Who sent down the Book that Moses brought as a light and a guidance for mankind, which you make into parchments that you display, while hiding much? And you were taught that which you knew not, neither you nor your fathers.” Say, “Allāh,” then leave them to play at their vain discourse.

Several commentators assert that this verse was revealed when a group of Jews, or by some accounts a rabbi named Mālik ibn al-Sayf (JJ, W), came to debate with the Prophet and at one point claimed that God has not sent down aught to any human being. In saying this, they did not measure God with His true measure (cf. 22:74; 39:67), since by denying God’s Revelation to human beings, they did not adequately appreciate either His Majesty (Ṭ) or His Mercy toward them (Bḍ, Z). It seems more likely, however, that the verse reflects the Prophet’s ongoing discourse with the idolaters of Makkah, since that is a predominant theme of this sūrah, and since the Jews clearly did not reject the idea that God sends down revelation to human beings (Ṭ). The Prophet is instructed to respond to this claim by asking who, then, sent down the Book that Moses brought, that is, the Torah, which is described as a light and a guidance, two concepts closely
associated elsewhere with prophethood and revelation (cf. 7:157; 21:48; 42:52; 64:8).

*Which you make into parchments that you display* seems to indicate that the Prophet is here being commanded to address himself to the Jews, who recorded the Torah on parchment, but it can also be read with slightly different orthography to mean, “which they make into parchments they display” (JJ, Ṭ), suggesting that the Prophet is being commanded to speak about the Jews, not to them; some, including al-Ṭabarî, prefer this latter reading. Despite recording the Torah on parchments for *display*, the Jews are also said to be *hiding much of what is in the Torah*. Allusion to the claim that the Jews concealed parts of the Torah from others and from their own people is also made in 2:42, 140, 146; 3:71, 187; 5:15. Commentators often asserted that what they concealed were passages or interpretations of passages that describe the future coming of the Prophet Muhammad (Ṭ) as well as passages containing certain legal injunctions (see 5:15c).

The Prophet is instructed to say *Allāh* as a response to his own question regarding who sent down the Book that Moses brought; cf. vv. 12, 63–64, where the Prophet similarly responds to his own rhetorical questions about God in his discourse with the Makkan idolaters. Having mentioned the name *Allāh*, he is then instructed to *leave them to play at their vain discourse*. This instruction, often repeated and practiced by devout Muslims, appears also elsewhere in the Quran; see vv. 68–69 and commentary. *And you were taught that which you knew not* may be addressed to the Jews, meaning either that they learned through the Torah what they *knew not* (Aj) or that that they had been given knowledge through the Prophet in addition to what is in the Torah (Z). This sentence may also have been addressed to the believing Muslims (Ṭ). Some Sufi commentators consider *Say, “Allāh,” then leave them to play at their vain discourse* to be a general instruction to invoke the name *Allāh*, either inwardly or outwardly, in all situations and to abandon concern with all else, leaving everything in God’s Hands (Aj, Su).

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[92] And this is a blessed Book that We have sent down, confirming that which came before it, that thou mayest warn the Mother of Cities and those around her. Those who believe in the Hereafter believe in it, and they are mindful of their prayers.

92 *This . . . blessed Book* is the Quran, which contains much benefit for humanity (R, Z). That the Quran confirms *that which came before it* is a central
Quranic theme and is fundamental to the Islamic understanding of the Quran (and also of the Gospel) in relation to previous scriptures (see 2:41, 89, 91, 97, 101; 3:3, 50, 81; 4:47; 5:46, 48; 10:37; 12:111; 35:31; 46:12, 30; 61:6). Mother of Cities is a reference to Makkah. It was given this title because the Ka‘bah, established at its center, is said to have been the first house of worship set up for mankind (see 3:96; Bd, R, Z); or because, as some claim, it was the first city built by human beings; or because it represents the direction in which the people of the surrounding Arabian towns turned in prayer and to which they made pilgrimage (Bd, R, Z). Thus human beings gather there, just as children gather around their mother (R). Some traditions claim that Makkah earned the title Mother of Cities because the whole earth was unfolded from beneath the Ka‘bah (Bd, R)—an image perhaps meant to evoke, metaphorically, the Ka‘bah’s spiritual primordiality and centrality. And those around her may refer to the whole Arabian Peninsula or to the whole world (R). The verse asserts that those who believe in the Hereafter—that is, in the Day of Resurrection and Judgment—believe in it—that is, the Quran—indicating that belief in the reality and consequences of the Hereafter is essential to religion and faith (Z). Such people are also mindful of their prayers, since prayer is the pillar of the religious life (Z) and inextricably intertwined with faith. In a ḥadīth, the Prophet says, “Whosoever leaves off prayer intentionally has disbelieved” (R), although this ḥadīth likely refers to those who not only neglect to pray, but consider it to be unnecessary.

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93 Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God, or says, “It has been revealed unto me,” though naught has been revealed unto him, and one who says, “I will send down the like of what God has sent down”? If thou couldst see when the wrongdoers are in the throes of death, and the angels stretch forth their hands, “Yield up your souls! This day shall you be recompensed with the punishment of humiliation for having spoken untruth against God, and for waxing arrogant against His signs.”

93 The rhetorical question Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God (cf. 6:21, 144; 7:37; 10:17; 11:18; 29:68; 61:7) invokes a
common Quranic criticism of disbelievers. “Fabricating a lie” against God is associated with the idea of creating false idols, inventing false religious beliefs, making false religious assertions (see 6:21c), and, as here, falsely claiming that one’s own ideas represent Divine Revelation (see 3:93–94; 5:103; 6:138–40, 144–45; 16:116). In several places Muhammad and other prophets are also accused by their disbelieving people of having “fabricated” their messages (10:38; 11:13, 35; 21:5; 25:4; 28:36; 32:3; 34:8, 43; 42:24; 46:8). Some commentators say that this verse was revealed regarding one or both of the false Arab prophets Musaylimah (JJ, IK, Ṭ, W, Z) and al-Aswad al-ʿAnsī (Z), who were contemporary with the Prophet Muhammad.

Other reports connect this verse with a certain follower of the Prophet named ʿAbd Allāh ibn Abī Sarḥ, who was asked by the Prophet to record some parts of the Quranic revelation, but who eventually came to think that he himself was capable of receiving the revelation received by Muhammad. He later renounced Islam, only rejoining the community after the conquest of Makkah (W, Z). The verse is nonetheless general and criticizes all those who would claim to be able to compose poetry or prose that was the like of the Quran (cf. 8:31; JJ, Ṭ). That the angels stretch forth their hands toward those in the throes of death (cf. 8:50, where the angels are described as striking their faces and their backs) and demand that they yield up their souls is consistent with other verses indicating the angels’ role in transitioning people from life to death (see 6:61–62c). Waxing arrogant is an attitude associated with Satan (2:34; 7:13; 38:74–75) and the disbelievers (14:21; 16:22; 25:21; 28:39; 35:43; 37:35; 40:60; 46:20; 71:7; 74:23), and in several places, as here, waxing arrogant specifically describes the disbelievers’ attitude toward God’s signs as brought by the prophets (7:40, 133; 10:75; 23:45–46, 66–67; 39:59; 45:31).

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94 And [God will say], “Now you have come unto Us alone, just as We created you the first time, and you have left behind that which We had bestowed upon you. We see not with you your intercessors—those whom you claimed were partners [unto God]. Now the bond between you has been severed, and that which you once claimed has forsaken you.”

94 After their souls are taken, God will address them, Now you have come
unto Us alone, for although the Day of Resurrection is a day of universal judgment, every person will feel utterly alone (cf. 19:95; 22:2; 80:32–37), just as they were created . . . the first time, that is, alone (see 74:11c) and naked (JJ). They are also alone in the sense that they will be brought to judgment without the benefit of their worldly means, wealth, associates, and children (Z), which they strove to acquire and which gave them status and protection in worldly life (R), for they will have left behind the goods and provision that God had bestowed upon them in this world. Al-Rāzī explains that, although worldly goods are left behind and that the connection between these goods and the one who strove to acquire them is severed, the effort one has made to acquire knowledge of God and virtue and the good deeds done in this life are, by contrast, “sent forth” to be met again in the Hereafter, for whatever good you send forth for your souls, you will find it with God better and greater in reward (73:20). Your intercessors here refers to the false idols or deities they had ascribed as partners unto God and to whom they attributed the power of intercession with God (cf. 10:18); on intercession, see 2:48c; 2:255c. The Quran mentions in several verses that false idols, deities, and authorities, including Satan, will disown and “forsake” those who followed or venerated them in earthly life (see 6:24; 7:37; 14:22; 16:86–87; 25:28–29; 40:73–74).

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95 Truly God is the Cleaver of the grain and the fruit stone. He brings forth the living from the dead, and He is the One Who brings forth the dead from the living. That is God—how, then, are you perverted—

95 That God is the Cleaver of the grain and the fruit stone is connected to His bringing forth the living from the dead in that splitting open the grain and fruit stone causes life to come forth from what is (or seems to be) dead (Ț). The connection between “cleaving” or “splitting” and creating is also made semantically in the Divine Name al-Fāṭir, “the Originator,” which is derived from the root meaning “to split” (for the mention of this Divine Name, which is also the title of Sūrah 35, see 6:14; 12:101; 14:10; 35:1; 39:46; 42:11, where it always occurs in the context of the phrase Originator of the heavens and the earth). He brings forth the living from the dead both when He creates human beings the first time and when He brings them forth through resurrection after death. He brings forth the dead from the living when He causes death, or the end of their earthly existence; see also 3:27; 10:31; 30:19. In this context it is important to recall the two Divine Names Muḥyī (Giver of Life; 30:50; 41:39) and Mumīṭ (Bringer of
Death). The living coming forth from the dead and the dead from the living can refer not only to the individual human being, who is given life and then dies, but also to the complementary movements of creation and resurrection, referred to in Islamic discourse as *mabdaʾ* (origin) and *maʿād* (return), by which human souls, and indeed all beings, are transported between this world and the next (see 10:4c). An analogous cycle of death and life is also seen in various ways in the created order, for example, when the apparently “dead” seed comes forth from the living plant and the living plant from the “dead” seed (R, T).

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96 Cleaver of the dawn. He has made the night for repose, and the sun and the moon for reckoning. Such is the decree of the Mighty, the Knowing.

97 He it is Who has made for you the stars, that you might be guided by them amid the darkness of land and sea. We have expounded the signs for a people who know.

96–97 The themes of “cleaving” and duality presented in v. 95 continue in these two verses. That God is the Cleaver of the dawn alludes to the manner in which the first light of dawn seems to cleave or split the darkness of night (Bḍ, R, T). That God created night for repose is invoked in several places as a mercy God has bestowed upon human beings (cf. 10:67; 25:47; 27:86; 28:73; 40:61; 78:9), as is His having created the sun and moon to be useful for reckoning time (2:189c; 10:5; 17:12) and determining the direction of the qiblah (R). After invoking the sun and the moon as means of temporal reckoning, v. 97 mentions the stars as a means of spatial orientation by which people can be guided (see also 16:16) in the absence of the sun and the moon (R), that is, amid the darkness of land and sea, referring to either the physical darkness of the night or, symbolically, the moral and intellectual darkness of error and misguidance (T). If the darkness of land and sea refers to the darkness of moral and intellectual confusion or error, the sun, moon, and stars can represent different levels of moral guidance and spiritual illumination (see 6:76–78c). The Quran frequently invokes the sun, moon, and stars together: for example, in Abraham’s argument in vv. 76–78 and in Joseph’s dream about his father and brothers (12:4). These three kinds of celestial bodies are also described as made subservient by His Command (7:54; 16:12) and as prostrating to Him (22:18); see also 55:5–6.
God expounded the signs (cf. 6:55, 97–98, 126; 7:32, 174; 9:11; 10:5, 24; 13:2; 30:28; 41:3; 41:44); that is, He explained them in detail, for a people who know, meaning those possessing intellect, who think and reflect correctly and who reason from sensory realities to intellectual ones and from the seen to the unseen (R, Ṭs); cf. v. 98, where the signs are expounded for a people who understand.

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And He it is Who brought you into being from a single soul, and then [has given you] a dwelling place and a repository. We have expounded the signs for a people who understand.

98 For the idea that God brings humanity into being from a single soul, see 4:1c.

Different meanings have been given for dwelling place (mustaqarr) and repository (mustawda‘), which are also juxtaposed in 11:6: There is no creature that crawls upon the earth, but that its provision lies with God. And He knows its dwelling place and its repository. In keeping with the overall theme of life and death, creation and resurrection in this part of the sūrah, some consider dwelling place to refer to the womb and repository to the grave (T, Z); the womb and the grave each represent a physical space in which the soul transitions from one world to the next—the first being the locus for the descent of the soul from the spiritual to the earthly realm, and the second being the site from which it is resurrected. The most common interpretation, however, is that repository refers to the loins of the male, and dwelling place to the female womb (IK, R, Ṭ, Z) or, much less commonly, the reverse (R). Still others, however, interpret dwelling place as one’s temporary dwelling on earth, and repository as one’s permanent place with God (Ṭ), or inversely, that repository is one’s temporary home on earth, which is always subject to change, and dwelling place is one’s place in the next world, because of the ultimate “permanence” of one’s state in the Hereafter (R). Taken together, the various interpretations evoke the journey of the soul between its transitory life in this world and its “permanent” abode in the next.

These are signs expounded . . . for a people who understand, that is, for a people willing to understand or endowed by God with the power of understanding (R). Here and elsewhere, references to God’s having expounded the signs can be understood as encouraging contemplation and reflection (Ṭs).

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And He it is Who sends down water from the sky. Thereby We bring forth the shoot of every plant, and from it We bring forth vegetation, from which We bring forth grain in closely packed rows; and from the date palm and from its sheaths, [We bring forth] clusters of dates hanging low, and gardens of grapes, olives, and pomegranates, like unto one another and yet not alike. Look upon their fruits, as they grow and ripen! Truly in that are signs for a people who believe.

God’s sending down water from the sky is repeatedly mentioned as a sign of Divine Power and Benevolence through which He revives the earth (16:65; 22:63; 29:63; 30:24; 43:11), provides drink for human beings (15:22), and gives them a means to “purify” themselves and remove the defilement of Satan (8:11). Here and in several other places, it is specifically cited as the means by which diverse crops and fruits come forth from the earth (see v. 141, whose language is very similar to the present verse, as well as 2:22; 14:32; 16:10–11; 20:53; 23:18–19; 31:10; 35:27; 39:21; 50:9–10; 78:14–16). The verse begins with a reference to God in the third person (He it is Who sends down water), but it continues with God speaking in the first-person plural (Thereby We bring forth the shoot of every plant). The juxtaposition of the more distant third person for God’s sending down water from above with the more direct and intimate first person for God’s bringing forth every plant simultaneously evokes God’s Transcendence relative to the earthly realm and His Immanence in all of its minute workings.

The verse encourages wonder that such diverse fruits and produce come forth after being watered with the same water (cf. 13:4; B’d; Z) and evokes God’s ability to bring forth diversity and multiplicity from singularity, as when He creates the multiplicity of human beings from a single soul (v. 98; for a fuller discussion, see 4:1c). The produce mentioned here: grain (36:33; 50:9; 55:12; 78:15; 80:27), the date palm and dates (16:67; 36:34; 50:10; 55:11, 68; 80:29), grapes and their vines (16:67; 36:34; 80:28), olives (80:29), and pomegranates (55:68) are also found in other verses as examples of God’s bountiful provision in the world and, in some cases, in the heavenly Garden. For the idea that the fruits of the earth and of Paradise are symbolically analogous or comparable, see 2:25c. Clusters of dates hanging low suggests both bounty and ease, as the fruit hangs low when it is heavy and ripe, thus making it easily accessible (cf. 55:54). The produce is like unto one another and yet not alike, indicating the resemblance certain plants have to one
another, even when their produce is very different (Bḍ, JJ), and further evoking the theme of the interwoven nature of oneness and multiplicity in creation.

_Truly in that are signs_ of God’s Oneness, Power, and Wisdom (Bḍ), for a _people who believe_, a phrase implicitly linked to _a people who know_ in v. 97 and _a people who understand_ in v. 98. Those who believe are the real beneficiaries of these signs, for they alone are able to see in these signs the proofs of Divine Power and Oneness, whereas those who disbelieve have hearts that are “sealed” against such understanding (Ṭ; cf. 6:46c; 2:26, where the disbelievers are unable to grasp the meaning of God’s parables).

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They make the jinn partners unto God, though He created them, and falsely attribute sons and daughters to Him, without any knowledge. Glory be to Him! Exalted is He above that which they ascribe!

100 For an extended discussion of the jinn, see the introduction to _Sūrah_ 72. Jinn cannot be understood as partners to God, any more than celestial bodies can (see vv. 76–78), because they too are created. According to 55:15, God _created jinn from smokeless fire_, and in 7:12 and 38:76, Satan adduces his creation from fire as an argument for his superiority over human beings. People _make the jinn_—and by extension the angels and other subtle beings who are nonetheless created by God (R)—_partners unto God_ when they worship or venerate them, when they consider them to be biologically related to God (cf. 37:158; R), or when they follow the “whisperings” (114:4–6) of satans and obey them (cf. v. 121; Bḍ, R). Al-Rāzī considered this verse to be a criticism of the Zoroastrian belief in a God of goodness and light, who creates all good things, and a god of evil and darkness, who creates evil things, thus suggesting that the latter is a cocreator with God (R).

People also _attribute sons and daughters to Him_, which may refer to the Quranic criticism of Christians for having done so with regard to Christ (5:17, 72; 9:30; 19:35; see also 9:30, where certain Jews are said to have considered Ezra to be a son of God) as well as to the idolaters who considered some of the female deities they worshipped or certain angels to be God’s “daughters” (16:57; 37:149; 43:16; 52:39; 53:27); see 2:116c; 4:117–19c. That God is _Exalted . . . above that which they ascribe_ means that He is above having offspring (JJ).

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The Unique Originator of the heavens and the earth! How should He have a child when He has no consort, and He created all things, and He is Knower of all things?

That is God, your Lord, there is no god but He, Creator of all things. So worship Him. And He is Guardian over all things.

101–2 The Unique Originator translates Bādīʿ, which literally means what is unique, unprecedented, and without peer or equal. It can also mean one who brings something into existence for the first time, and this is the meaning reflected in the translation here and in 2:117. In v. 101, the impossibility of God having a child is argued on the basis that He has no consort (Ṣāḥibah), meaning no female partner through whom He could beget offspring (see 72:3). In the earthly realm, offspring result from the sexual union of a male and a female of the same species, but no such consort or partner could be ascribed to God, for He transcends all species (Z), and naught is like unto Him (42:12). Moreover, God creates by fiat, by saying “Be!” and it is (2:117; 3:47, 59; 6:73; 16:40; 19:35; 36:82; 40:68), not through a partner or by means of a process like biological conception and birth. Finally, siring offspring is a bodily process, requiring that “part” of the male body (namely, sperm) be separated from him and transferred to the body of the female; since God has no body and no “parts,” such a process cannot be ascribed to Him (R, Z).

In v. 102, God’s Oneness and His uniqueness as Creator is affirmed. The statement in v. 102 that God is Creator of all things is understood by Ashʿarites, who subscribed to a voluntarist perspective, as extending also to human acts, and this interpretation is the basis of their belief that God is the author of all human acts (R). Muʿtazilites, however, argued that the statement that God is Creator of all things is immediately followed by the command So worship Him, which suggests that human acts are not created by God, for it would be purposeless, from their perspective, for God to command human beings to perform an act that He Himself had already created (R).

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Sight comprehends Him not, but He comprehends all sight. And He is the Subtle, the Aware.
The word *comprehends* here translates *yudrikū*, which can also mean to overtake, reach, encompass, or perceive. This verse has much relevance for the theological debate over whether human beings can “see” God. Some Quranic verses indicate that it is impossible to “see God openly” and inappropriate to ask to do so (cf. 2:55; 7:143), and the present verse could be read to suggest the same. Some have argued that this verse clearly indicates that human beings cannot see God in any way, in this world or the next—a position championed by the Muʿtazilite school. The Muʿtazilite commentator al-Zamakhsharī understands this verse to mean that no human sight can attach itself to God and that He cannot be perceived in such a manner, since human sight attaches itself only to forms and bodies (*Z*). God has no body or form—and indeed, He transcends all forms—and thus transcends the possibility of being seen. This interpretation was challenged by the Ashʿarites, some of whom argued that God is not essentially and completely impervious to all perception, since He can see Himself (*He comprehends all sight*), and that although the statement *sight comprehends Him not* indicates that not all sights can perceive Him, it does not necessarily indicate that no sight can perceive Him (*R*).

Some have posited that God may endow the righteous believers with a “sixth sense” on the Day of Resurrection by which they will be able to see God (*R*), and Sufi commentators suggest that though human *sight* cannot comprehend God, God comprehends Himself. Thus it may be that human beings are able to see God through a kind of vision acquired from God Himself (*Aj, Bq*) or that God sees Himself through them. Some Shiite commentators, basing themselves upon traditions attributed to the fifth, sixth, and eighth Imams, asserted that *sight* here does not refer to physical vision at all, but rather to the imagination or the vision of the heart, which cannot, however, “comprehend” or encompass God in His totality (*Kā*); Sufis also speak of the “eye of the heart” as a faculty for seeing God.

The Ashʿarites and *Ḥadīth* scholars also argued that the righteous believers would see God in the Hereafter on the basis of 75:22–23, *Faces that day shall be radiant, gazing upon their Lord*, as well as a widely transmitted *ḥadīth* that says, “Verily you will see your Lord on the Day of Resurrection, as you see the moon when it is full, and as you see the sun when it is not obscured by clouds” (*Ṭ*). Moreover, 83:15 describes sinful disbelievers as being *veiled from their Lord*, suggesting to some that the righteous believers will not be veiled and will thus be able to see their Lord. Given such support for the possibility of seeing God in the Quran and *Ḥadīth*, some have argued that the present verse only precludes the possibility that human sight could fully “comprehend” or encompass Him (*R, Ṭ*). If *sight* is understood as a metonym for knowledge, then such an interpretation is supported by, for example, 20:110: *He knows that which is before them and that which is behind them, and they encompass Him not in knowledge*. On the basis of 75:22, others have suggested that seeing God was possible in the next life, but not
in earthly life (JJ), in contrast to the view of some Sufi authorities.

God is the Subtle, and thus cannot be perceived by physical vision, but Himself possesses the subtle and essential reality of “sight” and so “comprehends” all sights and realities, including the subtle ones not accessible to human vision (Z). The Subtle translates al-Laṭīf, which can also mean “gentle” or “kind,” and Islamic tradition has generally understood the Divine Name al-Laṭīf to encompass both meanings. In most Quranic contexts, however, it is translated “Subtle” (12:100; 22:63; 31:16; 33:34; 67:14) and is often paired, as here, with the Divine Name al-Khabīr, meaning the Aware, thus indicating a relationship between subtlety and knowledge that is also suggested by other elements of the present verse. For the one exception, see 42:19, where Laṭīf should be translated “kind”: God is kind unto His servants.

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Insight has come to you from your Lord. So whosoever sees clearly, it is to the benefit of his own soul. And whosoever is blind, it is to its detriment, and I am not a keeper over you.

104 Insight, literally “insights,” translates baṣāʾir (sing. baṣīrah), which is derived from the same root as sight in the previous verse. Some commentators say that sight refers to the vision of the physical eye, but insight (baṣīrah) refers to the “eye of the heart” (Aj) or to the “light of the heart,” from which all vision derives (Z). Similarly, others gloss insight as “guidance” in the form of the vision of the heart that leads one toward the truth of religion (Ṭ). “Seeing clearly” is opposed to “blindness” in this verse, as it is elsewhere (6:50; 11:24; 13:16; 35:19; 40:58), and in all such cases it refers to spiritual, rather than physical “seeing” and “blindness” (cf. 22:46). Whosoever sees clearly—that is, understands the proofs and arguments for God’s Oneness and has faith in the truth of the message brought by the Prophet—it is to the benefit of his own soul, or literally, “it is for himself”—that is, he shall reap the reward for it (Ṭ); whosoever is blind to these matters, it is to its detriment, that is, “to the detriment of his soul” or literally, “against him.” It is understood to be the Prophet who says, I am not a keeper over you (see also 4:80; 11:86; 42:48), the implication being that God, not the Prophet, is their keeper (Aj, Ṭ).

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Thus do We vary the signs, lest they should say, “You have studied,” and that We might make it clear for a people who know.

For vary the signs, see 6:46c. Here this phrase refers to the various arguments and proofs for God’s Oneness presented up to this point in the sūrah (可能です). The idolaters apparently accused the Prophet of having simply studied with knowledgeable people among the People of the Book or of having merely read their scriptures. See 16:103: Indeed, We know that they say, “He has merely been taught by a human being.” The tongue of the one whom they falsely implicate is foreign, while this is [in] a clear, Arabic tongue. See also 6:25; 8:31; 16:24; 23:83; 25:5; 27:68; 46:17; 68:15; and 83:13, where the idolaters similarly dismiss the revelations received by the Prophet as merely fables of those of old, referring to the same idea.

Follow that which has been revealed unto thee from thy Lord—there is no god but He—and turn away from the idolaters.

Had God willed, they would not have ascribed partners unto God. We have not made thee a keeper over them, nor art thou their guardian.

V. 106 addresses the Prophet, indicating that after having given many proofs and arguments for God’s Oneness to this point in the sūrah, he should simply turn away from the idolaters if they do not accept the message, for had God willed, they would not have ascribed partners unto God. These verses reinforce the idea in v. 104 that the Prophet has no power over, and thus no responsibility for, those who reject the message he has been charged to deliver. Insight comes from your Lord (v. 104); thus the matter of accepting or rejecting the message brought by the Prophet is the moral responsibility of the individual receiving it, but is also ultimately a matter that lies in God’s Hands (cf. 6:66–67c). See also 6:148 and 16:35, where the idolaters themselves claim that their practice of ascribing partners to God was a matter of Divine Will, although this is understood to be an attempt to avoid their own responsibility for spiritual error and deflect punishment.
from themselves, and thus it is not accepted.

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Do not revile those whom they call upon apart from God, lest they should revile God out of enmity, without any knowledge. Thus have We made the deeds of every community seem fair unto them. Then unto their Lord shall be their return, and He will inform them of that which they used to do.

108 The Muslims in Makkah used to revile the gods worshipped by the idolaters—perhaps after the revelation of 21:98, in which the idols are described as fuel for Hell (Z)—and the idolaters would revile Allah in response. The leaders of the Quraysh went to the Prophet’s uncle, Abū Ṭālib, and asked him to arrange an agreement with Muhammad, according to which each side would cease reviling the God or gods of the other. The Prophet initially said that he would agree to such an arrangement only if they would testify that “there is no god but God.” The idolaters refused; this verse was then revealed, instructing the believers to refrain from reviling the Makkah gods (Ṭ, W). This was so that the Muslims would not become the “cause” of idolaters uttering sinful things against God in their ignorance (without any knowledge; R, Ṭ, Z). Although reviling idols may seem a proper religious act, this verse indicates that if doing so causes others to sin or to become more entrenched in their opposition to God and the messages brought by the prophets, then it does not serve the larger purpose of bringing people to religious rectitude; cf. 20:44, where Moses and Aaron are instructed to speak gently to Pharaoh in order to increase the likelihood that he would accept the message they brought. Al-Rāzī doubts that the Makkans were directly reviling Allah, since even the idolaters among them believed in His existence, and suggests that the verse refers to their invoking the idea of Fate (and consequently denying Divine causality) or to their reviling the Prophet, which was a way of indirectly reviling God (R).

The idea that people’s actions, even wrong actions, are made to seem fair unto them is repeated in over a dozen places in the Quran. In some cases it is unclear who or what makes their actions “seem fair” to them (6:122; 9:37; 13:33; 40:37; 47:14); in several places it is Satan (6:43; 8:48; 15:39; 16:63; 27:24; 29:38), while other verses, including the present one, suggest that it is God who does this, perhaps as a test (cf. 10:12; 27:4; 41:25). God may “make their actions seem fair”
by granting them prosperity or respite from punishment, which leads them to think that God has approved of their actions (cf. 3:178; 7:95; 23:55–56; 34:35–37), or by leading them to think that God had willed or commanded them to engage in corrupt religious practices (cf. 6:148; 7:28; 16:35), perhaps because their fathers had done so (2:170; 5:104; 7:70; 11:62). Upon their return to God after death, He will inform them of that which they used to do (see also 5:105; 6:60; 9:94, 105; 10:23; 29:8; 31:15; 39:7; 62:8); that is, all human beings will be confronted with their deeds on the Day of Resurrection.

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They swear by God with their most solemn oaths that were a sign to come unto them, they would surely believe in it. Say, “Signs are with God alone.” What will make you realize that, even if they were to come, they would still not believe?

109 The disbelievers and hypocrites elsewhere “swear solemn oaths” when they wish to deceive or make excuses, as in 35:42: And they swore by God their most solemn oaths that, were a warner to come unto them, they would be more rightly guided than any of the communities. And when a warner came unto them, it increased them in naught but aversion (cf. 5:53; 24:53). The idea that miraculous signs (or warnings) ultimately have no effect on entrenched disbelievers is mentioned or suggested in many Quranic verses; see 6:7c. The disbelievers claim to want “signs,” but the Prophet is instructed to respond, Signs are with God alone, since it was not for a messenger to bring a sign, save by God’s Leave (13:38; 40:78). Some reports connect the present verse to an incident in which the Makkani idolaters invoked the Quranic accounts of Moses’ and Jesus’ miracles, as told to them by the Prophet, and then asked the Prophet to perform a similarly impressive miracle by turning Mt. Ṣafā (a sacred hill near the Ka‘bah and the site of one of the ḥajj rituals; see 2:158) into gold. The Prophet began supplicating for this miracle, but was then informed by the Archangel Gabriel that such extraordinary signs were often followed by terrible punishment if people refused to believe in them (as suggested in the following verse), and so the Prophet ceased his supplication (IK, Ṭ, W); see 5:114–15c; 8:23c.

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We shall cause their hearts and their sight to waver, as they did not believe in it the first time, and We shall leave them to wander confused in their rebellion.

110  We shall cause their hearts and their sight to waver; that is, to move from one thought or state to another. We shall cause . . . to waver translates nuqallibu, which means to turn something over repeatedly. The use of this term connects the present verse with two well-known aḥādīth. According to one, “The heart of the believer is between two fingers of the Compassionate; He turns it about (yuqallibuhu) as He wills.” In the other, the Prophet supplicates, “O Turner of hearts and sights (Muqallib al-qulūb wa’l-abṣār)! Make my heart firm in Thy religion” (R). Although the present verse concerns neither the “believer” nor the Prophet, but rather disbelievers, some argue that nonetheless both the aḥādīth and the verse suggest God’s complete power over human thought and action (R). Because the verse concerns the disbelievers specifically, however, it may also be related to the many places in the Quran where God is said to set a “seal” upon hearts, eyes, and/or ears, such that the disbelievers and wrongdoers cannot perceive or understand the religious warnings or truths that come to them (Z; see 2:7c; 6:46c). In support of this interpretation, the verse indicates that God “causes their hearts to waver” because they did not believe in it the first time, suggesting that there are some who have an intrinsic resistance to the message, a resistance that perhaps can never be overcome in this world. God allows the disbelievers to wander confused in their rebellion, despite the signs and warnings He brings them; that is, He neither interferes with their choice to reject religion and pursue their worldly desires, nor cuts short their earthly life to prevent their further wandering (R; see also 2:15; 7:186; 10:11; 23:75).

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Even if We were to send down angels unto them, and the dead were to speak to them, and We were to gather all things in front of them, they would still not believe, unless God wills. But most of them are ignorant.

111  A further response to the Makkans’ implied request for a miraculous sign (v. 109), this verse reinforces the repeated Quranic reminder that even the most tremendous of signs, such as sending down an angel (see vv. 8–9 and commentary), causing the dead to speak (cf. 13:31), or gathering all things in front of them,
would have no effect unless God wills. See 10:100: *It is not for a soul to believe, save by God's Leave*. To gather all things in front of them might also be translated “to gather all things in droves” (JJ,Ṭ).

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112 Thus have We made for every prophet an enemy—satans from among mankind and jinn, who inspire each other with flowery discourse in order to deceive. Had thy Lord willed, they would not have done so. So leave them and that which they fabricate,

112 *We have made for every prophet an enemy* (cf. 25:31) indicates that the opposition experienced by Muhammad and the other prophets was a general rule and had a Divine purpose (Bd). These enemies of the prophets are described as *satans*. Though Satan and satans (in the plural) are usually understood to refer to the Devil and his assistants and to the evil jinn, this verse indicates that human beings who seek to thwart religion and its messengers can also be called *satans*. The early *Hadith* scholar Mālik ibn Dīnār (d. second/eighth century) used to say that the satans among people were worse than the satans among the jinn, for the satans who were jinn were driven away when he called out a formula seeking refuge in God from them, but the human satans persisted (Th). These “satans,” here either humans or jinn, *inspire each other with flowery discourse*; that is, they whisper to each other beautiful but vain words (Ṭ), seeking to lead one another farther astray. For the moral danger of “vain discourse” see 6:68c; and for the whispering of jinn and human beings, see 7:20; 20:120; 114:1–6, and also 50:16, where people are subject to the whisperings of their own soul.

Just as God created these *satans*, He also allows them to deceive one another as well as others, for *had thy Lord willed, they would not have done so*. The Prophet is thus instructed to *leave them*, rather than aggressively confront them, *and that which they fabricate*, that is, the false religious thinking to which they incline. Although “leaving” the disbelievers in this way may allow them to continue to “wander” in their moral error and confusion (v. 110; see also 2:15; 7:186; 10:11; 27:4), confronting them aggressively may serve only to harden their resistance to the Quranic message, as suggested in v. 108: *Do not revile those whom they call upon apart from God, lest they should revile God out of enmity.*

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so that the hearts of those who believe not in the Hereafter may incline toward it, and be content with it, and so commit that which they commit.

113 Those who believe not in the Hereafter may refer to disbelievers generally, since some commentators consider belief in the Hereafter to be one of the primary foundations of all religious belief (see 6:92c). The Prophet is told to leave such people (v. 112), so that their hearts may incline toward it, that is, so that they may continue to pursue their oppositional and deceitful course of action toward the Prophet and the Quranic message. That they are content with their wrongful behavior suggests the idea in v. 108 and elsewhere that the disbelievers come to see their deeds as fair, meaning right and good, and so are pleased with themselves. As a result, the disbelievers are left unimpeded by the Prophet (who has been told to “leave them” in v. 112) and by their own conscience (which views their actions as “fair”), and thus they continue to commit that which they commit.

For Ashʿarite commentators, such as al-Rāzī, this verse serves as an argument for their view that God exercises control over human beings’ inclinations toward either belief or disbelief (R). Muʿtazilites, by contrast, argue that verses such as the present one, which suggest that God inclines disbelievers toward disbelief, should be interpreted as referring to one of the means by which God punishes disbelievers and wrongdoers for their rejection of faith and their evil deeds; that is, disbelief and wrongdoing effectively serve as an impetus to entrench oneself in more of the same, while the lack of immediate, tangible punishment can serve to encourage the disbelievers and give them false assurances of their own rectitude or at least of their freedom from any negative consequences for their actions.

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114 [Say,] “Shall I seek a judge apart from God, when it is He Who has sent down unto you the Book, expounded?” Those unto whom We have given the Book know that it has been sent down from thy Lord in truth; so be not among the doubters.

Here, as elsewhere, the Quran connects proper judgment among human beings directly to the sending down of the Book (see also 2:213; 3:23; 4:105; 5:43–49). Most such connections between judgment and the Book, however, occur
in Madinan verses, where the context concerns the central need to rely upon the Quran as well as the scriptures of the People of the Book as the basis for judgment among human beings in worldly affairs. The present verse occurs in a Makkan context, however, and relates to the ongoing discussion in this sūrah of the Makkans’ lack of acceptance of the Prophet and the message he brought and their request for a “sign” or miracle by which they might be certain of the truth of his prophethood. Shall I seek a judge apart from God, when it is He Who has sent down unto you the Book can thus mean, “Should I seek a miraculous sign apart from God’s having sent down this Quran?” since the Quran itself, with its powerful and inimitable language and message (cf. 2:24; 10:38), is considered by Muslims to be the primary “evidentiary miracle” (muʿjizah) proving the truth of Muhammad’s prophethood (Bḍ, Z). The verse may also be meant to question why the Prophet or his people should need some other way to judge right from wrong, truth from falsehood, when God has sent down . . . the Book, in which the distinction between these matters is expounded, that is, explained in detail (Bḍ, R). For the description of the Book as expounded, see 6:55c.

Those unto whom We have given the Book refers to the People of the Book, Jews and Christians in particular, whose scriptures are considered to support the truth of Muhammad’s prophethood, either because they are believed to describe or name him specifically (cf. 7:157; 61:6) or because the Quranic message is in accord with the essential elements of the Jewish and Christian scriptures (Bḍ, Z). See also 10:94: So if thou art in doubt concerning that which We have sent down unto thee, ask those who recite the Book before thee. The truth has certainly come unto thee from thy Lord. So be thou not among the doubters. The warning so be not among the doubters (in the present verse as well as in 10:94) may be addressed to the Prophet (cf. 2:147; 3:60; 11:17), since the imperative is in the second-person singular (lā takunanna), but it may also be addressed to the Prophet’s community as a whole or in fact to all people (Bḍ, R).

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The Word of thy Lord is fulfilled in truth and justice. None alters His Words, and He is the Hearing, the Knowing.

115 The Word of thy Lord is fulfilled may mean that God completes His Revelation—namely, the Quran—as a whole (Ṭ); see 6:154, where the same is said of the Book given to Moses, as well as 9:32 and 61:8, where it is said that God completes His Light, which is commonly understood to mean His Guidance or Revelation. Many commentators interpret the Word of thy Lord here to refer
collectively to the commands, prohibitions, promises, threats, rewards, and punishments contained in the Quran, indicating that they will all be fulfilled (Q, R, Ṭ, Z); see 7:137 and 11:119 for contexts in which similar statements are understood in this way. The Quran is *fulfilled in truth*; that is, its accounts and promises are perfectly true, and it is *fulfilled in . . . justice*, in that its rulings and judgments represent perfect justice (Bḍ). For *none alters His Words*, see v. 34 as well as 10:15, 64; 18:27.

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116 Wert thou to obey most of those on earth, they would lead thee astray from the way of God; they follow naught but conjecture, and they do but surmise.

117 Surely thy Lord knows best those who stray from His way, and He knows best the rightly guided.

116–17 The Prophet is warned in several places not to obey the disbelievers, hypocrites, and wrongdoers (18:28; 25:52; 33:1, 48; 68:8, 10; 76:24; 96:19). Erroneous religious practices and beliefs, especially those of idolaters, are said here and elsewhere to be the result of “following conjecture” and “surmising” rather than certain knowledge (6:148; 10:66; 38:27; 45:24; 53:23). The illiterate among the People of the Book and those who think that Jesus was slain are also said to follow *conjecture* (2:78; 4:157). See 10:36 and 53:28, where *conjecture does not avail against the truth in the least*. The present verses directly precede a discussion of dietary law (in vv. 118–21), and some commentators have said that the warning to the Prophet about obeying others pertained to the idolaters’ invitation to him to eat food that had been consecrated to their false deities (Ṭ). The “conjecture” and “surmising” mentioned in v. 116 may also refer to the claim of some idolaters that it was acceptable to eat carrion, since “that which God has killed is worthier to be eaten than that which you have killed” (Sy, Z). Others understand the warning more generally to mean that *most of those on earth* follow their whims or blindly follow what their fathers have taught them, which leads them to *stray from His way* (v. 117), rather than following true guidance (R, Z).

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118 So eat of that over which the Name of God has been
invoked, if you are believers in His signs.

What ails you that you eat not that over which the Name of God has been invoked, when He has expounded for you that which He has forbidden you, unless you are compelled thereto? Indeed, many lead astray through their own caprices, without any knowledge. Surely thy Lord is He Who knows best the transgressors.

118–19 In these verses, a single dietary rule is put forth, namely, that one should eat only food over which the Name of God has been invoked, which some interpret as a condition for all kinds of food that one would eat (Q, T), but which in the case of meat would forbid the eating of carrion, since God’s Name would not have been invoked over it before it died (R; see 6:116–17c, where a debate over the eating of carrion is reported to be the reason for the revelation of the verses). The importance of invoking God’s Name over the animals one slaughters for meat is also mentioned in 5:2, where it is embedded in a more complex set of restrictions concerning meat. Both the invocation of God’s Name over the animals to be slaughtered and the ritual manner of slaughtering them make the meat halāl, or permissible for Muslims to eat. Dietary restrictions, including an explicit prohibition against eating carrion, are also mentioned in 2:172–73; 5:3–5; 16:114–15, where, as here, an exception is made for those who are compelled by necessity (ḍarūrah), as a result of hunger, and need to eat food normally considered unlawful. For a fuller discussion of dietary laws, see 5:3–5c.

Some commentators have suggested that the statement that God has expounded for you that which He has forbidden you refers to the more detailed dietary laws as found in 5:3–5 (T), although these detailed laws were revealed in Madinah, while the present verse was revealed earlier in Makkah (Q). Given that the fuller dietary laws were revealed only later in Madinah, al-Qurṭubī suggests the possibility that He has expounded for you that which He has forbidden should be understood to mean, “He will expound for you.” Those who lead astray through their own caprices may refer to those who tried to convince the Prophet and his followers that it was better to eat carrion (which was, in a sense, killed by God), than to eat what their own hands had slaughtered (Q). They lead astray by following their own caprices and without any knowledge, since their arguments are based upon conjecture and surmise (see v. 116).
Forsake sin, both outward and inward. Surely those who commit sin shall be recompensed for that which they used to do.

Sin, both outward and inward refers, respectively, to sin committed publicly and sin committed secretly or in private, or to sin committed with the limbs and sin committed in the heart (Bḍ, Su). Inward sin may also refer to the formulation of an intention to sin (Ti). Some commentators consider the outward and inward sin mentioned here to refer specifically to sexual indecencies committed openly or secretly; see 6:151 (Approach not indecencies, whether outward or inward) and 7:33 (Say, “My Lord has only forbidden indecencies—both outward and inward), where indecencies (fawāḥish) in both verses is understood to refer to sexual transgression. Some have thus interpreted outward sin in the present verse to refer to marrying women who are not permitted to be taken as wives (as described in 4:22–24) and inward sin as a reference to adultery and fornication; others have suggested that outward sin refers to open adultery or fornication, and inward sin to the taking of secret paramours (cf. 4:25; 5:5)—the latter of which was reportedly tolerated by Arabs in the pre-Islamic period (Q, Ti). The language of the verse is general, however, and gives no indication that it is meant to refer to specific kinds of sin (Q, Ti); moreover, if it were meant to refer to a particular kind of sin or transgression, it would more likely refer to the transgression of dietary laws, since the verse is situated among verses concerned with eating food over which the Name of God has been mentioned (Ti). Some Sufi commentary interprets outward sin as seeking after the goods of this world, and inward sin as seeking after the good things of Paradise, both of which distract one from concentration on God, the Real (Su).

And eat not of that over which the Name of God has not been invoked; truly it is iniquity. Indeed, the satans inspire their friends to dispute with you, and if you obey them, you are surely idolaters.

This verse, like vv. 118–19, can be understood generally to mean that believers should not eat any food (meat or otherwise) over which the Name of God has not been invoked, including both the meat of animals slaughtered in the name of false deities or according to pagan practices (see 2:173; 5:3; 16:114–15) and
carrion, since the animal would have been killed without God’s Name having been invoked over it (JJ, T). However, the meat of animals slaughtered by Muslims who simply neglect or forget to invoke God’s Name during the slaughtering is generally considered licit to consume. Among the founders of the Sunni schools of jurisprudence, Mālik and al-Shāfi‘ī considered it legitimate to consume such meat whether the omission of God’s Name was inadvertent or deliberate (JJ, Q, Z) while Abū Ḥanīfah and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) held that if the omission was deliberate, one should not eat the meat (Q, Z).

Despite its general application, this verse is likely a continuing response to the idolaters’ argument for the legitimacy of eating carrion, namely, that carrion is meat that has been ultimately “slaughtered by God,” even if it effectively comes about through human agency (Q, Ṭ; see 6:116–17c; 6:118–19). According to some accounts, the idolaters’ argument appeared persuasive to some of the Prophet’s Companions (W), and the present verse was thus revealed to make it clear that eating that over which the Name of God has not been invoked is iniquity, that is, a clear sin and an act of disobedience (Ṭ). That the satans, who may here be human beings or jinn (see 6:71–72c; 6:112), inspire their friends to dispute with you can be understood to mean, generally, that those who engage in such disingenuous debate concerning God’s Law encourage and incite one another in their disquisitions (Ṭ). Some reports claimed that the satans who inspire their friends to dispute with you referred to certain Persian Zoroastrians, allied with the Quraysh, who formulated the argument regarding carrion mentioned above and encouraged the idolaters to use it against the Prophet (Ṭ, W), or that the verse concerned a group of Jews who similarly argued with the Prophet on the issue of eating carrion (Q, Ṭ). Most commentators, however, subscribed to the more general interpretation of the verse mentioned above.

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122 Is he who was dead, and to whom We give life, making for him a light by which to walk among mankind, like unto one who is in darkness from which he does not emerge? Thus for the disbelievers, what they used to do was made to seem fair unto them.

122 Cf. 35:22; 39:22. See also 2:28c and 6:95c, where God’s bringing forth the living from the dead can be a reference to either original creation or resurrection after death. Here, however, God’s giving “life” to one who was dead is a metaphor for spiritual awakening, and it is followed by the mention of God’s
making for him a light by which to walk among mankind, that is, a source of religious guidance, or perhaps the Quran specifically (Ṭ). Light is a common Quranic symbol for spiritual guidance and revelation, usually in this life (cf. 5:15; 7:157; 14:1; 21:48; 39:22; 42:52; 64:8), although the Quran also describes the righteous believers in the Hereafter being guided by a light that radiates before them (57:12; 66:8). For the idea of light as a symbol for the means by which one might walk among mankind—that is, with guidance in the world—see 57:28: O you who believe! Reverence God and believe in His Messenger; He will give you a twofold portion of His Mercy, make a light for you by which you may walk, and forgive you; as well as several places where God or His messengers are said to bring people out of darkness into light (2:257; 5:16; 14:5; 33:43; 57:9; 65:11). For a fuller discussion of the meaning of light and darkness (lit. “darknesses”), see 6:1c; 24:35c. Al-Rāzī interprets the one to whom God “gives life” as a reference to a person whose soul God has prepared to receive the spiritual guidance of revelation, and the light by which to walk among mankind as revelation itself.

Although the verse is best understood as a metaphorical comparison between believers and disbelievers generally, it was reportedly revealed in relation to two of the leaders of the Quraysh: Abū Jahl, one of the Prophet’s most determined enemies who was killed at the Battle of Badr (2/624), and Ḥamzah, the Prophet’s uncle and strong supporter, who embraced Islam in Makkah, migrated to Madinah, and was killed at the Battle of Uhud (3/625). According to one report, after Abū Jahl insulted the Prophet, the powerful and respected Ḥamzah came to the defense of his nephew and openly embraced Islam. This verse was then revealed, indicating that Ḥamzah, who was dead, but was then given “life” and a light by which to walk among mankind, cannot be compared with Abū Jahl, who is in darkness from which he does not emerge (R, W). Other reports consider the one who is given a light by which to walk among mankind a reference to the Prophet himself (R); or to ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who had initially opposed the message brought by the Prophet, but converted in Makkah and became one of the Prophet’s strongest supporters and eventually the second Caliph (R, Ṭ, Ṭs); or to ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir, an early Companion who later become a close supporter of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib after the Prophet’s death, and who died fighting with ʿAlī at the Battle of Ṣiffin in 37/657 (R, Ṭ, Ṭs). That the actions of the disbelievers are made to seem fair unto them is found in several places in the Quran, including in vv. 43, 108, and 137 of this sūrah; see 6:108c for a fuller discussion.

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[123] And thus have We made great ones among the guilty in every town, that they may plot therein. But they only plot
against themselves, though they are unaware.

123 The great ones who are among the guilty in every town refers to those in a community who stand in strong opposition to the message of a prophet who has come to them (T); see 25:31: Thus did We make for every prophet an enemy from among the guilty. The present verse indicates that it is often the most powerful and authoritative members of a community who stand in stubborn resistance to a prophetic messenger (JJ, Q, R, Z), like Abū Jahl in the case of the Prophet; see 6:122c. See also as 43:23 as well as 7:60–127 and 10:75–88, where it is the notables in Pharaoh’s land and in other communities who most stridently oppose the message of the prophets sent to them. (Although not mentioned in the Quran, the same can be said of Jesus, who was opposed by some of the leaders of his time.) Their plot is only against themselves in that it is they who are ultimately ensnared by it. Cf. 2:9 and 3:69, where it is said that those who attempt to deceive or mislead others only deceive or mislead themselves, and correspondingly, 2:272, where it is mentioned that whatever one spends in charity is spent only for oneself. These and other similar verses contribute to a theme of moral reflexivity in the Quran, in which all one’s actions are done ultimately and in the deepest sense to or for oneself (see 4:111c); that is, the consequences of one’s actions, though often affecting others in this life, will devolve upon only oneself in the Hereafter.

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124 And when a sign comes unto them, they say, “We will not believe till we are given the like of that which was given to the messengers of God.” God knows best where to place His message. Humiliation before God and a severe punishment shall soon befall the guilty for that which they used to plot.

124 Cf. 17:90–93; 74:52. Throughout this surah, there is repeated mention of God’s signs, including the disbelievers’ disingenuous request for a sign (vv. 37, 109, 158) or an extraordinary event—such as the coming of an angel (vv. 8, 158) or the descent of a miraculous written book (6:7c)—as proof of Muhammad’s prophethood and the truth of the message he brings. This verse indicates that even when a sign does come, the disbelievers do not accept it (cf. vv. 4, 25, 111). Instead, they demand that they themselves be given a sign (JJ, Q, R), the like of that which was given to the messengers of God, meaning the prophets and messengers
Whomsoever God wishes to guide, He expands his breast for submission. And whomsoever He wishes to lead astray, He makes his breast narrow and constricted, as if he were climbing to the sky. Thus does God heap defilement upon those who do not believe.

125 Whomsoever God wishes to guide and whomsoever He wishes to lead astray indicate that not all are guided to the truth, a point made in various ways in the Quran; see, for example, v. 35: Had God willed, He would have gathered them all to guidance; and 32:13: And had We willed, We would have given every soul its guidance. The Quran also indicates elsewhere that God or His signs and parables may mislead some (see, e.g., 2:26; 4:143; 6:39; 14:4; 74:31), sometimes particularly the disbelievers and wrongdoers (40:34, 74).

The breast, mentioned throughout the Quran, is understood to be the seat of inner thoughts and intentions as well as belief or disbelief and is associated with the heart, which lies at its center. The Quran frequently warns that God knows what lies within breasts (see, e.g., 5:7; 8:43; 11:5). That God may “expand one’s breast” for Islam, or submission to God, is mentioned elsewhere; see 39:22: Is one whose breast God has expanded for submission, such that he follows a light from his Lord [. . .]? God’s expanding a breast for Islam may be understood as a
metaphor for God’s making the soul receptive to religious truth and removing any aspects of the soul that might impede acceptance of this truth (Bḍ). The Prophet describes the expansion of the breast in a ḥadīth as “a light that God, Glory be to Him, casts into the heart of the believer, so that it is expanded and made spacious for Him.” Such persons, the Prophet further noted, could be known by their “constant turning toward the abode of eternity,” their “shunning the abode of delusion,” and their “preparation for death before it comes.” (Bḍ, IK, Ṭ, Ṭs). The expansion of the breast is also associated with the prophets; see 94:1, which addresses Muhammad: Did We not expand for thee thy breast? (often thought to refer to the opening of the Prophet’s breast and the cleansing of his heart prior to his receiving the Quranic revelation; see 94:1c); and 20:25, in which Moses prays, “My Lord! Expand for me my breast!”

In the present verse, as well as in 94:1, the expansion of the breast can be understood as a metaphor for Divine Kindness and Favor (luṭf) and perhaps also as a reward for prior willingness to be guided toward belief (R, Ṭ, Ṭs). The expansion of the breast, however, can also be said to relate to what is referred to in Islamic metaphysical discourse as the subtle or psychic body, which transcends the physical body, but is also related to it and affects it, even in a physical way. For example, when people are in a joyful mood, they might be said to be in an “expansive state,” which describes their inner psychological state, but also captures something of the outward physiological effects of joy upon their facial expressions and demeanor.

By contrast, people’s breasts may be made narrow or constricted (ḥarajan), an image used in the Quran as a metaphorical expression for anxiety, including the prophets’ concern about the reception of the message they bring (cf. 11:12; 15:97; 26:13). Here, however, it is used to indicate the inability of some to accept the Quranic message. Ḥaraj also denotes a dense cluster of trees whose branches are thickly interwoven (Ṭ), thus evoking the image of a dense woodland whose choking vegetation is such that light cannot penetrate it. The image of climbing to the sky is used to convey the sense of a feat that is utterly impossible, indicating that if God wishes to lead someone astray, religious belief is similarly impossible (Bḍ, Ṭ). Some understand this “narrowing” and “constricting” of the breast as a reference to doubt, despair, or even sin (Ṭ). The fifth Shiite Imam Muhammad al-Bāqir is reported to have said that for those who have not attained to truth, it is as if their heart is removed from its place and has risen into the throat, and when they attain to truth, it settles again in its place; he then quoted this verse (Ṭs).

Thus does God heap defilement upon those who do not believe could refer to God’s punishing the disbelievers in various ways including, perhaps, by permitting Satan authority over them (JJ, Q; cf. 15:42; 16:99, where Satan has no authority over God’s believing servants). The thus at the beginning of this line may also indicate that God narrows the breasts of those whom He wishes to lead astray as a
punishment for their prior rejection of belief. In this way, their initial disbelief results in a Divine punishment that only further entrenches them in disbelief and makes the possibility of their later coming to belief more remote (R, Ts). One commentator notes that there is no punishment more severe than being oblivious to truth (Qu).

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This is the path of thy Lord, made straight. We have expounded the signs for a people who take heed.

For the fundamental Quranic concept of the straight path, see 1:6c. For God’s having expounded the signs, see v. 55 and commentary as well as 6:97–98; 7:32, 174; 9:11; 10:5, 24; 13:2; 30:28; 41:3, 44.

Theirs shall be the Abode of Peace with their Lord, and He shall be their Protector, because of that which they used to do.

The Abode of Peace (dār al-salām) has been understood in several ways in the Islamic tradition, although in this context it is most commonly considered to be a reference to the paradisal Garden, which God has prepared for His friends (awliyā’) in the Hereafter as a reward for the difficulties they faced and to which they responded in this life (T) and the good actions they performed. The Abode of the Hereafter (found, e.g., in 2:94; 6:32; 7:169; 12:109; 16:30) is used in a similar manner to mean the Garden; see also 13:22–24, where the reward of the Abode is identified as Gardens of Eden. Since salām (“peace”) is also one of the Divine Names, the Abode of Peace has also been understood to mean the Abode of God (Aj, R, Ṭ, Z), although salām may simply be a description of the Abode as one characterized by peace (R) or by the greeting “Peace” (Aj; see, e.g., 10:10). The Abode of Peace is also mentioned in 10:25: And God calls unto the Abode of Peace, and guides whomsoever He will unto a straight path. Some have interpreted the Abode of Peace as also referring to the rare state of spiritual peace that some souls may enter even before death (Aj). In connection with this interpretation, Ibn ʿAjībah comments that there are two Gardens, the Garden of Gnosis (true knowledge of God; maʿārif) and the Garden of Ornaments (zakhārif) —that is, of sensual pleasures—and that whoever enters the Garden of Gnosis has no longing for the Garden of Ornaments, for in the Garden of Gnosis nearness to God makes one independent of all else (Aj).

The term Dār al-salām (“Abode of Peace”) has had much resonance in Islam and is sometimes considered synonymous with Dar al-islām (“Abode of Islam”), designating the geographical territory in which Muslims are in the majority. It has also been adopted as the name of certain Islamic cities; for example, Dar es Salam is the name of Tanzania’s largest and most important city.
On the Day when He shall gather them all together [He shall say], “O company of jinn! Many among mankind have you claimed.” And their friends among mankind will say, “Our Lord! We have profited from each other, but now we have reached our term which Thou hadst appointed for us.” He will say, “The Fire is your abode, to abide therein, except as God wills. Truly thy Lord is Wise, Knowing.”

Thus do We make the wrongdoers allies of one another because of that which they used to earn.

128–29 Addressed to the jinn directly, many among mankind have you claimed refers to the many people the jinn led astray through flowery discourse (v. 112; Ṭ) or “whispering” (114:4–6). It is important to note that claimed here is not meant to suggest that the jinn “possessed” these human beings in the sense of controlling their will, but rather that the jinn merely called or tempted them toward wrongdoing, and that many responded (R). See 14:22, where Satan says to those who followed him, I had no authority over you, save that I called you, and you responded to me. The term . . . appointed for us here, as elsewhere, may refer to the onset of the Day of Judgment (R) or simply to the end of their earthly lives (R, Ṭ). The jinn and the human beings they claimed profited from each other: human beings profited from the false assurances they received by calling upon the jinn for protection against harm (see 72:6), and the jinn profited from this arrangement insofar as it attributed to them a greatness, power, and authority they did not actually possess (R, Ṭ). The verse concludes with the judgment that the Fire is to be their abode (here mathwā, instead of dār, as in v. 127). In v. 129, We make the wrongdoers allies of one another may mean that God makes human wrongdoers supporters of each other in this life, that He will make them follow one another into Hellfire, or that some wrongdoers are given authority over others (Ṭ)—all meanings within the semantic range of the verb nuwallī.

“O company of jinn and human beings! Did not
messengers come unto you from among yourselves, recounting unto you My signs, and warning you of the meeting with this your Day?” They will say, “We bear witness against ourselves.” The life of this world deluded them, and they bear witness against themselves that they were disbelievers.

130 The jinn, as a group, are mentioned in various places in the Quran, but only in Makkan sūrah (although Satan, who is identified as a jinn in 18:50, is mentioned in Madinan sūrah as well). In the Islamic tradition and in the Quran the jinn, like human beings, have the duty to worship God (51:56) and are mentioned here and elsewhere as addressees and recipients of Divine Revelation and Guidance (46:29–32; 55:33; 72:1–5). Like human beings, they also undergo judgment (37:158; 41:25; 46:18; 55:39) and may be punished in Hellfire (7:38, 179; 11:119; 32:13). In 27:17 and 34:12 they are said to have served the prophet Solomon. The present verse, however, seems to indicate that jinn have also been sent their own messengers who were jinn like themselves, since the question Did not messengers come to you from among yourselves is addressed to both jinn and human beings. Some commentators accept that there are messengers among the jinn, following a literal interpretation of this verse (R, Ṭ, Z), while others assert that messengers are found only among human beings, sometimes citing 57:26, which indicates that prophethood and revelation were established among the progeny of Noah and Abraham (IK). Some suggest that the jinn may also serve as “warners” among their kind (Ṭ, Th) or as “messengers of the human messengers” (R, Ṭ, Z). When faced with judgment, the jinn and their supporters bear witness against themselves that they were disbelievers; see 7:37, where human beings do the same.

131 That is because thy Lord would never destroy towns for their wrongdoing while their people were heedless.

131 Following the mention of God having sent messengers to human beings and to the jinn in v. 130, the present verse states that God sends such messengers because He would never destroy a town (or a people) for their wrongdoing while they were heedless, that is, before they were made fully aware of their wrongdoing and its destructive consequences (Bd, JJ, Ṭ, Z). The verse can also be read to mean, “Thy Lord would never destroy towns unjustly,” indicating that God would
consider it unjust or “wrong” to destroy people for their religious and moral errors before they had been sufficiently warned through the sending of prophets and messengers to them (T); and as the Quran repeats in many places, God does not wrong people, but they wrong themselves (see, e.g., 3:117; 10:44; 29:40; 30:10). Most commentators, however, prefer the first reading.

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Unto each are degrees in accordance with that which they have done, and thy Lord is not heedless of that which they do.

132 Here, and in several other places, the Quran speaks of people being distinguished by different degrees in accordance with that which they have done or, more generally, according to their religious belief and moral and intellectual qualities (cf. 3:163; 4:95; 8:4; 20:75; 46:19; 58:11). In other verses, it is said that God raises some people in degrees above others without tying this distinction explicitly to their actions; see v. 83 regarding Abraham, and v. 165 and commentary, where God raises some people by degrees above others as a way of trying them. Although in v. 130 people may be heedless of their wrongdoing, or at least of its consequences, the present verse reiterates the idea, found throughout the Quran in various ways, that God is never heedless or unaware of people’s actions.

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Thy Lord is Self-Sufficient, Possessed of Mercy. If He will, He can remove you, and in your place appoint whomsoever He will to succeed you, just as He brought you into being from the progeny of another people.

133 The Divine Name Self-Sufficient translates Ghanī, which means, literally, free from need or “rich” in the sense of being completely independent of everyone and everything. For other instances of this Divine Name, see 2:263, 267; 4:131; 10:68; 14:8; 22:64; 27:40; 31:12, 26; 35:15; 57:24; 60:6; 64:6; also 47:38, where the Name is translated the Rich in order to contrast with the description of human beings as the poor. The reference to God as Self-Sufficient or Rich relates not to material wealth or a lack of material need, but to God’s ontological fullness and independence of any other reality as contrasted with human existential poverty.
and total dependence upon God. In Islamic philosophical terms, as first expressed fully by Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, d. 428/1037), God is the “Necessary Being” (wājib al-wujūd), and in relation to Him all else represents “contingent being” (mumkin al-wujūd; R) and therefore has no existence of its own. In this sense, all being and reality can be said to belong ultimately to God, as the Quran repeatedly asserts, unto Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and on the earth (e.g., 2:116, 255; 4:171).

In the present verse, human existential dependence on God and God’s independence of human beings are conveyed in the reminder that if God wills, He can remove you, that is, from earthly life or existence altogether and appoint others to succeed you. See 11:57, where the Arabian prophet Hūd warns his people that if they do not heed the message he brings, God will cause them to be succeeded by a people other than themselves; and 4:133, where it is said that if God wills, He can remove you altogether . . . and bring others [in your stead]. See also 10:13–14, which refers to generations destroyed on account of their wrongdoing and to those who are vicegerents (which can also mean “successors”) after them.

Following vv. 130–31, where it is said that God sends messengers to warn people and jinn and destroys no town without such a warning, the present verse indicates that such messages of warning are only for the benefit of their recipients. God has no need for human beings to accept His messages and warnings (Bḍ); their failure to do so neither harms nor diminishes Him in any way—indeed, as the verse asserts, He can simply destroy them and bring forth others. By failing to accept God’s message, people harm only themselves; thus God’s warnings to them can be understood as a means of God’s Mercy toward them. It is said that God is Possessed of Mercy in the most universal and perfect sense (R), since He endows all creatures with existence without need of any of them. That God is Possessed of Mercy in conjunction with His being Self-Sufficient can be understood to indicate that He possesses all mercy and that no one can be merciful save through His Mercy, since all are dependent upon Him for all of their existential qualities, while He depends upon none (R).

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134 Indeed, that which you are promised shall come to pass, and you cannot thwart [it].

134 That God’s Promise will surely come to pass and that it cannot be “thwarted” by human effort are repeated in various ways throughout the Quran; cf. 10:51–53; 11:32–33; 16:46; 19:61; 39:51; 21:38–40; 34:29–30. Similarly, that God’s Promise is true is mentioned repeatedly; see 4:122; 10:4, 55; 18:21, 98;
Say, “O my people! Work in accordance with your ability; I, too, am working. Soon you shall know whose end is the Abode. Surely the wrongdoers will not prosper.”

In the face of the continued Makkan opposition, alluded to throughout this surah, the Prophet is instructed to tell the disbelievers, Work in accordance with your ability; that is, continue with what you have been doing, including your opposition to the Quranic message, to the best of your ability, implying the futility of such actions. This statement is therefore not meant as a license, but as a warning and a threat (Ṭ), for the Prophet is also working to fulfill the Divine Command and the mission that he has been given. Similarly the Prophet is elsewhere instructed to tell the disbelievers to wait, as he too is waiting (9:52; 10:20, 102). In the end, it will be seen which of the two has his end in the Abode, that is, in the permanent Abode of the Hereafter. Elsewhere, the Quran states that the end belongs to the reverent (7:128; 11:49; 13:35; 28:83).

And they dedicate to God a share of the crops and cattle He created, saying, “This belongs to God”—or so they claim—“and this belongs to our partners.” But that which is for their partners does not reach God, and that which is for God does reach their partners. Evil indeed is the judgment they make!

The Makkan idolaters reserved shares of the crop for God and for their partners, that is, for the false deities or idols that they took as partners unto God (IK, Ṭ); see 16:56: And they dedicate a share of that which We have provided them unto that which they know not. The phrase or so they claim indicates that this practice is something they invented and has no basis in a Divine command or revealed Law (Z). That which is for their partners does not reach God means that if some of the portion intended for their partners became mingled with the portion intended for God, the idolaters would restore it to the partners’ share. That which
is for God does reach their partners means that if some of the portion dedicated to God fell into that dedicated to their partners, they would leave it as it is (JJ, Ṭ), claiming that God is Self-Sufficient and has no need of it (JJ), but also betraying their greater loyalty to the partners (Ṭ).

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137 Likewise have their partners made the slaying of their children seem fair unto many of the idolaters, that they may ruin them and confound them in their religion. Had God willed, they would not have done so. So leave them and that which they fabricate.

These same partners have made the slaying of their children—that is, the idolaters’ slaying of their own children—seem fair to them, either because the idolaters considered their false deities to have commanded such practices (JJ) or because their partners are satans who inspire the idolaters, through their “whisperings,” to slay their children. They do this in order to ruin them, that is, to lead them to perdition and to obscure for them true religion—that is, the Abrahamic monotheistic tradition, established by Ishmael among the Arabs (Z)—and thus make them go astray (Ṭ). The pre-Islamic Arabs were reported to have practiced female infanticide in particular, often killing their infant daughters by burying them alive (see 81:8–9c), because of the perceived shame attached to having daughters in pre-Islamic Arabia (see 16:57–59). The Quran also warns against slaying one’s children for fear of poverty (6:151; 17:31) and states that those who do so are lost (v. 140). In 60:12, women seeking to join the Islamic community in Madinah are asked to take a pledge that, among other things, they will not slay their children. For the statement Had God willed, they would not have done so and the command to the Prophet to leave them, see 6:112c.

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138 And they say, “These cattle and crops are sacrosanct; none shall eat of them save whom we will”—or so they claim—and [there are] cattle whose backs are forbidden, and cattle over which they do not invoke the Name of God, fabricating against Him. Soon will He recompense them for
that which they used to fabricate.

138 This verse continues the discussion of arbitrary practices considered religiously necessary by the Makkan idolaters, here referencing their custom of considering certain livestock or crops to be sacrosanct. This may have meant that they were prohibited for slaughter or consumption in general, because the Makkans had dedicated them to God or to their false deities and idols, as mentioned in v. 136 (T), or that they were prohibited for women but allowed for men (see v. 139), for they claimed, none shall eat of them save whom we will (T). Alternately, the exception save whom we will was understood by some as a reference to the caretakers of the idols to whom the animals or crops were dedicated (Q). In the case of certain livestock, their backs are forbidden, meaning that they could not be ridden or used for bearing burdens (cf. 6:143–44; 16:115–16). Commentators connect these practices with the rituals of baḥīrah, sāʾibah, waṣīlah, and ḥām, which proscribed the consumption or use of certain livestock and which are mentioned by name in 5:103 (JJ, T); for detailed discussion of these four pre-Islamic practices, see 5:103c.

The Makkan idolaters are also chastised in the present verse for eating cattle over which they do not invoke the Name of God, which may refer to animals slaughtered in the names of their idols instead (Q) or simply to animals slaughtered without invoking the name of any deity. The importance of invoking the Name of God over animals one intends to slaughter for consumption is mentioned in vv. 118–21; see also 2:173; 5:3; 16:114–15. Here and in vv. 136–37, the invented, rather than revealed, nature of all these idolatrous practices is made explicit by the assertion that they are practices based merely on the idolaters’ claim, and by the reference to them as practices that they fabricate. Some consider these practices to have been inspired by the satans the idolaters had taken as partners unto God (T).

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139 And they say, “That which is in the bellies of these cattle is reserved for our males, and forbidden to our wives, but if it be stillborn, then all shall have a share therein.” Soon will He recompense them for that which they ascribe. Truly He is Wise, Knowing.

139 That which is in the bellies of these cattle may refer to the fetuses or offspring of female livestock that had been made sacrosanct (v. 138); the live
offspring of some of these animals—particularly as connected with the practices of baḥīrah and sāʾibah (see 5:103c)—were permissible exclusively for men, and only their stillborn offspring were permitted to both men and women for consumption (Bḍ, JJ). Wives (azwāj) here was widely interpreted by commentators to refer to women generally, although some reports claim that it refers to daughters (banāt; Q, Ṭ). Other reports understand that which is in the bellies of these cattle to refer to the milk produced by these animals, which would then be considered permissible for men, but prohibited to women (Q). See 16:66 and 23:21, where that which is in their bellies refers explicitly to the milk provided by livestock. In the present verse, however, that which is in the bellies more likely refers to the offspring of the animals the Makkan idolaters considered sacrosanct, given that an exception is made for those that are stillborn (maytat; lit. “dead”); although the phrase may refer to both milk and offspring (Ṭ), with the exception that stillborn applies only to the latter. That which they ascribe, like that which they used to fabricate in v. 138, refers to the arbitrary ritual prohibitions the Makkan idolaters invented for themselves, but ascribed to God (Ṭ) or to some form of revealed Law.

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140 Lost indeed are those who slay their children foolishly, without knowledge, and make forbidden that which God has provided them, fabricating against God. They indeed have gone astray, and were not rightly guided.

140 This verse comes as a response to the Makkan idolaters’ practice of “slaying their children,” mentioned in v. 137, and to the false prohibitions they establish regarding livestock in vv. 136, 138–39, indicating that those who engage in such practices are lost; that is, they lose their way in this world and face perdition in the Hereafter. The pre-Islamic Arabs, particularly the Arabs of the northern tribes of Rabīʿah and Muḥār, would slay their children, specifically their daughters, out of fear either that the daughters would be captured and thus become a source of dishonor and humiliation for their families or that the burden of supporting them would impoverish their families (Bḍ, Q, Ṭ). But the Quran states that they slay their children foolishly and without knowledge, for it is God who provides for them and their children (Bḍ); see v. 151: Slay not your children for fear of poverty—We will provide for you and for them. The Quranic prohibition against slaying one’s children also serves as a scriptural basis for the general prohibition of abortion in Islam, although some Islamic legal schools allow abortion within the first four months of pregnancy in exceptional cases where it is
necessary to save the life of the mother.

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He it is Who brings into being gardens, trellised and untrellised, and the date palm and crops with diverse produce, olives and pomegranates, like unto one another and yet not alike. Eat of their fruit when they grow, and pay the due thereof on the day of its harvest, but be not prodigal. Truly He loves not the prodigal.

141 This verse is very similar to v. 99, which also mentions God’s provision of date palms, olives, pomegranates, and other crops like unto one another and yet not alike (see 6:99c). In relation to vv. 136 and 140, which mention the pre-Islamic Arabs’ practice of slaying their children, often out of fear of being unable to provide for them, as well as in relation to vv. 138–39, which recount the Arabs’ arbitrary restrictions on the crops and livestock God has generously provided for their use and consumption, the present verse affirms it is God Who brings into being the diverse crops and fruits by which human beings find sustenance. They should therefore trust in God to provide for them and their families and avoid arbitrary prohibitions on themselves or others that would limit access to the bountiful or “bounty of” crops and livestock He has provided (Ţs).

The verse bids human beings to eat of the fruit of these plants and crops when they grow, but also to pay the due thereof on the day of its harvest. The latter phrase refers to the practice of giving a portion (perhaps as much as 10 percent) of the crop to the needy at the time of the harvest (JJ, Ĭ). Some consider this portion to be part of the mandatory alms (zakāh; Q, Ĭ), although others consider the command in the present verse, which was revealed in Makkah, to be distinct from the mandatory alms (zakāh) as established in Madinah (Bül, Q, Ĭ). Twelver Shiites, basing themselves on a report attributed to the fourth Imam, ĖAli Zayn al-Ĕbidīn, or the fifth Imam, Muhammad al-Bāqir, hold that this form of charity involves the giving of a few handfuls of grain or other crops as distinct from the specific portion later required as part of the alms (zakāh) (Ţs, Ţū). Some argue that the mandatory alms, or zakāh, on agricultural produce as established by the Prophet’s Sunnah—which was 10 percent for crops produced by dry farming and 5 percent for crops watered by irrigation (Q)—abrogated the less specific command in this verse (Q, Ĭ). The alms (zakāh) on produce pertains only to produce that can be stored for later use, such as grains and dried fruits, to the exclusion of perishable
crops.

The command be not prodigal may pertain to the portion of the harvest given in charity, indicating that one should not give so much away that one would not have enough to feed oneself and one’s dependents (Bdl, JJ); cf. 17:29. Alternately, be not prodigal may mean, here, to avoid being wasteful or excessive in a way that would prevent one from giving this charitable portion (T). He loves not the prodigal (see also 7:31), who are also said to be among the inhabitants of the Fire (40:43).

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And [He produces] the cattle, some for burden and some for slaughter. Eat of that which God has provided you, and follow not the footsteps of Satan. Truly he is a manifest enemy unto you.

142 Just as God brings forth diverse crops and fruits in v. 141, so too does He produce the cattle, some for burden—that is, to be ridden and to carry loads—which pertains particularly to large livestock such as camels and horses (T), and some for slaughter (farshan). Farsh derives from a root whose primary meaning is to “spread out.” As reflected in the present translation, it is interpreted by many to mean “for slaughter” insofar as the animal is laid or spread out for the act of slaughter (Bdl, Z). It may also refer, however, to the rugs and coverings (another related meaning of farsh) made from the skin of such animals, which are “spread out” for furnishings (Z); in fact some commentators considered farsh to refer particularly to sheep, whose skins were often used for this purpose (Q, T), although farsh can mean “carpet” in general. Alternately, it can mean “for riding,” since the rider is “spread out” astride the animal when riding (Is). The multivalence of this term points to the variety of ways in which livestock are of use to human beings. Their usefulness for riding and transporting goods, for providing warmth and clothing, for providing food and drink, and even their beauty are invoked in several passages as signs of God’s Beneficence toward humanity; see 16:5, 66, 79; 23:21–22; 36:72; 40:79.

The admonition to eat of that which God has provided you (cf. 16:114) combined with the subsequent warning to follow not the footsteps of Satan as he is a manifest enemy unto you is also found in 2:168. That Satan is the manifest enemy of human beings is established in the account of the creation of Adam and his temptation by Satan (2:36; 7:24; 20:117, 123) and is repeated as a warning in 2:208; 7:22; 12:5; 17:53; 28:15; 35:6; 36:60; 43:62.
Eight pairs: of sheep, two, and of goats, two. Say, “Is it the two males He has forbidden or the two females, or that which the wombs of the two females contain? Tell me with knowledge, if you are truthful.”

And of camels, two, and of oxen, two. Say, “Is it the two males He has forbidden or the two females, or that which the wombs of the two females contain? Or were you present when God enjoined this upon you?” Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God, that he may lead men astray without knowledge? Truly God guides not wrongdoing people.

143–44 Eight pairs is a continuation of the description of the cattle mentioned in the previous verse and refers to the male and female of each of the four classes of livestock, namely, the sheep and goats mentioned in v. 143 and the camels and oxen in v. 144 (JJ). Vv. 143–44 also deride additional prohibitions the idolaters would variously place upon eating the males or the females of these species or the contents of their wombs, mocking the arbitrary nature of these prohibitions by asking, Is it the two males He has forbidden or the two females, and challenging their knowledge and authority on the matter by asking in v. 144, Were you present when God enjoined this upon you? Since the Makkan idolaters did not accept Muhammad’s prophethood, or perhaps prophethood at all, as a means for knowing God’s commands, the verse questions how they could be certain about the correctness of these various prohibitions, unless they were personally present when God commanded these practices (R). The rhetorical question Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God is also found in 6:21, 93; 7:37; 10:17; 11:18; 18:15; 29:68; 61:7. That God guides not wrongdoing people is also stated in 2:258; 3:86; 5:51; 9:19, 109; 28:50; 46:10; 61:7; 62:5.

Say, “I do not find in that which is revealed unto me
anything forbidden to one who would eat thereof, save carrion or blood poured forth, or the flesh of swine—for that is surely defilement—or a sinful offering made to other than God. But whosoever is compelled by necessity, without willfully disobeying or transgressing, truly thy Lord is Forgiving, Merciful.”

145  The Prophet is instructed to respond to the Makkan idolaters’ various ritual prohibitions concerning the animals whose meat may be consumed by clearly stating that the revelation he received prohibits only carrion (which the idolaters reportedly argued was licit; see commentary on 6:116–21); blood poured forth, meaning the animal’s liquid blood—which had to be drained from the animal’s veins before its meat could be eaten—as distinct from its organs or other tissue; the flesh of swine; and any animal consecrated to what is other than God—that is, to a false deity or idol. An exception here, as in other verses, is made for one who is compelled by necessity to eat what is otherwise considered unlawful. These same prohibitions are mentioned in 2:173; 5:3; and 16:115; for a fuller discussion of this issue, see 2:172–73c; 5:3c. In addition to the prohibited sources of meat listed here, some commentators note that on the basis of Prophetic Sunnah all carnivorous beasts and birds of prey are also forbidden as sources of meat (JJ, Q).

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146  And unto those who are Jews, We forbade every animal with claws; and of oxen and sheep We forbade them the fat thereof, save that upon their backs or their entrails or that which is mingled with bone. Thus did We recompense them for their willful disobedience, and surely We are truthful.

146  After the criticisms of the arbitrary restrictions on eating meat observed by the Makkan idolaters (vv. 136, 138–39, 143–44) and the listing of the four prohibitions related to the consumption of meat revealed to the Prophet (v. 145), this verse mentions some additional dietary prohibitions imposed by God upon the Jews as a recompense . . . for their willful disobedience. That God forbade them every animal with claws (dhī ḟuṭur) suggests that they are forbidden all
carnivorous beasts (which also became part of Islamic dietary law on the basis of Prophetic Sunnah). They are further forbidden the fat of oxen and sheep, except for that upon their backs or intermingled with other tissue. Some legal scholars, including the founders of two of the four major schools of Sunni Law, Abū Ḥanīfah and al-Shāfiʿī, held that this prohibition on fat did not pertain to Muslims, citing a report that the Prophet did not forbid one of his followers from eating it during the siege of Khaybar (Q), during which he established other dietary prohibitions on eating beasts and birds of prey as well as donkeys.

The specific dietary prohibitions mentioned for the Jews in the present verse are largely consistent with the extensive dietary prohibitions found in Leviticus 3 and 11, as well as Deuteronomy 14, although they are not identical. For example, in Leviticus 11, the Israelites are forbidden “all that walk on their paws” (v. 27) and several different birds of prey, but also animals with undivided hooves, such as camels—although many Quranic commentators consider dhī ḏafūr (here translated with claws) to mean “with undivided toes” (JJ, Q, Ṭ). In Leviticus 3:9–10, the Israelites are instructed to remove the fat from the backbone and the entrails to be burned as a sacrifice. The Quran here suggests that such dietary prohibitions, which are more complex and restrictive than what is found in Islamic dietary law, were a recompense for their willful disobedience, which some gloss as their mistreatment of the needy among themselves (Ṭb) or simply their “wrongdoing” (Z). Cf. 3:93: All food was lawful unto the Children of Israel, save what Israel had forbidden for himself, before the Torah was sent down, indicates that there were no Divinely imposed dietary prohibitions on the Israelites prior to the revelation of the Torah.

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147 But if they deny thee, say, “Your Lord is Possessed of vast Mercy, but His Might will not be averted from the guilty people.”

147 But if they, the Jews, deny thee by arguing that God’s Mercy is so vast that He will not punish them for their disobedience (Ṭ, Z), the Prophet is instructed to respond by affirming that the Lord’s Mercy is indeed vast. This is so for the righteous believers, but also for the disbelievers and wrongdoers, insofar as God does not send punishment down upon them immediately. This vast Mercy, however, should not lead the disbelievers or wrongdoers to think that God’s Might will be indefinitely averted from the guilty people (Ṭ).
Those who ascribe partners unto God will say, “Had God willed, we would not have ascribed partners unto God, nor our fathers, nor would we have forbidden anything.” Those who were before them had similarly denied, till they tasted Our Might. Say, “Do you have any knowledge that you can produce for us? You follow naught but conjecture, and you merely surmise.”

148 With this verse, the surah resumes its engagement with the Makkani idolaters, presenting and then challenging the Makkans’ claim that their invented ritual practices were a matter of Divine Will and thus suggesting that these practices were part of a revealed Law (Bḍ). Their argument is that had God willed, they would not have ascribed partners unto God, nor would they have forbidden anything, referring to the foregoing criticism of the ritual prohibitions they observed. See 16:35 and 43:19–20, where the idolaters make a similar claim. In vv. 107 and 137, respectively, the Quran itself affirms that had God willed, the idolaters would not have ascribed partners unto God or slain their children (cf. 10:99).

Although these verses have been read by some to suggest that God willed the idolaters to observe these practices (R), they can also be understood to mean that God is capable of altering the idolaters’ practices, but He abstains from doing so in order to allow them to choose freely whether to participate in them or not. The idolaters’ own assertion that had God willed, they would not have engaged in such practices is thus, on one level, an accurate assertion (Aj), but in a deeper sense it served to underscore their personal responsibility for their own actions. As such it does not have the effect of either proving that their practices have Divine sanction or allowing them to avoid personal responsibility for them. Rather, like those who made similar claims before them, they will “taste the punishment” (for other references to “tasted” punishment, see, e.g., 3:106; 4:56; 6:30; 7:39; 8:35). In response to their claims, the Prophet is instructed to ask, rhetorically, if the idolaters have any knowledge that they can produce—that is, any proof for their claims (Bḍ; IK; cf. v. 144), and then to dismiss their assertions and practices as based upon mere conjecture and surmise (see 6:116–17c).

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149 Say, “Unto God belongs the conclusive argument. Had
He willed, He could surely have guided you all.’”

The idolaters in v. 148 follow naught but conjecture and, it is understood, can produce no proof that God has ordained their idolatry or their ritual prohibitions. By contrast, God possesses the conclusive argument, which is clear and incontrovertible, showing all other arguments to be false, and which thus accomplishes the aim of establishing the truth and removing all doubt about religion (Ṭ, Ṭū). The word argument translates ḥujjah, which can also mean “proof.” Cf. v. 83 where Abraham’s argument against his people’s idolatry (in vv. 76–78) is described as an argument that God gave unto Abraham against his people, meaning a definitive proof or argument against their idolatry. The phrase “proof of God” (ḥujjat Allāh) is widely used in the Islamic intellectual tradition to refer to certain and irrefutable proof or knowledge.

According to some, God’s argument against humanity is constituted by the messengers He sent them, because of whom they have no excuse for not knowing true religious doctrine and law (Aj, Bḍ); perhaps for this reason, Shāh Wāli Allāh of Delhi entitled one of his key works dealing with the derivation of Islamic Law from the sayings and precedent of the Prophet ḥujjat Allāh al-bālighah, “The Conclusive Argument (or Proof) of God.” Twelver Shiites also explicitly identify the twelve Imams, who are their foundational spiritual guides after the Prophet, as “proofs” (ḥujaj) of God. The seventh Shiite Imam, Mūsā al-Kāẓim, is reported to have said, “God has two arguments [or proofs] against mankind, an outward one and an inward one. As for the outward, it is the messengers, prophets, and imams, and as for the inward, it is [their] intellects” (Kā), meaning that God demonstrates conclusively the truth of religion through both the messengers and spiritual leaders He sends to mankind and human beings’ own intrinsic intelligence.

Had He willed, He could surely have guided you all (cf. v. 35) indicates to some commentators that, since not all were “guided,” it must be that it is God’s Will to guide some and not others (Aj, IK, R), an idea that may be supported by other verses indicating that God misleads some (cf., e.g., 2:26; 6:125; 40:74; 74:31). Other important commentators, however, read it to mean that although God is capable of bringing all people, involuntarily, to guidance, He wishes to entrust them with the responsibility (taklīf) to come to guidance of their own free will and so does not “gather them all to guidance” (v. 35; Ṭū). Indeed, some argue that if God were to bring people forcibly to guidance or to disbelief, He would have no “conclusive proof” or “argument” against the disbelievers, who like those in v. 148, could contend that it was God Himself who willed their spiritual error (Ṭū).
Say, “Bring forward your witnesses who can bear witness that God has forbidden this.” Then if they bear witness, do not bear witness with them, and do not follow the caprices of those who deny Our signs, nor those who believe not in the Hereafter and ascribe equals unto their Lord.

Having been asked if they personally were witness to God’s ordaining the idolatrous prohibitions and rituals they observe (v. 144), and challenged to bring knowledge, or proof, that God ordained these practices (v. 148), the idolaters are now told to bring forward . . . witnesses who can testify that God had indeed instituted the dietary prohibitions they claim for themselves (vv. 136, 138–39, 143–44). If they do presume to bear witness to the truth of their claims, the Prophet is instructed not to bear witness with them, that is, not to give credence or support to their claims. He is further warned not to follow their caprices (cf. 2:120, 145; 5:48–49; 6:56; 13:37; 42:15; 45:18), that is, the caprices of the idolaters, who are then described as those who believe not in the Hereafter—that is, in Resurrection and Judgment—and who ascribe equals unto their Lord, committing the sin of shirk, or polytheism—their two central religious errors.

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Say, “Come, I will recite that which your Lord has forbidden you: that you ascribe nothing as partner unto Him, and that you be virtuous toward parents, and that you slay not your children for fear of poverty—We will provide for you and for them—and approach not indecencies, whether outward or inward, and slay not the soul that God has made inviolable, save by right. This He has enjoined upon you, that haply you may understand.”

And approach not the orphan’s property, save in the best manner, till he reaches maturity. And observe fully the measure and the balance with justice. We task no soul
beyond its capacity. And when you speak, be just, even if it be [against] a kinsman, and fulfill the pact of God. This He has enjoined upon you, that haply you may remember.

151–52 In response to the false prohibitions the idolaters have invented for themselves, the Prophet is instructed to recite that which your Lord has forbidden through authentic revelation. The list of prohibitions in these two verses brings together those mentioned elsewhere in the Quran. Throughout this sûrah various ways of “ascribing partners to God,” or shirk, are described, including the worship of idols (v. 74), celestial bodies (vv. 76–78), and jinn (v. 100), and the admonition against shirk here refers to all its forms. The paired command to ascribe nothing as partner unto God (or to worship only Him) and to be virtuous toward parents also appears in 2:83; 4:36; and 17:23; it indicates the importance of filial piety and suggests a relationship between proper worship of God and reverence and care for parents. After God, human beings are most indebted to their parents, given the extensive and solicitous care they were provided when they were young, and for this reason the duty to worship God alone is followed immediately by the mention of duty to parents (R). Immediately following the mention of children’s duty to parents, the verse warns parents against “slaying their children” for fear of poverty, indicating that they should rely upon God to provide for the needs of themselves and their children. Similar warnings against slaying one’s children are found in 6:140 and 17:31, and a promise not to slay one’s children was made a condition for women who wanted to join the Muslim community in Madinah as mentioned in 60:12.

The prohibition against slaying any soul save by right—that is, when it is warranted as a punishment for capital transgression, such as for murder or “waging war against God and His Messenger” (5:33)—is also mentioned in 4:29, 92–93; 5:32; 17:33; 25:68. For the admonition to avoid indecencies in both their outward and inward—that is, public and private—forms, see also 6:120c; 7:33. Indecencies translates fawāḥish (sing. fāḥishah), which often connotes specifically sexual transgression (see 4:15c; 4:22c), but which here more likely refers to serious sins and moral transgressions of all sorts. Shunning such sins both outwardly and inwardly demonstrates true piety, for if one were to avoid sin publicly, but commit it privately, it would indicate that one’s motivation was simply to avoid public blame and not to obey God (R). Al-Rāzī observes that v. 151 contains five commands or prohibitions that can all be said to pertain to outward sin, while v. 152 contains four prohibitions that relate to inward sin (R), that is, sin done in private or surreptitiously, without others being witness to it. Some define “inward sin” as the intention to sin formulated in the heart (Q). According to a well-known
Islamic principle based upon a *ḥadīth*, “Deeds are according to intentions,” meaning that the reward or punishment for a given act is dependent upon the intention of the one who commits it.

In v. 152, *approach not the orphan’s property . . . till he reaches maturity* (repeated verbatim in 17:34) means that a guardian should hold the orphan’s property in trust until the orphan reaches the age when knowledge and wisdom are sufficiently developed (R)—a standard that is qualitative, rather than a quantitative one measured in years. For a fuller discussion of this and the various ages given for “maturity” in Islamic Law, see 4:6c. The exception *save in the best manner* refers to a situation in which an impoverished guardian may take a small amount from the orphan’s property, although he is required to repay it when he is able, or to the guardian’s right to use the orphan’s property in a way that might help maintain or improve it (Ṭ); for a discussion of the terms and conditions under which a guardian may use the orphan’s property, see 4:6c.

To *observe fully the measure and the balance with justice* refers to the requirement to engage in commerce and business transactions with probity and fairness (cf. 7:85; 17:35; 26:182; 55:8–9; and 11:84–85, where the prophet Shuʿayb admonishes his people to do the same). That God tasks *no soul beyond its capacity* is found in several verses (2:286; 7:42; 23:62) and is a central Islamic doctrine; see also 65:7: *God tasks no soul beyond that which He has given it*. The command *When you speak, be just* refers to the importance of truthful testimony, but also to the requirement that one speak with integrity and truthfulness at all times (R). The Quran enjoins speaking honorably or *in a goodly way* to others (2:83, 235; 4:5, 8; 33:32) as well as speaking justly (4:9; 33:70), and the injunction in v. 152 requires that one speak justly *even if it be [against] a kinsman* (cf. 4:135).

The importance of fulfilling the pact (*ʿahd*) of God is also found in 2:40 and 13:20; in the present verse, it is understood to mean obeying the injunctions and prohibitions established by God (Ṭ).

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This indeed is My path made straight; so follow it, and follow not other ways, lest they separate you from His way. This He has enjoined upon you, that haply you may be reverent.

153 *My path made straight* refers to the “straight path” (*al-ṣirāt al-mustaqīm*) that leads to God and salvation (see 1:6c), and for most commentators it was understood to refer specifically to the religious path of Islam, defined by the
guidance and injunctions brought by the Prophet Muhammad—including the Quranic revelation and the Prophet’s own example, or Sunnah (R). See also 5:15–16: There has come unto you, from God, a light and a clear Book whereby God guides whosoever seeks His Contentment unto the ways of peace, and brings them forth from darkness into light, by His Leave, and guides them unto a straight path.

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Then We gave unto Moses the Book, complete for those who would be virtuous, as an exposition of all things, and as a guidance and a mercy, that haply they might believe in the meeting with their Lord.

154 The Book given to Moses is the Torah, which here as elsewhere is described as a source of guidance (cf. 3:3–4; 5:44). It is complete in the blessings it provides to those who seek to live a life of virtue (Ṭ). It is important to note that the descriptions of the Torah here are similar to the descriptions the Quran gives elsewhere for itself. See v. 115, where the Word of thy Lord, understood to be a reference to the Quran, is fulfilled or completed in truth and justice. The Book of Moses is also said in the present verse to be an exposition of all things (tafṣīl); see 6:114, where the Quran is described as “expounded” (mufaṣṣal), from the same root. This verse serves as a Quranic indication that the Torah remains a valid source of guidance and a path to virtue, even after the revelation of the Quran, an idea made more explicit in 5:43–45.

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And this is a blessed Book that We have sent down; so follow it and be reverent, that haply you may receive mercy.

Lest you should say, “The Book was only sent down upon two groups before us, and we were indeed heedless of their study.”

Or lest you should say, “If the Book had been sent
down upon us, we would surely have been better guided than they.” Now there has come unto you a clear proof from your Lord, a guidance and a mercy. So who does greater wrong than one who denies the signs of God and turns away from them? Soon shall We recompense those who turn away from Our signs with a terrible punishment for their having turned away.

155–57 After the description of the Torah in the previous verse, the reference to the blessed Book . . . sent down in v. 155 is to the Quran. As with the Torah, the Quran provides a means to obtain God’s mercy. Once the Quran was sent down, the Makkans could no longer excuse their various moral and spiritual errors (mentioned throughout this sūrah) by claiming that the Book, meaning revelation in general, had not been sent to them, but had been sent only to two groups: the Jews and the Christians. For similar arguments from disbelievers that their moral error was a result of a lack of prophetic warning, see 28:47.

Heedless in v. 156 translates ghāfilīn, which also means to be passively oblivious or unaware. Some understand heedless of their study to be a reference to the Arabs’ inability to read or understand the Torah or the Gospel (IK, Z). In vv. 156–57, the Quran suggests that the Makkans may have wished to use their inability to read or study the Jewish and Christian scriptures, along with the argument that no revelation had been sent down directly to them (v. 157), as an excuse and explanation for their lack of moral guidance. The response is that such excuses from the Makkans— as well as their boast that had they been given revelation, they would surely have been better guided than the Jews and Christians (cf. 35:42 for similar boast)—are belied, since a clear proof had now come to them from God. This clear proof is the Quranic revelation itself, which is sent down in clear Arabic (Ṭ; see 26:195) and thus easily understandable to them, and which is described as a guidance and a mercy, exactly as the Torah is described in v. 154.

Who does greater wrong than one who denies the signs of God takes the same form as many other rhetorical questions; see, for example, 18:57; and 32:22: And who does greater wrong than one who has been reminded of the signs of his Lord, then turns away from them? The phrase turns away from them in v. 157 likely means that the idolaters attempt to turn others away from the signs of God (IK, Z; cf. v. 26).
Do they await aught but that the angels should come upon them, or that thy Lord should come, or one of the signs of thy Lord should come? On the day that one of the signs of thy Lord does come, believing will be of no avail to any soul that did not believe beforehand and did not earn some goodness in its belief. Say, “Wait! We, too, are waiting.”

Do they await aught but that the angels should come upon them, or that thy Lord should come (cf. 2:210; 16:33) is meant to emphasize the foolishness of the disbelievers’ request for powerful heavenly signs of the truth of Muhammad’s warnings of Divine Judgment, for once such signs come, the time during which they could have chosen freely to believe will have come to an end. The disbelievers’ apparent waiting for the angels to come upon them might mean that they seem to be waiting for their own deaths, which will be heralded by the coming of the angels of death, or for the end of the world itself (Ṭ). See 43:66 and 47:18, where disbelievers seem to be similarly inviting the Hour—that is, the end of the world and Final Judgment—to come upon them. In this context, the signs of thy Lord may be understood as signs of the end times, such as the sun rising from the West (Ṭ, Z). Once these events have come, believing will be of no avail to any soul that did not believe beforehand, for repentance and belief only avail a soul before its own death (cf. 4:17; 6:8–9c; 6:57–58c). The Prophet is finally instructed to tell the disbelievers, who seem to be continually, but disingenuously, waiting for “proof” of Muhammad’s prophethood, Wait! We, too, are waiting. The We in this statement is generally understood as referring to the Prophet and his believing followers, although it could also refer to God. This ominous command is found in various forms elsewhere in the Quran (7:71; 9:52; 10:20, 102; 11:122; 20:135; 52:31), and is meant as a threat or warning to the disbelievers (R).

Truly those who have divided their religion and become factions, thou hast nothing to do with them. Their matter rests with God alone; then He will inform them about that which they used to do.
159 The Quran here, as elsewhere, criticizes those who become divided in their religion or create sects within it (cf. 3:103–5; 5:14c; 30:32; 42:13–14; 98:4). Those who have divided their religion may refer to those who believe in some aspects or doctrines of the religion and disbelieve in others. Alternately, some read the phrase with different vowelization to mean “those who separate from their religion,” meaning those who leave it altogether (R, Ṭ, Z). Here those who have . . . become factions may refer to the Jews and Christians (R, Ṭ, Z); to the idolaters (with whom this sūrah is primarily engaged) who differed as to the “partners they took unto God,” partners that included idols, celestial bodies, or jinn (R); or to those within the Muslim community who introduce innovation (bidʿah) or doubt into religion (Ṭ). In connection with this verse, some commentators cite a hadīth in which the Prophet states that the Jews divided into seventy-one sects, and the Christians into seventy-two sects, before predicting that his own community would divide into seventy-three sects (Z). Regarding such people, the Prophet is told thou hast nothing to do with them, meaning that he is instructed to leave them, rather than fight them (Ṭ), for their matter rests with God alone. That God will settle religious differences among people in the Hereafter by “informing” them about that which they used to do (or elsewhere, “about that wherein they differed”) is also mentioned in 5:14, 48; 6:108.

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160 Whosoever brings a good deed shall have ten times the like thereof; but whosoever brings an evil deed shall be recompensed only with the like thereof, and they shall not be wronged.

160 This is one of several verses in the Quran indicating God’s leniency in judging human actions and His great bounty toward them (Aj, R), multiplying the reward for good deeds, while recompensing evil deeds equitably. See also 4:40: Truly God commits not so much as a mote’s weight of wrong: if there is a good deed, He will multiply it and grant from His Presence a great reward; and 27:89 and 28:84, where it is said that whoever does a good deed, he will have that which is better than it. If the multiplication of good deeds is a manifestation of Divine Bounty, the equitable recompense of evil deeds manifests Divine Justice (Z). According to some commentators, ten times the like thereof should not be understood as a precise factor by which one’s good deeds will be “multiplied” in reward, but rather as a symbolic figure indicating that the spiritual worth of and reward for good deeds is multiplied many times over (R). Such an interpretation is
supported by other Quranic verses that suggest, for example, that the wealth one
spends in the way of God will be increased seven hundred times (2:261), or that
human behavior, or certain moral acts or qualities, will be rewarded without reckoning (39:10).

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161 Say, “Truly my Lord has guided me unto a straight path, an upright religion, the creed of Abraham, a ḥanīf, and he was not of the idolaters.”

161 This verse mentions together the concepts of a straight path, upright religion, the creed of Abraham, the religious description ḥanīf, and the shunning of idolatry, all of which recur throughout the Quran in close association with one another. The straight path is used throughout the Quran to refer to the path of true religion that leads to felicity in this life and the next; for a fuller discussion, see 1:6c. For other references to upright religion, see 9:36; 12:40; 30:30, 43; 98:5. The reference to the creed of Abraham, a ḥanīf, is also found in similar or verbatim form in 2:130, 135; 3:95; 4:125; 16:23. Creed here translates millah, which sometimes denotes a religious community, but can also refer to its particular belief system or creed. The description ḥanīf is usually mentioned in connection with Abraham in the Quran (2:135; 3:67, 95; 4:125; 6:79; 16:120, 123), although in some verses the Prophet Muhammad and his community are called upon directly to be ḥanīf (10:105; 22:31; 30:30), and Islamic tradition commonly uses this term to describe Muhammad’s religious life and practice even before his call to prophethood. In some contexts, being a ḥanīf is distinguished explicitly or implicitly from following the monotheistic traditions of Judaism and Christianity (2:135; 3:67; 4:125), although the Quran indicates that Jews and Christians were also called to be ḥanīfs (98:4–5). For fuller discussion of ḥanīf, see 2:135c.

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162 Say, “Truly my prayer and my sacrifice, my living and my dying are for God, Lord of the worlds.

163 He has no partner. This I am commanded, and I am the first of those who submit.”

865
The various arguments presented against the idolaters and their practices throughout this sūrah are now brought to a close with the simple but uncompromising statement of commitment to monotheistic worship that the Prophet is instructed to utter in these two verses. *Sacrifice* here renders *nusuk*, which can also refer to religious rites of various kinds (Q, Ṭ) and thus to any ritual act meant to bring one closer to God (Q). In the present context, however, *nusuk* is widely connected with the proper ritual sacrifice of animals, which has been a concern elsewhere in the sūrah, specifically as it pertains to invoking the Name of God over the animal to be slaughtered (vv. 118–19, 121; Q, Ṭ, Z). The mention of *prayer* and *sacrifice* together also occurs in 108:2, *So pray to thy Lord and sacrifice*, although in this case, *sacrifice* renders the imperative *anḥar*.

*My living and my dying are for God* indicates complete devotion to God, that all one’s actions, even unto death, are done only for the sake of pleasing Him (Z) and drawing near to Him (Q), and that all considerations of self are removed from one’s actions (Aj). *I am the first of those who submit* (literally, I am the first of the *muslims*; see also v. 14; 39:12) may simply mean that the Prophet is the first to submit himself to God as a Muslim among his community or among the people of his time (since earlier prophets and their followers are also designated as *muslims* in the Quran). In the context of these two verses and their expression of complete devotion to God, however, the Prophet’s assertion that he is *the first of those who submit* may also indicate his submission in the fullest sense, meaning complete surrender to God’s Will and Decree (R). The idea that the Prophet was *the first of those who submit* can also be understood in relation to the Islamic metaphysical concept of the Muhammadan Reality (or sometimes “Muhammadan Light,” *nūr Muḥammadī*), which preceded all creation; in this sense the Prophet says in a ḥadīth that he was a prophet “while Adam was still between water and clay.” According to a ḥadīth cited by some commentators, the Prophet would recite these two verses, along with Abraham’s statement in v. 79, *Truly, as a ḥanīf, I have turned my face toward Him Who created the heavens and the earth and I am not of the idolaters*, before beginning his night prayer (Q).

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Say, “Shall I seek a lord other than God, while He is lord of all things? No soul does evil, save against itself, and none shall bear the burden of another. Then unto your Lord is your return and He will inform you of that wherein you differed.”
Shall I seek a lord other than God is similar to other rhetorical questions meant to indicate that God suffices all human need and that only one who was ignorant of this truth could worship other deities or “ascribe partners unto Him” (cf. 6:114; 7:140). That no soul does evil, save against itself reflects the Quranic principle that the consequences of all moral actions ultimately harm or benefit only the moral agent. Thus, wrongdoers, above all, wrong themselves (2:57; 3:117; 7:160; 10:44); deceivers deceive only themselves (2:9); and whatever good you spend, it is for yourselves (2:272). That none shall bear the burden of another (see also 17:15; 35:18; 39:7; 53:38) reflects the individual nature of moral responsibility and the reality and significance of personal judgment. That God will inform you in the Hereafter about your religious differences is also mentioned in 5:48; cf. 2:113; 10:93; and 45:17, where God will judge between people with regard to their religious differences.

He it is Who appointed you vicegerents upon the earth and raised some of you by degrees above others, that He may try you in that which He has given you. Truly thy Lord is Swift in retribution, and truly He is Forgiving, Merciful.

Vicegerents translates khalāʾif (sing. khalīfah, the usual plural of which is khulafāʾ), which means “representatives” or “successors”; in Islamic political terminology the term in the singular became the title of the head of the unified Islamic state (anglicized as “caliph”). The first vicegerent God appointed on earth was Adam (2:30), and insofar as Adam represents humanity as a whole, all human beings can be understood to be God’s vicegerents on earth. The Quran also uses vicegerents upon the earth to refer to new generations or communities that succeed older ones that have been destroyed for their wrongdoing (7:74, 129; 10:13–14, 73); and in 24:55, the Muslims are promised that if they believe and perform righteous deeds, God will make them vicegerents upon the earth. Many commentators consider vicegerents in the present verse to relate primarily to the idea of generations succeeding others (Ṭ)—meaning either that the Muslim community has succeeded earlier religious communities or that generations of Muslims will succeed one another on earth (R, Z)—or that they have inherited the position of God’s representatives on earth (R, Z), although the more universal idea of human vicegerency may also be intended. For a further discussion of this term, see 2:30c.

That God raised some people by degrees above others is mentioned in several
other verses (see 6:83c). The “degrees” among people mentioned in other verses may pertain to degrees in this world or in the Hereafter, or both. In the present verse, however, the subsequent clause, *that He may try you*, suggests that the *degrees* in this verse are degrees that pertain to earthly existence, since people are tried only in this world; they receive their recompense in the next. Commentators widely interpret the *degrees* mentioned in the present verse as differing degrees of worldly provision and goods (R, Ṭ, Z), nobility (R, Z), or intellect (R). God’s appointing people *vicegerents upon the earth* and His worldly provision for them serve as means to *try* human souls as to their trust in Him and gratitude for what they have been given. That God provides for human beings in different *degrees* allows Him to test the generosity and kindness of those given worldly nobility and wealth toward those given less (Z) as well as to test the humility and trust of those given little, inspiring them to emulate the nobler human beings in their midst (Su). God is *Swift in retribution* for those who fail to be thankful and obedient to Him in the face of the gifts they have been given (R, Ṭ, Z), but *Forgiving* and *Merciful* toward those who are grateful for His gifts (Z), who seek to approach Him through obedience (R, Ṭ), and who repent of any sins they may commit (Ṭ). For the commentator al-Tustarī, one should not consider the hardships one suffers in this life as forms of Divine Punishment. Rather, all such hardships are but means of purification and atonement for sins, except for the hardening of the heart. The juxtaposition of the Divine Attributes *Swift in retribution* and *Forgiving, Merciful* (also found in 7:167) inspires both fear and hope, indicating that, although the possibility of irreversible Divine Judgment is ever imminent (R, Z), God remains *Forgiving* and *Merciful* toward His creatures.