20

Ṭā Hā

Ṭā Hā

Ṭā Hā is a Makkansūrah, with the possible exception of vv. 130–31, which some consider to be Madinan (JJ), although the context of these two verses indicates that they are most likely Makkan. This sūrah was revealed after Sūrah 19, Maryam (JJ), and figures prominently in the famous conversion account of the second Caliph, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644). Shortly before becoming Muslim, ʿUmar was intent on killing the Prophet. He encountered a Companion, who was concealing the fact that he was a Muslim, and ʿUmar told him of his plan. In order to divert ʿUmar, the Companion told him to first settle affairs with his own household, as ʿUmar’s sister and her husband had also accepted Islam. They were reciting the Quran when ʿUmar came to their home to confront them. The parchment from which they were reading, but which they hid when ʿUmar entered, contained some or all of Ṭā Hā. ʿUmar told them that he had heard them and insisted on seeing what they had been reciting. After a brief confrontation, they relented and gave him the parchment. Upon reading it, ʿUmar had a change of heart, resolved to become Muslim, and went to the Prophet to profess his faith (Ibn Hishām, al-Sīrah al-nabawiyyah [Beirut, 1999], 1:272). The Prophet is reported to have said concerning this sūrah (along with Sūrahs 2 and 3) that God’s Supreme Name (al-ism al-aʿẓam) is to be found in it (R).

The sūrah begins with a consolation to the Prophet and speaks of God’s all-encompassing knowledge and His Most Beautiful Names. It then segues into a lengthy account of the story
of Moses (vv. 9–97) that recounts many details of his life, including his encounter with God and the charge of his mission to Pharaoh, the Israelites’ escape from Egypt, and the false god that the Israelites worshipped when Moses went to Mt. Sinai. Next, the sūrah transitions to discuss several aspects concerning the end of time and the Last Day, and then recounts the story of Adam’s creation, temptation, banishment, and forgiveness (vv. 115–24). It then encourages the Prophet to be steadfast in the face of the Makkans’ insults, recounting the Makkans’ disingenuous request for a sign to be sent to the Prophet from God; and concludes with a threat to the Makkans, telling them to wait for the inevitable end, when they shall come to know who is upon the sound path and is rightly guided.

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

1 Ṭā. Hā. 2 We did not send down the Quran unto thee that thou shouldst be distressed, 3 but only as a reminder unto one who fears [God], 4 a revelation from He, Who created the earth and the high heavens. 5 The Compassionate mounted the Throne. 6 Unto Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth, whatsoever is between them, and whatsoever lies beneath the ground. 7 And if thou speakest aloud, verily He knows what is secret and what is more hidden still. 8 God, there is no god but He. Unto Him belong the Most Beautiful Names. 9 Hast thou heard tell of Moses, 10 when he saw a fire and said unto his family, “Stay here. Verily I perceive a fire. Perhaps I shall bring you a brand therefrom, or find guidance at the fire”? 11 Then when he came to it, he was called, “O Moses! 12 Verily I am thy Lord. Take off thy sandals. Truly thou art in the holy valley of Ṭuwā. 13 I have chosen thee, so listen to what is
revealed. 14 Truly I am God, there is no god but I. So worship Me, and perform the prayer for the remembrance of Me. 15 Surely the Hour is coming. I would keep it hidden, that every soul might be recompensed for its endeavors. 16 So let not he who believes not and follows his caprices turn thee away from it, or thou wilt perish. 17 And what is that in thy right hand, O Moses?” 18 He said, “It is my staff. I lean upon it and beat down leaves for my sheep. And I have other uses for it.” 19 He said, “Cast it, O Moses!” 20 So he cast it, and behold, it was a serpent, moving swiftly. 21 He said, “Take hold of it, and fear not! We shall restore it to its former way. 22 And enclose thy hand in thy side. It will come forth white, without blemish, as another sign, 23 that We may show thee some of Our greatest signs. 24 Go unto Pharaoh! Truly he has rebelled!” 25 He said, “My Lord! Expand for me my breast! 26 Make my affair easy for me, 27 and untie a knot from my tongue, 28 that they may understand my speech. 29 And appoint for me a helper from among my family, 30 Aaron, my brother. 31 Through him, increase my strength, 32 and make him a partner in my affair, 33 that we may glorify Thee much 34 and remember Thee much. 35 Truly Thou dost ever see us.” 36 He said, “Thou hast been granted thy request, O Moses! 37 And We have indeed shown thee favor another time, 38 when We revealed to thy mother that which was revealed: 39 ‘Cast him into the ark and cast it into the sea. Then the sea will throw him upon the bank. An enemy unto Me and an enemy unto him shall take him.’ And I cast upon thee a love from Me, that thou mightest be formed under My eye.
When thy sister went forth and said, ‘Shall I show you one who can nurse him?’ Thus We returned thee to thy mother that she might be comforted and grieve not. And thou didst slay a soul, but We saved thee from sorrow. And We tried thee with trials. Then thou didst remain some years among the people of Midian. Then thou didst come, as determined, O Moses. I selected thee for Myself. Go forth, thou and thy brother, with My signs, and tire not in the remembrance of Me. Go, both of you, unto Pharaoh! Truly he has rebelled! Yet speak unto him gently, that haply he may remember or have fear.” They said, “Our Lord! Truly we fear that he will deal hastily with us, or that he will transgress.” He said, “Fear not! Truly I am with ye twain; I hear and I see. So come unto him and say, ‘Truly we are two messengers of your Lord. So send forth with us the Children of Israel and punish them not. We have brought you a sign from your Lord. Peace be upon him who follows guidance!” Truly it has been revealed unto us that punishment shall come upon him who denies and turns away.” He said, “So who is the Lord of you two, O Moses?” He said, “Our Lord is He Who gives everything its creation, then guides [it].” He said, “What, then, of former generations?” He said, “Knowledge thereof is with my Lord in a Book—He errs not, nor does He forget— the One Who made the earth a cradle for you, and threaded paths for you therein. He sent down water from the sky, wherewith We brought forth diverse kinds of vegetation [saying], ‘Eat and pasture your cattle.’” Truly in that are signs for those possessed of
intelligence.  From it We created you, and unto it We shall bring you back, and from it We shall bring you forth another time.  We indeed showed him Our signs, all of them; yet he denied and refused.  He said, “Have you come to us in order to expel us from our land with your sorcery, O Moses?  But we shall surely produce for you sorcery like it. So appoint a tryst between you and us at a neutral place, which neither you nor we shall fail to keep.”  He said, “Your tryst shall be on the Day of Adornment; let the people be gathered when the sun has risen high.”  Then Pharaoh turned away and devised his scheme. Then he came.  Moses said to them, “Woe unto you! Do not fabricate a lie against God, lest He should destroy you with a punishment. Whosoever fabricates [lies] has failed.”  So they debated their affair among themselves and kept secret their intimate discourse.  They said, “These two are sorcerers who wish to expel you from your land with their sorcery and to do away with your exemplary way of life.  So gather your plot, then come in ranks. Today, whosoever gains the upper hand will surely have prospered!”  They said, “O Moses! Either you cast, or we shall be the first to cast.”  He said, “Nay, you cast.”  Then, behold, their ropes and their staffs appeared to him, through their sorcery, to move swiftly, whereat Moses conceived a fear in his soul.  We said, “Fear not! Truly thou art uppermost.  Cast that which is in thy right hand; it will devour what they have produced. They have produced only a sorcerer’s trick. And the sorcerer prospers not, wherever he may go.”  Then the sorcerers were cast
down in prostration. They said, “We believe in the Lord of Aaron and Moses.” He said, “Do you believe in Him before I give you leave? He is indeed your chief, who has taught you sorcery. Now I shall surely cut off your hands and your feet on alternate sides, and I shall surely crucify you on the trunks of palm trees. And you will surely know which of us [inflicts] a more severe and lasting punishment!” They said, “We shall never prefer you to the clear proofs that have come to us, nor to Him who originated us. So decree whatsoever you decree; you only decree in the life of this world. Truly we believe in our Lord, that He may forgive us our sins and the sorcery that you compelled us to perform. And God is better and more lasting!” Verily, whosoever comes unto his Lord guilty, surely his shall be Hell, wherein he neither dies nor lives. But whosoever comes unto Him as a believer, having performed righteous deeds, theirs shall be the highest ranks— Gardens of Eden with rivers running below, abiding therein. That is the recompense of one who purifies himself. And We indeed revealed unto Moses, “Set forth with My servants by night and strike for them a dry path through the sea. Be not afraid of being overtaken, and fear not.” Then Pharaoh pursued them with his hosts, and they were overwhelmed by the sea that enshrouded them. Pharaoh led his people astray, and guided them not. O Children of Israel! We have saved you from your enemies and have appointed a tryst for you on the right side of the Mount. And We sent down unto you manna and quails. Eat of the good things We have provided you,
but exceed not the limits therein, lest My Wrath be unleashed upon you. And he upon whom My Wrath is unleashed has been cast into ruin. And surely I am most forgiving toward the one who repents and believes and works righteousness, and thereafter is rightly guided. “What hast made thee hasten from thy people, O Moses?” He said, “They are close upon my footsteps, and I hastened unto Thee, my Lord, that Thou mayest be content.” He said, “Truly We tried thy people in thine absence, and the Samaritan led them astray.” Then Moses returned to his people, angry and aggrieved. He said, “O my people! Did your Lord not make you a goodly Promise? Did the pact seem too long for you? Or did you desire that the anger of your Lord be unleashed upon you, such that you failed your tryst with me?” They said, “We did not fail our tryst with thee of our own will, but we were laden with the burden of the people’s ornaments. So we cast them [into the pit], and thus did the Samaritan throw also.” Then he brought forth for them a calf as a mere body that lowed, and they said, “This is your god and the god of Moses, though he has forgotten.” Have they not considered that it does not respond to them with words, and that it has no power over what harm or benefit may come to them? And Aaron had indeed said to them earlier, “O my people! You are merely being tested by this, and truly your Lord is the Compassionate. So follow me and obey my command!” They said, “We shall not cease to be its devotees till Moses returns unto us.” He said, “O Aaron! What hindered thee, when thou didst see them
going astray, \(93\) that thou didst not follow me? Didst thou disobey my command?\(^\text{94}\) He said, “O son of my mother! Seize not my beard or my head. Truly I feared that thou wouldst say, ‘Thou hast caused division among the Children of Israel, and thou hast not heeded my word.’” \(^\text{95}\) He said, “What was your purpose, O Samaritan?” \(^\text{96}\) He said, “I saw that which they saw not. So I took a handful [of dust] from the footsteps of the messenger, and I cast it. Thus did my soul prompt me.” \(^\text{97}\) He said, “Be gone! In this life it shall be yours to say, ‘Touch [me] not!’ And truly for you there is a tryst that you cannot fail to keep. Now observe your god, to whom you remained devoted: we shall surely burn it and scatter its ashes in the sea!” \(^\text{98}\) Your only god is God, besides whom there is no other god. He encompasses all things in knowledge. \(^\text{99}\) Thus do We narrate unto thee some of the accounts of those who have come before. And We have given thee a Reminder from Our Presence. \(^\text{100}\) Whosoever turns away from it, verily he shall bear it as a burden on the Day of Resurrection, \(^\text{101}\) abiding therein. How evil a burden for them on the Day of Resurrection— \(^\text{102}\) the Day the trumpet shall be blown, and We shall gather the guilty on that Day, blind. \(^\text{103}\) They will whisper among themselves, “You have tarried only ten [days].” \(^\text{104}\) We know well that which they will say, when the most exemplary of them in conduct will say, “You have tarried only a day!” \(^\text{105}\) They ask thee about the mountains. Say, “My Lord shall scatter them as ashes. \(^\text{106}\) And He will leave it a barren plain. \(^\text{107}\) You will see no crookedness or curvature therein.” \(^\text{108}\) On that Day they shall follow a
herald in whom there is no crookedness. And voices will be
humbled before the Compassionate, and you will hear
naught but a murmur. On that Day intercession will be
of no benefit, save [that of] those whom the Compassionate
has granted leave and with whose word He is content. He
knows that which is before them and that which is
behind them, and they encompass Him not in knowledge.
Faces will be humbled before the Living, the Self-
Subsisting. And whosoever bears wrongdoing will have
failed. But whosoever performs righteous deeds and is a
believer, he shall fear neither wrong nor deprivation.
Thus have We sent it down as an Arabic Quran, and We
have varied the threat therein that haply they may be
reverent, or [that] it might occasion remembrance for them.
Exalted is God, the True Sovereign. Be not in haste with
the Quran before its revelation is completed for thee, but
say, “My Lord! Increase me in knowledge!” And We
indeed made a pact with Adam aforetime, but he forgot.
And We found no resoluteness in him. And when We
said unto the angels, “Prostrate yourselves before Adam,”
they prostrated, save Iblīs; he refused. We said, “O
Adam! Truly this is an enemy unto thee and thy wife. So let
him not expel the two of you from the Garden, such that
thou wouldst be wretched. Truly it is for thee that thou
shalt neither hunger therein, nor go naked, and that thou
shalt neither thirst therein, nor suffer from the heat of the
sun.” Then Satan whispered to him. He said, “O Adam!
Shall I show thee the Tree of Everlastingness and a
kingdom that never decays?” So they both ate therefrom.
Then their nakedness was exposed to them, and they began to sew together the leaves of the Garden. Adam disobeyed his Lord, and so he erred. Then his Lord chose him, and relented unto him and guided [him]. He said, “Get down from it, both you together, each of you an enemy to the other. And if guidance should come unto you from Me, then whosoever follows My Guidance shall not go astray, nor be wretched. But whosoever turns away from the remembrance of Me, truly his shall be a miserable life, and We shall raise him blind on the Day of Resurrection.” He will say, “My Lord! Why hast Thou raised me blind, when I used to see?” He will say, “Thus it is. Our signs came unto you, but you forgot them. Even so, this Day shall you be forgotten!” Thus do We recompense whosoever is prodigal and believes not in the signs of his Lord. And surely the punishment of the Hereafter is more severe and more lasting. Does it not serve as guidance for them, how many generations We destroyed before them, amid whose dwellings they walk? Truly in that are signs for those possessed of intelligence. And were it not for a Word that had already gone forth from thy Lord and a term appointed, it would be inevitable. So bear patiently that which they say, and hymn the praise of thy Lord before the rising of the sun and before its setting, and in the hours of the night glorify [Him], and at the ends of the day, that haply thou mayest be content. Strain not thine eyes toward the enjoyments We have granted certain classes of them, as the splendor of the life of this world, that We may test them concerning it. The provision of thy Lord is better
and more lasting. \[132\] And bid thy family to prayer and be steadfast therein. We ask no provision of thee; We provide for thee. And the end belongs to reverence. \[133\] They say, “Why has he not brought us a sign from his Lord?” Has there not come unto them the clear proof of that which is in the scriptures of old? \[134\] Had We destroyed them with a punishment before it, they would have said, “Our Lord! If only Thou hadst sent a messenger unto us, we would have followed Thy signs before being abased and disgraced.” \[135\] Say, “Each is waiting, so wait! For you shall come to know those who are the companions of the sound path, and those who are rightly guided.”

Commentary

1 Ṣā. Ḥā.

The Arabic letters ṭāʾ and ḥāʾ are among the separated letters (al-muqattāʿ āt) that are found at the beginning of twenty-nine sūrah s and whose innermost meaning, most commentators attest, is known only to God; see 2:1c. Some have said that ṭāʾ ḥāʾ could mean “O man!” (Kl, Ṭ, Ṭs) with the Prophet as the referent (Kl, TH), or that it is one of the Names of God (M) or a name of the Prophet (Kl). Since ṭāʾ ḥāʾ can be a name of the Prophet, it has become a proper name among Muslim males. According to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, ṭāʾ ḥāʾ refers to the purity and guidance of the Household of the Prophet (ahl al-bayt; R). According to another interpretation, the ṭāʾ refers to a tree in Paradise called Ṭūbā (see 13:29c) and the ḥāʾ to an abyss (ḥāwiyah; see 101:9c) in Hell, which is to say that it is as if God were swearing by both the Garden and the Fire (R).

We did not send down the Quran unto thee that thou shouldst be distressed,
The Quran was not given to the Prophet to cause him to be distressed over its acceptance or rejection by his people, or their belief or disbelief in his message (Q; see 15:88; 18:6; 26:3). Thus this verse relates to the wider Quranic theme of God’s addressing the prophets’ human reactions to the trials they encountered when rejected by their people (see 2:214; 11:36; 15:97–99; 21:83–84; 26:3). According to another interpretation, the Prophet had been praying all night to the point that his legs had become swollen; so this verse was revealed, conveying that the Quran was not sent to cause him to weaken and exhaust himself in acts of worship, thereby causing undue hardship upon himself (Q).

but only as a reminder unto one who fears [God],

a revelation from He, Who created the earth and the high heavens.

But in v. 3 can mean “however,” which would indicate that v. 3 does not directly follow upon v. 2, as it would then read, “However, it is only a reminder unto one who fears [God]” (R). If it is directly connected to v. 2, then v. 3 can mean that the Quran was not revealed to the Prophet in order to cause him hardship, but rather was sent down only as a reminder unto one who fears [God] (R). In either case, one who fears refers to those who reverence God (muttaqīn), as in 2:2: This is the Book in which there is no doubt, a guidance for the reverent (R). Elsewhere, “Reminder” is considered one of the names of the Quran; see 3:58; 21:2, 7, 10, 24 (cf. 38:1).

The Compassionate mounted the Throne.

The Compassionate (al-Raḥmān; see 1:3c; 55:1c) appears in the Quran as an adjective describing God, but also as one of His proper Names (see, e.g., 19:18, 26, 44). This verse is the only instance in the Quran where the Compassionate is referred to as mounting the Throne; for other Quranic references to God’s mounting the Throne, see 7:54; 10:3; 13:2; 32:4; 57:4; cf. 25:59: He Who created the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them in six days, then mounted the Throne, the Compassionate [is He]. For the special significance of the Divine Name al-Raḥmān, see 17:110: Call upon God, or call upon the Compassionate.
_whichever you call upon, to Him belong the most beautiful names_ this verse clearly indicates the close connection between the names Allah ("God") and al-Rahmān ("the Compassionate"), both of which, in traditional Islamic sources, are identified as names of the Divine Essence.

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6 Unto Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth, whatsoever is between them, and whatsoever lies beneath the ground.

V. 5 invokes the imagery of God as King seated upon a Throne, and v. 6 continues this image as it calls attention to God's sole ownership of everything in existence (see also, e.g., 2:255; 5:17; 67:1). According to a spiritual interpretation of this verse reported by al-Sulamī, since everything belongs to God, one should ask only God to fulfill one's requests: "To Him belongs the kingdom (mulk). So whoever seeks out a part from the whole from other than Him has sought wrongly. Return to Him for all of the things that are of importance to you, and He will suffice you. Seek all of your requests from Him, and He will bestow them upon you." The Prophet is reported to have said, "When you ask, ask only of God; and when you seek help, seek help only from God."

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7 And if thou speakest aloud, verily He knows what is secret and what is more hidden still.

What is secret refers to hidden talk (Kl), and what is more hidden still refers to what lies deeply hidden in the soul and is only known to God (Kl, My, Qu). According to a common Sufi psychological teaching, the secret (sirr) corresponds to the heart, which is the locus of one's consciousness of God, while what is more hidden still (akhfā) corresponds to a deeper dimension of the same reality. Al-Rāzī deduces from the second part of this verse that if God knows the innermost recesses of a person's thoughts, then, a fortiori, He also knows what he speakest aloud. Taken together, vv. 6–7 are in part similar to 2:284: Unto God belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth. And whether you disclose what is in your souls or hide it, God will bring you to account for it; see also 2:255; 6:3; 13:10; 21:110.
God, there is no god but He. Unto Him belong the Most Beautiful Names.

For God’s Most Beautiful Names as well as their function in Islamic ritual practice, see 7:180c; 17:110; 59:24.

Hast thou heard tell of Moses,


when he saw a fire and said unto his family, “Stay here. Verily I perceive a fire. Perhaps I shall bring you a brand therefrom, or find guidance at the fire”?

It is said that Moses’ encounter with God occurred at night, during the winter, when Moses had lost his way (T). Having seen the fire (Q), he sought warmth or perhaps some means of illumination from it; see also 27:7; 28:29; cf. Exodus 3:1–3. It is said that the fire was on Horeb, identified in Exodus 3:1 as “the mountain of God.” For the symbolism of the fire perceived by Moses as representing increasing levels of certainty in the spiritual life, see 27:7c.

Then when he came to it, he was called, “O Moses!

Verily I am thy Lord. Take off thy sandals. Truly thou art in the holy valley of Ṭuwā.
It is said that in the valley God called to Moses from a tree (Q, Ṭ) that was a kind of lycium or boxthorn (ʿawsaj) plant (JJ, Ṭ); see also 28:30. It thus refers to the tree (JJ) or, alternately, to the fire that Moses perceived (see v. 10; IK, R, Ṭ) and which consumed the tree (Bg, R). See also 27:8–10; 28:30. Cf. Exodus 3:4–6.

Moses was told to take off his sandals, either because they were made of the skin of a dead donkey (Ṭ), or out of reverence (taʿẓīm) for the sacred space where he was standing, just as people are commanded to remove their shoes before entering the sacred sanctuary (ḥaram) of the Kaʿbah (IK) or in fact any mosque. According to a more esoteric reading of this phrase, al-Ghazzālī suggests that in being asked to remove his sandals Moses was being instructed to cast aside this world and the next world by turning his face toward God alone (Niche of Lights, trans. D. Buchman [Provo, 1998], 30). In other words, for Sufis the verse means that one’s heart should be free of any attachment to the things to be found in this world, and even the thought of the delights of the next world, as one should dedicate oneself solely to God (My, Qu). As Ibn ʿAjībah explains it, the phrase means, “Leave the two realms of existence (kawn) if you wish to witness the Presence of the Existentiator (mukawwin).”

The idea of taking the sandals off has inspired a number of artful literary works in Islamic civilization, such as the book Taking Off the Sandals (Khalʿ al-naʿlayn) by the Andalusian mystic Abuʾl-Qāsim ibn Qasī (d. 546/1151), and is a frequently encountered image and symbol in Sufi poetry. In a famous poem attributed to Ibn ʿArabī, the Divine intent behind the imagery is explained: “Take off the sandals if you come / to this valley, for therein is Our Holiness. / Of the two worlds divest yourself, / and lift the veils of in-betweenness” (Aj).

It is also interesting to note that the name of the holy valley in which Moses encounters God is Ṭuwā, which comes from a root that means “to fold up” and “to become enwrapped.” Thus, Moses is told to rid himself of any thought of this world or the next, because he is in the place of Divine intimacy, the inner, holy sanctuary that symbolizes the Ocean of the Divine Presence above all states of existence (Aj). It is here that all of existence is “folded up” before him (Aj) and where his soul becomes “enwrapped” in the Divine Reality.

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I have chosen thee, so listen to what is revealed.

Moses’ being chosen refers to God’s conferral of messengerhood (risālah) upon him as well as the special distinction given to him of being addressed by God directly (R), which is why Moses is also referred to in the
Islamic tradition as Kalīm Allāh, that is, “the one to whom God spoke”; see also 7:144c. According to the early Sufi figure Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī (d. 215/830), “God (Great and Glorious is He) looked into the hearts of the children of Adam and did not find a heart more humble than the one belonging to Moses (upon whom be peace). Thus, He singled out Moses from among them by speaking directly with him” (al-Ghazzālī, Iḥyāʾ [Beirut, 1997], 4:142).

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Truly I am God, there is no god but I. So worship Me, and perform the prayer for the remembrance of Me.

14 See also 3:18, where God testifies to His own Divinity: God bears witness that there is no god but He. In the present verse, perform the prayer for the remembrance of Me is said to refer to the act of remembering God much in the prayer (Bq). A deeper dimension of this act of remembering God is, as explained by the Sufi Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, for the servant to be the dhikr through which he becomes “drowned in the oceans of witnessing the One Who is Remembered (al-madhkūr), because the prayer is the place for witnessing secrets by means of lights (al-anwār), [and the place] for the disclosure of beauty (al-jamāl) to spirits by virtue of their ascent.”

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Surely the Hour is coming. I would keep it hidden, that every soul might be recompensed for its endeavors.

15 Commentators disagree regarding the phrase I would keep it hidden. For some, the modifier akādu can make the phrase mean, “I desire to keep it hidden” (R). Alternately, others read the phrase as a shortened version of an Arabic idiom that describes how one keeps something so hidden that it is even hidden from oneself. Through this form of poetic exaggeration, this phrase would be interpreted, “I have well-nigh kept it hidden [from Myself],” indicating how unknown the Hour is to creation (Q, R). Some read the disputed word as simply a statement of fact or assurance (Q), so that the phrase would mean, “I have indeed kept it hidden.”

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So let not he who believes not and follows his caprices
turn thee away from it, or thou wilt perish.

16 If it refers to the Hour (see v. 15), the message of this verse is not to lose faith in the Hour and fail to prepare for it (Kl) on account of those who do not believe in it and instead follow their ephemeral desires (Aj). Alternately, it is possible that it refers to the prayer mentioned in v. 14 (Z).

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17 And what is that in thy right hand, O Moses?”

18 He said, “It is my staff. I lean upon it and beat down leaves for my sheep. And I have other uses for it.”

17–18 God’s question to Moses is a rhetorical one intended to draw his attention to the staff so that when it becomes a serpent, Moses will know in a direct manner that it was the result of a great miracle (Bg). Al-Rāzī explains it this way: “It is as if God said, ‘O Moses, do you know the reality of that which is in your hand, that it is a piece of wood which can neither harm nor benefit, but which will then turn into a mighty serpent?’”

In traditional Islamic lore, the staff of Moses is said to have belonged initially to Adam and was made from a pillar in Heaven; it was then transmitted from prophet to prophet until it ended up with the prophet Shu‘ayb, who then gave it to Moses when he married Shu‘ayb’s daughter (ST); see also 7:106–8c. According to al-Tustarī, although Moses’ words I have other uses for it will become true in the future because God will soon make it the means by which Moses performs several major miracles, at this point Moses is unaware of the future function of the staff. This, al-Tustarī says, was God’s way of showing to Moses that even though he was to be a prophet, what even someone like him knows is ultimately very little in comparison to what God knows. See also 27:10; 28:31; cf. Exodus 4:2.

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19 He said, “Cast it, O Moses!”

20 So he cast it, and behold, it was a serpent, moving swiftly.
19–20 The serpent was long (IK) and mighty (‘azīm; JJ), and is said to have eaten a tree and swallowed a rock (IK, _TREE_). Its swift motion is a reference to its quickly slithering about on its belly like a small snake (JJ). See also 27:10; 28:31; cf. Exodus 4:3.

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21 He said, “Take hold of it, and fear not! We shall restore it to its former way.

21 Elsewhere in the Quran, when the staff becomes a serpent, Moses is said to have turned in retreat without returning (27:10; 28:31). Some say that Moses’ fear was assuaged when God informed him that He would cause the serpent to return to its former way (R), that is, its form as a staff (Aj). Yet others say that after God told Moses not to fear, a state of tranquility and contentment overcame him so that he was no longer fearful (R); see also 27:10–11c; cf. Exodus 4:3–4. Moses then laid hold of the serpent by its mouth, grabbing it by either the teeth or the jaw, at which time God turned it back into a wooden staff (R). Al-Qutubī explains that God showed Moses the serpent as a way of preparing him so that when he would go to Pharaoh and cast his staff before him and his entourage, he would not be frightened.

Some philosophers and mystics read this verse as alluding to various aspects of the human being’s lower nature. Moses’ staff, which became a serpent, is seen as the unrefined human soul which must be conquered in order for the soul’s true nature to be actualized, as explained by Mullā Ṣadrā: “There is no serpent like your soul; so slay it and purify it of the stain of its false beliefs and ugly opinions; or subjugate it until it becomes a muslim in your hand. First cast it aside like the staff of Moses; then pick it up with your right hand after it has returned to its former way and primordial disposition. It shall then live an intellectual life, striving for the Return and the Final Abode” (Mafātīḥ al-ghayb [Beirut, 2002], 81).

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22 And enclose thy hand in thy side. It will come forth white, without blemish, as another sign,

23 that We may show thee some of Our greatest signs.
22–23 Side here refers to what is beneath the upper arm (Z) or, more specifically, the region directly below the arm pit (KI); see also 27:12; 28:32. It is said that Moses’ skin was reddish brown and that when he removed his hand from his side, it was white, without blemish, meaning it was completely luminous, with no dark spots (Aj, Q); cf. 27:12; 28:32; Exodus 4:6–7. Moses’ hand is said to have shone with such brilliance by night and day that it was like the sun and the moon (Bg, Q), or its light was even more intense (Q). Moses’ white hand is referred to as another sign, which here denotes the second miracle given to him (Bḍ); see also 27:12, which speaks of Moses’ hand as among nine signs (see also 17:101c). According to Ibn ʿAbbās, Moses’ white hand was the greatest of his miracles (Aj).

Similar to the report in Exodus 34:34–35, it is said that when Moses later received the Torah from God on Mt. Sinai, his face shone with such radiance that he had to veil it when addressing his people (al-Thaʿlabī, Qīṣṣ al-anbiyāʾ [Cairo, 1951], 123–24).

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24 Go unto Pharaoh! Truly he has rebelled!”

24 This verse is identical to 79:17 (cf. v. 43); see also 26:10–11; 27:12; 28:32; cf. Exodus 3:7–10.

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25 He said, “My Lord! Expand for me my breast!

26 Make my affair easy for me,

27 and untie a knot from my tongue,

28 that they may understand my speech.

25–28 This part of Moses’ prayer is commonly uttered by Muslims at times of difficulty and anxiety. Moses’ prayer for his breast to be expanded is seen as a prayer to God to fill his being with the light of faith and certainty, or to help him carry out his message properly (R); see also 94:1c. Moses’ request that God untie a knot from his tongue is thought by some Muslim and Jewish commentators (see 26:12–13c) to be a reference to a physical speech impediment (Q, Z), namely a
The commentators relate a story that, while still a child, Moses struck Pharaoh and pulled some of the hair out of his beard, an act that threatened Pharaoh, as he interpreted it to mean that Moses would one day become his enemy and cause his kingdom to perish (according to some, Pharaoh had already developed a fear that one of the sons of the Israelites would overthrow him, which is arguably why he ordered that they all be killed; see 2:49c). Pharaoh ordered Moses to be put to death, but Pharaoh’s wife Āsiyah (regarding whom see 66:11c) tried to protect Moses, assuring him that Moses was just a young child and did not have the ability to discriminate between right and wrong. In order to test Moses, Pharaoh put a fiery coal and a ruby before him. If Moses took the ruby, that would mean that he could discriminate between things that look the same, but are in fact very different. In that case, Pharaoh would put him to death, since that would mean that he attacked Pharaoh intentionally and would one day be responsible for his demise. But if Moses took the fiery coal, that would mean that he could not discriminate between the objects placed before him, confirming Āsiyah’s defense of him and rendering his actions not worthy of punishment. With the objects in front of Moses, Gabriel came and guided his hand to lay hold of the fiery coal, which Moses then accidentally placed into his mouth, thereby burning his tongue and impeding his speech (Q, R, Ṭ); see also 43:52c.

Al-Rāzī observes that Moses’ request that God untie a knot from his tongue was motivated by his desire to be able to communicate effectively the message with whose delivery God had charged him. This is why Moses then says in v. 28, that they may understand my speech, that is, in conveying God’s message (JJ). According to Ibn Juzayy, the reason Moses requested that God only loosen and not completely remove a knot from his tongue is that he was not asking for complete eloquence, but for enough of the speech impediment to be removed so that people would understand his message clearly; cf. Exodus 4:10–11. Moses’ request was granted, for which, see v. 36c.

It is also possible that there is a connection between Moses’ request that his breast be expanded and that a knot in his tongue be loosened, namely his anticipating that, upon being denied by Pharaoh and his people and being called a liar by them, he would feel constriction in his breast, which would then result in his inability to speak with facility; see 26:12–13c.

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29 And appoint for me a helper from among my family,

30 Aaron, my brother.
Through him, increase my strength,
and make him a partner in my affair,
that we may glorify Thee much
and remember Thee much.

Truly Thou dost ever see us.”

29–35 Moses asks God to appoint his brother Aaron to help him carry out his duty of delivering the message to Pharaoh and his people (Bḍ). See also 19:53; 26:12–13c; cf. Exodus 4:13–16. Moses sought Aaron’s help because Aaron was older and more eloquent (Z). The word translated helper here is wazīr, which comes from a root that connotes the carrying of a weight or burden on behalf of another person, which is why many scholars assert that in Islamic political history wazīr came to denote the king’s right-hand man or chief minister, who was responsible for discharging many of the king’s duties (Bḍ, M, N). Moses’ request that God strengthen him with Aaron was answered, as is evidenced by 28:35: We shall strengthen thine arm through thy brother, and We shall grant an authority for both of you, such that they shall not reach you (M); see also v. 36.

With the request Make him a partner in my affair, Moses is asking God to make Aaron a prophet along with him (IJ, Z). It is said that the intention behind Moses’ words, That we may glorify Thee much, and remember Thee much, was so that he and his brother could work together in worshipping and remembering God, thereby increasing spiritually through their mutual encouragement (Z), which is in keeping with the Sufi concept of spiritual companionship (ṣubbah); see also 5:2: Help one another toward piety and reverence. In Shiite Islam, the relationship between Moses and Aaron is of special significance, since it is seen as analogous to the intimate connection between the Prophet Muhammad and his cousin and son-in-law ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, to whom the Prophet is reported to have said, “You are to me as Aaron was to Moses, except that there shall not be a prophet after me.” And like the Prophet and ʿAlī in the Islamic tradition, particularly in Shiite and Sufi sources, Moses represents the function of prophecy (nubuwwah) and Aaron that of sainthood (walāyah).
36 He said, “Thou hast been granted thy request, O Moses!

This verse refers to the fulfillment of all of Moses’ requests made in vv. 25–35 (Aj), including his prayer that a knot be loosened from his tongue (v. 27), enough of which was removed in order for him to convey his message effectively (R); see also 43:52c. Some of Moses’ requests were actualized later, such as God’s strengthening him through Aaron (see 28:35; Aj).

37 And We have indeed shown thee favor another time,

Al-Rāzī notes that the words We have indeed shown thee favor another time serve to assure Moses that, since God had already been protecting him and looking after his best interests before granting his requests in vv. 25–36, He would also tend to Moses’ needs in the future. Alternately, these words function as an indication to Moses that God had been looking after him from the beginning, so as to prepare him for the weighty task of prophecy and the deliverance of the Israelites from Pharaoh’s control (R).

38 when We revealed to thy mother that which was revealed:

This verse refers to the time when Pharaoh was killing the newborn males of the Israelites (see 2:49c; 28:4c). God cast into the heart of Moses’ mother, or caused her to see by means of a dream, what He wanted her to do with her infant in order to save him; see 28:7c. For the different senses of the root w-h-y, which usually denotes “revelation” but can in certain cases also mean “inspiration” employed in the Quran, see 16:68–69c; 28:7c.

39 ‘Cast him into the ark and cast it into the sea. Then the sea will throw him upon the bank. An enemy unto Me and an enemy unto him shall take him.’ And I cast upon thee a
love from Me, that thou mightest be formed under My eye.

39 The ark, which was made from a sycamore tree (Q), is said to have been built by a person who was a member of Pharaoh’s family but was a believer (Q; see 28:2; 40:28). The sea here is the Nile River (JJ, Kl, Q), and the enemy of God and Moses is Pharaoh (Kl). It is said that Pharaoh was busy supervising the Nile when he saw the ark and ordered that it be brought to him. His wife was present and saw the baby in it. Moved by compassion for the baby, she asked Pharaoh if they could keep him, and he granted her request (Kl); see also 28:7–10. I cast upon thee a love from Me can either mean that God loved Moses (Z), or that God caused Moses to be beloved to His servants in general (JJ, Ṭ) or to Āsiyah and Pharaoh in particular (Ṭ). According to al-Zamakhsharī, these interpretations are not mutually exclusive, for, as he asserts, “Whoever God loves, people will also love.” That thou mightest be formed under My eye refers to Moses’ being raised and nurtured under God’s protection and care (Aj).

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40 When thy sister went forth and said, ‘Shall I show you one who can nurse him?’ Thus We returned thee to thy mother that she might be comforted and grieve not. And thou didst slay a soul, but We saved thee from sorrow. And We tried thee with trials. Then thou didst remain some years among the people of Midian. Then thou didst come, as determined, O Moses.

40 Cf. 28:11–13. God is said to have caused the infant Moses to refuse to be suckled by anyone other than his mother, and thus Moses’ sister, who in 28:11 is told by their mother to follow Moses and is described as watching him from a distance while the household of Pharaoh were unaware, directed them to someone who could suckle him, namely Moses’ mother; see 28:12c. Moses’ being returned to his mother is seen as a fulfillment of God’s Promise that He would return him to her; see 28:7: Surely We shall bring him back to you and make him one of the messengers. Read in connection with 19:24–26, which speaks of God’s comforting Mary during her labor pains, the present verse is an indication of the great compassion and care that God has for the suffering of mothers. Although God’s comforting Moses’ mother and Mary during their labor is not directly connected to
the success of the prophetic missions of their sons (Moses and Jesus respectively), it is done purely out of compassion for the pain that these mothers had to suffer for the sake of their sons.

For the incident of Moses’ slaying an Egyptian and what ensued from this event, including Moses’ flight from Egypt, see commentary on 28:15–20. *We tried thee with trials* refers to the many great trials by which God tested Moses, one after the other, from the time he was saved from Pharaoh’s slaughtering the male children of the Israelites to his eventual escape from Egypt and his time in the wilderness, where he was without riding beast or provisions. It is understood by some that God had made Moses undergo all of these trials to prepare him to become a prophet and messenger (Aj). For the time Moses spent *among the people of Midian*, which is said to have been twenty-eight years in total (Aj, Q), see commentary on 28:21–28. The last part of this verse, where God tells Moses that he had come to the valley to meet Him *as determined*, means that God had ordained for Moses both the path that would lead to knowledge of Him and the time in which its attainment would occur; thus, Moses’ arrival at the valley where he met God was in accordance with the Divine Decree (Su).

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41 I selected thee for Myself.

41 God tells Moses *I selected thee for Myself* as a way of honoring Moses and drawing him nearer, since it is as if God is saying to him, “I have made a place for you in My Favor and My Generosity” (Kl). This verse is similar to 7:144: *O Moses! Verily I have chosen thee above mankind through My messages and My speaking [unto thee]. So take that which I have given thee, and be among the thankful*; see also 20:13c.

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42 Go forth, thou and thy brother, with My signs, and tire not in the remembrance of Me.

42 *My signs* refers to the nine signs given to Moses (JJ; see 17:101c). *Tire not in the remembrance of Me* means to not weaken in conveying the message (Q). According to a spiritual interpretation of this verse, it means that one should not invoke God only with the tongue while the heart is not vigilant and aware of the One who is being invoked (ST); see also vv. 33–34.
Go, both of you, unto Pharaoh! Truly he has rebelled!

Cf. the similar wording addressed to Moses in v. 24; 79:17; see also 26:10–11; 27:12; 28:32.

Yet speak unto him gently, that haply he may remember or have fear.”

According to some commentators, the command here is similar to the words God tells Moses to speak to Pharaoh in 79:18–19: Dost thou wish to be purified and that I guide thee to thy Lord that thou mightest have fear? (Bd, Z). Gently could also be rendered “a gentle word,” which some understand as a reference to the Islamic testimony of faith (shahādah), “There is no god but God” (lā ilāha illa’Llāh; IK). Gently is also seen as a general command to Moses to communicate the message to Pharaoh in a gentle manner (IK). Al-Rāzī notes that it is customary for tyrants, when they are admonished harshly, to increase in their obstinacy and pride. Thus, by speaking gently to Pharaoh, there was a chance he would respond positively to the admonition conveyed by Moses and Aaron; see also 16:125: Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation. And dispute with them in the most virtuous manner. Al-Rāzī also notes that since Moses was brought up by Pharaoh, it was only fitting that Moses be gentle with him, which would be in keeping with the importance of observing the rights of one’s caregivers.

Remember here refers to Pharaoh’s taking heed of the warning given to him (JJ) and turning away from his misguidance (IK), while fear is understood to mean that Pharaoh would be fearful of God, return to Him (JJ), and be obedient toward Him (IK). Haply (laʿalla) conveys the sense of “perhaps,” “hopefully,” or “it might be that” (on laʿalla, see also 2:21c; 2:24c; 11:12c; 28:67c). In this case, haply is said for the benefit of Moses and Aaron (JJ), who could not know the outcome of delivering God’s warning and admonition to Pharaoh, but should have hope in the possibility that he would remember or have fear (R).
hastily with us, or that he will transgress.”

46 He said, “Fear not! Truly I am with ye twain; I hear and I see.

45–46 It is reported that Moses and Aaron’s fear that Pharaoh would deal hastily with them refers to his hastening their punishment (JJ); for Pharaoh’s tendency to punish swiftly as evidenced by his summary execution of the sorcerers, see vv. 70–73 and 7:124; see also 7:124c. Alternately, it can refer to Pharaoh’s killing them without actually pondering over the proofs they would have brought to him (Ṭs). Moses and Aaron’s fear that Pharaoh would transgress conveys the concern that he would go beyond bounds in punishing them, or that, in his attempts to refute them, his disbelief (kufr) would increase (Ṭs). God’s telling Moses and Aaron that He is with them is understood to mean that He will protect them and help them (Bḍ); cf. Exodus 3:11–12.

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47 So come unto him and say, ‘Truly we are two messengers of your Lord. So send forth with us the Children of Israel and punish them not. We have brought you a sign from your Lord. Peace be upon him who follows guidance!

48 Truly it has been revealed unto us that punishment shall come upon him who denies and turns away.”’

47–48 Moses and Aaron were inviting Pharaoh to believe in God and to free the children of Israel (Kl) who were under the control of Pharaoh and his people—Pharaoh used to kill their children and force them into labor in order to serve him, all the while humiliating them (Kl). A sign from your Lord is a collective reference to the miracles of Moses’ staff and his white hand (Kl). Peace be upon him who follows guidance conveys the teaching that whoever believes in God’s signs will have greetings of peace from God, the angels, and the believers, which will also entail safety in both this life and the next (Aj); punishment in this world and the next shall come upon him who denies God’s signs and turns away
He said, “So who is the Lord of you two, O Moses?”

He said, “Our Lord is He Who gives everything its creation, then guides [it].”

Al-Rāzī notes that the question posed by Pharaoh here was a preliminary stage to his deeper inquiry about God found in 26:23 (And what is the Lord of the worlds?); in other words, Pharaoh, in questioning Moses, was actually seeking answers to theological questions. Other commentators reject the idea that Pharaoh was making a serious theological inquiry into the Nature of God and instead interpret his questions as a form of confrontation (see 26:23–24c). If seen as a sincere inquiry, So who is the Lord of you two, O Moses? is interpreted as a question regarding God’s modality (kayfiyyah, lit. “howness”), or how He is who He is. When Moses answered Pharaoh by pointing to the signs of God’s Being, citing Him as He Who gives everything its creation, then guides [it], Pharaoh realized that he would not be able to receive any further answers from Moses concerning God’s Nature, and so proceeded to ask him in 26:23, And what is the Lord of the worlds?, which is an inquiry into essence or quiddity (māhiyyah); in other words, Pharaoh was asking Moses to define God’s Essence (R). But God’s Essence is above any and all descriptions and definitions and is completely inaccessible through human means. For Moses’ reply to Pharaoh’s question concerning God’s Essence, see 26:23–24c; see also Exodus 3:13–15.

He said, “What, then, of former generations?”

He said, “Knowledge thereof is with my Lord in a Book—He errs not, nor does He forget—

Pharaoh’s question means, “What is the condition of the former generations after death, and what has God done with them?” Moses’ reply confirms that knowledge of this matter is an unfathomable affair that none knows but God (Aj). By a Book is meant the Preserved Tablet (see 85:22c).
the One Who made the earth a cradle for you, and threaded paths for you therein. He sent down water from the sky, wherewith We brought forth diverse kinds of vegetation [saying],

‘Eat and pasture your cattle.’” Truly in that are signs for those possessed of intelligence.

Cf. 43:10–11. The relationship between water and vegetal life is discussed in 6:99 and 13:4. For the benefits of cattle, see 6:142c; 16:5–7c. Intelligence in those possessed of intelligence translates nuhā, which is derived from a root that also connotes “restraining” or “prohibiting”; here it refers to those who, through the use of their rational faculties (ʿaql), avoid vile actions and ways of thinking (JJ).

From it We created you, and unto it We shall bring you back, and from it We shall bring you forth a another time.

It here refers to the earth (ard; T) or dust (turāb; K), although the latter can also denote “earth.” See also 43:11. This verse is often recited at Muslim funerals, as it instructs people that human beings are made of earth (i.e., clay), are buried in it when they die, and shall be resurrected from it on the Last Day.

We indeed showed him Our signs, all of them; yet he denied and refused.

He said, “Have you come to us in order to expel us from our land with your sorcery, O Moses?
But we shall surely produce for you sorcery like it. So appoint a tryst between you and us at a neutral place, which neither you nor we shall fail to keep.”

Our signs, all of them refers to the nine signs that Moses brought to Pharaoh and his people (JJ, Z); see 17:101c. Pharaoh denied the signs and refused to accept the truth (Z). Sorcery like it means “sorcery” like the kind that Moses had come with (Ṭū). For references to similar accusations of sorcery made against Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, and other prophets, see 5:110c. A tryst and neutral place refer to the fixed time of their meeting (Ṭū) and its location respectively (M).

He said, “Your tryst shall be on the Day of Adornment; let the people be gathered when the sun has risen high.”

Then Pharaoh turned away and devised his scheme. Then he came.

The Day of Adornment is considered by many to be the Day of ʿĀshūrāʾ (the tenth of Muḥarram) or a day of celebration (Kl, M) on which the Egyptians’ adorned themselves and gathered together (JJ). Devised his scheme refers to Pharaoh’s gathering his sorcerers together along with all those who would aid him in his encounter with Moses, as well as to the tools necessary for the sorcerers to carry out their trickery (R).

Moses said to them, “Woe unto you! Do not fabricate a lie against God, lest He should destroy you with a punishment. Whosoever fabricates [lies] has failed.”

In this context, Moses’ words Do not fabricate a lie against God mean, “Do not call God’s signs and miracles sorcery” (Z); see also 10:77.
So they debated their affair among themselves and kept secret their intimate discourse.

They said, “These two are sorcerers who wish to expel you from your land with their sorcery and to do away with your exemplary way of life.

So gather your plot, then come in ranks. Today, whosoever gains the upper hand will surely have prospered!”

Upon hearing Moses’ words, the sorcerers consulted one another in private concerning the best means by which they could oppose and overcome him (Aj). Al-Māturīdī, the important Quran commentator and founder of the Māturīdī school of Sunni theology, notes that the sorcerers’ statement that Moses and Aaron wish to expel them from their land is taken from an identical statement by Pharaoh with regard to Moses in 26:34–35: Truly this is a knowing sorcerer, who desires to expel you from your land with his sorcery (see also v. 57). Their sorcery refers to the miracles that Moses performed for Pharaoh earlier (Aj), namely the nine signs that Pharaoh took to be sorcery (see v. 56). By their exemplary way of life the sorcerers were referring to their easy lifestyle, which entailed all of their needs being met by the Israelites by virtue of the Egyptians’ dominance over them (M).

They said, “O Moses! Either you cast, or we shall be the first to cast.”

He said, “Nay, you cast.” Then, behold, their ropes and their staffs appeared to him, through their sorcery, to move swiftly.

See 7:115–16c.
whereat Moses conceived a fear in his soul.

We said, “Fear not! Truly thou art uppermost.

67–68 Moses conceived a fear in his soul means fear entered into his heart because, after the sorcerers had caused their ropes to appear as serpents and were seen by the people, Moses was apprehensive that this might prevent the people from seeing the truth of the sign with which he had come (M).

Cast that which is in thy right hand; it will devour what they have produced. They have produced only a sorcerer’s trick. And the sorcerer prospers not, wherever he may go.”

69 When Moses cast his staff, it devoured all their deceptions (7:117) and whatsoever they did was shown to be false (7:118). See also 10:77, where Moses makes a similar statement about the ultimate futility of the work of sorcerers. After the sorcerers were defeated, they turned back, humbled (7:119). See also 20:89c.

Then the sorcerers were cast down in prostration. They said, “We believe in the Lord of Aaron and Moses.”

70 See commentary on 7:119–22.

He said, “Do you believe in Him before I give you leave? He is indeed your chief, who has taught you sorcery. Now I shall surely cut off your hands and your feet on alternate sides, and I shall surely crucify you on the trunks of palm trees. And you will surely know which of us [inflicts] a more severe and lasting punishment!”
They said, “We shall never prefer you to the clear proofs that have come to us, nor to Him who originated us. So decree whatsoever you decree; you only decree in the life of this world.

Truly we believe in our Lord, that He may forgive us our sins and the sorcery that you compelled us to perform. And God is better and more lasting!”

71–73 See commentary on 7:123–26; cf. also v. 71 with 26:49. The sorcerers reached such a high degree of certainty in God that they came to see the trials and pleasures of this life as merely passing and ultimately finite in comparison to the state of eternal felicity in the Afterlife (K). The sorcerers’ statement that God is better and more lasting means that the rewards that God can give are better than the rewards that Pharaoh can give, and that God’s Punishment, when meted out, is more lasting than Pharaoh’s punishment (JJ); see also 28:60; 42:36; cf. v. 131.

Verily, whosoever comes unto his Lord guilty, surely his shall be Hell, wherein he neither dies nor lives.

But whosoever comes unto Him as a believer, having performed righteous deeds, theirs shall be the highest ranks—

Gardens of Eden with rivers running below, abiding therein. That is the recompense of one who purifies himself.

74–76 One neither dies nor lives in Hell because its inhabitants will not experience rest in it, nor will they live a kind of life from which they can draw positive benefit (JJ); see also 14:16–17; 87:13. For the various ranks in Paradise, see 4:96c. The Gardens of Eden are mentioned in several places in the Quran; see
And We indeed revealed unto Moses, “Set forth with My servants by night and strike for them a dry path through the sea. Be not afraid of being overtaken, and fear not.”

The first part of this verse is identical to the first part of 26:52. Moses followed God’s Command to go with the Israelites by night, and they were pursued by Pharaoh and his hosts at sunrise (26:60). See also 26:61–64.

Then Pharaoh pursued them with his hosts, and they were overwhelmed by the sea that enshrouded them.

Pharaoh led his people astray, and guided them not.

For the drowning of Pharaoh and his hosts, see 7:136c; see also 2:50; 8:54; 10:90; 17:103; 26:65–66; 28:40; 43:55; 44:24; 51:40. The fate of Pharaoh in particular is discussed in 10:90–92c.

O Children of Israel! We have saved you from your enemies and have appointed a tryst for you on the right side of the Mount. And We sent down unto you manna and quails.

Eat of the good things We have provided you, but exceed not the limits therein, lest My Wrath be unleashed upon you. And he upon whom My Wrath is unleashed has been cast into ruin.
Cf. 2:57, 60; 7:160. For God’s sending down *manna and quails* to the Israelites and the command to *eat of the good things We have provided you*, see 2:57c. *Exceed not the limits therein* is a warning against excess combined with ungratefulness for the blessings that they had been given (JJ); see 2:61 for the Israelites’ request for foods other than what they had been given and the subsequent Divine Response for their ingratitude. For the Israelites’ asking Moses to make them an idol similar to the ones they found others worshipping, along with Moses’ response, see 7:138–41c; for their taking an idol to worship apart from God while Moses was on Mt. Sinai, see vv. 87–88.

A *tryst* for the Israelites *on the right side of the Mount* refers to the reception of the Torah, which would soon be given to Moses at Mt. Sinai (JJ; see vv. 83–84); cf. 19:52, which speaks of *the right side of the Mount* in reference to Mt. Horeb, where Moses met God and was chosen as a messenger (see v. 10); see also 28:29, 46.

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And surely I am most forgiving toward the one who repents and believes and works righteousness, and thereafter is rightly guided.

For the nature and significance of God’s Forgiveness, see 7:156c; 39:53c.

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“What hast made thee hasten from thy people, O Moses?”

He said, “They are close upon my footsteps, and I hastened unto Thee, my Lord, that Thou mayest be content.”

Moses appointed Aaron over the Israelites while he spent forty days on Mt. Sinai in retreat, fasting and having intimate discourse with God (see commentary on 7:142–43). Then he hastened to his meeting place with God on the Mount (IK; see v. 80; 7:143). It is said that Moses rushed to his meeting place with God in order to fulfill immediately God’s Command (KI), and out of an intense
desire to speak with Him (Z). Moses’ words, *that Thou mayest be content*, mean that Moses also came hurriedly to their meeting so that God would be more content with him (IK, Z). God’s question to Moses is not out of ignorance, but rather functions as a means of allowing Moses to articulate to himself the purpose of his haste, which engenders in him a heightened sense of awe and reverence for the One before Whom he stands. Moses’ statement that the Israelites *are close upon* his *footsteps* means that they have alighted in a spot close to the Mount (IK).

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85 He said, “Truly We tried thy people in thine absence, and the Samaritan led them astray.”

85 For the Samaritan (al-Sāmirī), see also 7:148c. It is said that al-Sāmirī is a generic title derived from the name of the Israelite tribe (al-Sāmirah) to which this individual belonged (Z). The Samaritan is believed to have been a hypocrite who did not accept Moses’ message, but appeared to do so outwardly (Z).

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86 Then Moses returned to his people, angry and aggrieved. He said, “O my people! Did your Lord not make you a goodly Promise? Did the pact seem too long for you? Or did you desire that the anger of your Lord be unleashed upon you, such that you failed your tryst with me?”

86 This verse is similar to 7:150 (see also 17:150c). God’s *goodly Promise* refers to His Promise that He would give the Torah to the Israelites to live by (JJ see v. 80). See also 20:80–81c, where the Israelites are warned of God’s Wrath if they were to be ungrateful.

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87 They said, “We did not fail our tryst with thee of our own will, but we were laden with the burden of the people’s ornaments. So we cast them [into the pit], and
thus did the Samaritan throw also.”

87 The Israelites’ response indicates that they were tricked by the Samaritan. According to some, the people’s ornaments refers to the heavy jewelry lent to the Israelites by the Egyptians before the latter were destroyed, and which was therefore unlawful for the Israelites to keep (Kl, R, Z). From a spiritual point of view, the burden of the people’s ornaments can represent worldly riches or wealth, which becomes a kind of spiritual “burden” for people by giving them a false sense of security and immortality that weakens their sense of reliance upon God and their ultimate return to Him, as in 104:1–3: Woe unto every slandering backbiter who amasses wealth and tallies it, supposing that his wealth makes him immortal. See also 18:7–8c; 18:46c.

Aaron told the Israelites that these ornaments were a source of religious defilement (najas) and thus were sinful to keep; he ordered them to throw these ornaments into a pit until Moses returned, which they all did (R). Alternately, some have said that it was the Samaritan who ordered them to throw the ornaments into the pit, telling them that they should wait to see what God wants to do with the ornaments (Kl, R). Then, without their knowledge, the Samaritan lit the pit on fire and used the now malleable ornaments to form the golden calf (Kl); see also 7:148c.

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88 Then he brought forth for them a calf as a mere body that lowed, and they said, “This is your god and the god of Moses, though he has forgotten.”

88 The golden calf made sounds as though it were a real calf. Some say it did so because it had a number of perforations and hollows in it that made a kind of whistling sound when the wind blew; others report that when the Samaritan took a handful [of dust] from the footsteps of the messenger (v. 96) and cast it into the molten gold, it caused the calf to low; see 7:148c; 20:95–96c. They refers to the Samaritan and his followers who were already inclined to idolatrous tendencies (Q). The reference to Moses having forgotten is prompted by the Samaritan’s suggestion that Moses forgot that the calf was Moses’ god and thus went elsewhere in search of him (R).

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Have they not considered that it does not respond to them with words, and that it has no power over what harm or benefit may come to them?

Cf. 7:148, which mentions that the calf did not speak to them or guide them in any way. Despite the calf’s unintelligible lowing sounds, it was nothing in comparison to God, Who spoke clearly to Moses; see 7:148c. It can also be said that such “senseless miracles”—that is, supposed “miracles” that are unaccompanied by meaningful spiritual guidance—are ultimately without purpose or value, and are thus actually evil in their attempt to detract from prophetic miracles that come as a support for rationally comprehensible revelation and guidance. The Samaritan’s trickery also bears some analogy to the magic of the sorcerers (see 7:117–18; 10:77) who, at Pharaoh’s behest, tried to undermine the religious message of Moses by challenging the uniqueness of the wonders or marvels accompanying it.

And Aaron had indeed said to them earlier, “O my people! You are merely being tested by this, and truly your Lord is the Compassionate. So follow me and obey my command!”

Aaron said this to the Israelites before Moses returned, calling them to worship the true God, and enjoining them to obey his command to worship God (JJ). Cf. Aaron’s role here and in Exodus 32:1–6.

They said, “We shall not cease to be its devotees till Moses returns unto us.”

This means that the people insisted they would not cease worshipping the calf until Moses returned (M).
He said, “O Aaron! What hindered thee, when thou didst see them going astray,
that thou didst not follow me? Didst thou disobey my command?”

He said, “O son of my mother! Seize not my beard or my head. Truly I feared that thou wouldst say, ‘Thou hast caused division among the Children of Israel, and thou hast not heeded my word.’”

92–94 While on the mountain, Moses was informed by God that his people had gone astray. He thus returned to them in a state of anger and grief over their actions, and when he saw their worship of the idol, he threw down the Tablets in anger and shock. Since Moses had left Aaron in charge of the Israelites, upon his return he rebuked Aaron for what had happened while he was absent. See also 7:150c.

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He said, “What was your purpose, O Samaritan?”

He said, “I saw that which they saw not. So I took a handful [of dust] from the footsteps of the messenger, and I cast it. Thus did my soul prompt me.”

95–96 A handful [of dust] from the footsteps of the messenger refers to the tracks of dust or sand left behind by the “horse of life” (faras al-hayāt), upon which the Archangel Gabriel was riding when he was sent to take Moses to meet God at Mt. Sinai, an event witnessed by the Samaritan (Z). The Samaritan tooled some of this dust and noticed that whenever this dust was placed upon something, it would become spirit, flesh, and blood; that is, it would become a living thing (Q).
He said, “Be gone! In this life it shall be yours to say, ‘Touch [me] not!’ And truly for you there is a tryst that you cannot fail to keep. Now observe your god, to whom you remained devoted: we shall surely burn it and scatter its ashes in the sea!”

97 In this life it shall be yours to say, “Touch [me] not!” is understood to mean that the Samaritan was forbidden from then on to be in contact with the Israelites in any way whatsoever (T). The tryst that you cannot fail to keep is in reference to the punishment that the Samaritan would inevitably encounter, in either this life or the next (M). Since the idol was a living animal made of flesh and blood (see v. 96c), Moses first burned it and then cast its ashes into the sea (Ts). According to Ibn Kathîr, the calf was made of gold, but then turned into a living creature, which was then burned and the ashes thrown into the sea (cf. 2:93). It is also said that Moses wanted to kill the Samaritan, but that God revealed to him that he should not do so (Ts); cf. Exodus 32:20.

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98 Your only god is God, besides whom there is no other god. He encompasses all things in knowledge.

98 For God as encompassing all things in knowledge, which means that everything that takes place does so in accordance with His Wisdom and His Knowledge, see 40:7, which speaks of God encompassing all things in Mercy and Knowledge, as well as 6:80c; 7:89; 65:12.

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99 Thus do We narrate unto thee some of the accounts of those who have come before. And We have given thee a Reminder from Our Presence.

99 Thus do We narrate; that is, just as We related to you the story of Moses, so too do We relate to you reports of other older communities (JJ); see also 7:107. By a Reminder from Our Presence is meant the Quran (JJ, R). See also 7:107
28:44–46.

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Whosoever turns away from it, verily he shall bear it as a burden on the Day of Resurrection,

abiding therein. How evil a burden for them on the Day of Resurrection—

100–101 *Whosoever turns away from it*—that is, the Quran (Aj)—shall be subject to a “weighty” punishment (Bḍ) on the Day of Resurrection. *Abiding therein* means that such a person will continually be in this state of punishment (Bg); see also v. 124; 72:17.

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the Day the trumpet shall be blown, and We shall gather the guilty on that Day, blind.

They will whisper among themselves, “You have tarried only ten [days].”

We know well that which they will say, when the most exemplary of them in conduct will say, “You have tarried only a day!”

102–4 *The Day the trumpet shall be blown* refers to the second blowing of the trumpet, which will signal the Day of Resurrection (R); the trumpet’s first blowing ushers in the Last Day, when the world will come to an end; see 39:68c. For the function of the trumpet in Islamic eschatology, see 6:73c. By *the guilty* here is meant the disbelievers and the wrongdoers, namely those who ascribed partners unto God (R). For the manner in which the disbelievers will be blind on the Last Day, see vv. 124–25; see also 20:124–27c. According to some, the reason that the guilty will *whisper among themselves* is that they will be so terrified that they will barely be able to speak (R); cf. v. 108. *Only ten [days]* refers to the period of time
people in the Hereafter will think they had spent in the life of this world (R), although some say that it relates to the period of time in the grave (R). Although most say that *ten* refers to a number of days (as in 23:112–13), some suggest that it refers to a number of hours (as in 79:46; R). In Arabic, the term *days* can have different symbolic meanings and may even denote entire cosmological periods; see 14:5–6c. *The most exemplary of them in conduct* refers to those who were the most just (JJ) and most knowledgeable (Kl); see also 17:52; 23:114.

According to one interpretation, people will deem their time on earth to have been slight because of their intense fear on the Last Day (JJ). From another perspective, however, the life of this world will seem so insignificant to them on the Last Day that all of their actions, in the face of eternity, would amount to only a few days or hours, much like a dream whose duration seems long, but when the dreamer awakens, he or she realizes that it took place in only a few fleeting moments. The Prophet (or, according to some, Ṭāli) is reported to have said, “People are asleep, and when they die, they awaken”; see the essay “Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran.” Meditating upon this saying, MullāṢadrā explains the manner in which every soul will awaken in the afterlife: “Every soul, whether it be felicitous or miserable, when it is disengaged from the body and travels to this abode . . . its inner faculties will become powerful and piercing because of [its] perception of the matters related to the next world, as in His Most High’s saying, *Now We have removed from you your cover; so today your sight is piercing [50:22]*.”

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They ask thee about the mountains. Say, “My Lord shall scatter them as ashes.

And He will leave it a barren plain.

You will see no crookedness or curvature therein.”

105–7 The destruction of the mountains on the Last Day is referred to throughout the Quran; see 18:47; 52:10; 56:5; 69:14; 70:9; 77:10; 78:20; 81:3; 101:5.

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On that Day they shall follow a herald in whom there is no crookedness. And voices will be humbled before the Compassionate, and you will hear naught but a murmur.

The reference here is to the Archangel Seraphiel (Isrāfīl), who according to some traditions will be standing on the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem on the Last Day or the Day of Resurrection, calling people with his powerful voice (JJ Z). Seraphiel is also the archangel responsible for the two blowings of the trumpet, for which, see 39:68c. Some say that Seraphiel will call people after the second trumpet blast (Aj), in which case the scene of his calling would not be the Last Day, but the Day of Resurrection. That there will be no crookedness in the herald means that people will not be able to turn away from him (IK, Z). Out of awe, peoples’ voices will be humbled (Aj). The murmur they will hear on this Day is said to be the slight sounds that people’s feet will make (AJ, JJ, Z) as they walk to the Gathering Place (mahshar; Aj, Z). Murmur translates hamsah, which denotes the pitter-patter sound of a camel’s hoofs (AJ, JJ, Z); cf. v. 103.

On that Day intercession will be of no benefit, save [that of] those whom the Compassionate has granted leave and with whose word He is content.

For a discussion of intercession on the Day of Judgment, see 2:48c; 2:255c. Some theologians say that the reference to with whose word He is content encompasses anyone who testifies to God’s Oneness, while the Mu’tazilites restrict this status to those who believe and who also have not committed major sins; see 21:28c.

He knows that which is before them and that which is behind them, and they encompass Him not in knowledge.

This verse is similar to part of 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; see 2:255c; see also 21:28; 22:76. The main
difference between the present verse and 2:255 is in the phrase about “knowledge.” In 2:255 it says, *They encompass nothing of His Knowledge,* emphasizing creatures’ inability to comprehend God’s Knowledge. The present verse has *They encompass Him not in knowledge,* highlighting their inability to know Him fully. As the first Caliph, Abū Bakr, is reported to have said, “The inability to comprehend [God] is comprehension itself” (Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II: 619.35).

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111 Faces will be humbled before the Living, the Self-Subsisting. And whosoever bears wrongdoing will have failed.

111 On the Day of Judgment, people, here symbolized by their faces (as in 88:8–9), will be in a lowly state like slaves, and the kingdom will belong solely to God (R); see also 40:16. For God as the Living, the Self-Subsisting, see 2:255c.

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112 But whosoever performs righteous deeds and is a believer, he shall fear neither wrong nor deprivation.

112 In several places the Quran couples righteous deeds and belief—that is, action and faith—as the means by which people attain salvation; see 4:124; 16:97; 17:19; 21:94; 40:40. *Deprivation* in this verse is in reference to the detraction of one’s good deeds (Kl); that is, in the Afterlife, believers will not be slighted in the least in regard to the righteous actions that they have performed.

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113 Thus have We sent it down as an Arabic Quran, and We have varied the threat therein that haply they may be reverent, or [that] it might occasion remembrance for them.

113 The Quran refers to itself variously as being an Arabic Quran (12:2; 39:28; 41:3; 42:7; 43:3), a judgment in Arabic (13:37), and [in] a clear, Arabic tongue (16:103; cf. 26:195; 46:12); see 13:37c. *We have varied the threat therein*
is to say that in the Quran the threat of Divine Punishment or Sanction is repeated in various ways (R). It might occasion remembrance for them means that those who read about the destruction of previous nations in the Quran might draw lessons from their stories (JJ).

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Exalted is God, the True Sovereign. Be not in haste with the Quran before its revelation is completed for thee, but say, “My Lord! Increase me in knowledge!”

114 This verse refers to the Prophet’s fear of forgetting the verses of revelation, which led him to repeat quickly what was being revealed to him by the Archangel Gabriel while the revelation was taking place (Q, R); see 75:16-18c. Alternatively, it could be an admonishment to the Prophet not to seek to receive the revelation before its appropriate time (R).

My Lord! Increase me in knowledge! is commonly invoked by Muslims at various times, such as when they are students beginning their studies. The Prophet is reported to have said, “If a day comes upon me in which I do not increase in a knowledge that draws me nearer to God, may God not bless me that day” (Ṭs). Thus, if the Prophet is told to pray for increase in knowledge, then, a fortiori, all Muslims are expected to do the same. Hence, Ibn ēArabī says, “God did not say to His Prophet, Say, ‘My Lord! Increase me in knowledge!’ , nor did He allow us to hear that, except as a way of alerting us so that we would [also] say this and seek increase from God. If this were specific to the Prophet, God would not have allowed us to hear it, or He would have mentioned that it was specific to him” (Futūḥāt, II: 531.7). This supplication has often been a prayer of the Sufis in particular, although it is used by pious Muslims in general.

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And We indeed made a pact with Adam aforetime, but he forgot. And We found no resoluteness in him.

115 The pact that God made with Adam refers to His telling him not to approach the tree (R); see 2:35c; 7:19c. By aforetime is meant either before Adam’s actual eating from the tree or, more generally, before the coming of the Prophet Muhammad and the revelation of the Quran (R). He forgot denotes Adam’s forgetting his pact (Q) or abandoning it (JJ, Q); see also v. 121. The Prophet is
reported to have said, “Adam forgot, and thus his progeny forgot.” Adam is the model for human beings to follow, since God taught Adam the names, all of them (2:31). According to the close spiritual companion of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, Shams-i Tabrīzī (disappeared in 644/1247), people should keep in mind that Adam only forgot one time, and so they also should allow themselves to forget only once. Concerning the person who constantly falls into error in the spiritual life, Shams says, “The custom of his father [Adam] was [that he only forgot] one time—one is enough!” (Maqālāt [Tehran, 1990], 767). On human forgetfulness, see 59:19c.

We found no resoluteness in him can mean that God did not find in Adam the resolve to disobey Him (R), although he and his wife did eat from the tree because they were deceived by Satan (see 7:21–22c); in other words, he erred, but did not do so intentionally (Ṭs). Or We found no resoluteness in him can mean that God did not find in Adam the moral resolve to obey His Prohibition against eating from the tree (R). According to this latter interpretation, some see the reference to God not finding resoluteness in Adam as the reason for his not being counted as one of the resolute among the messengers (īlu’ l-ʿazmi min al-rusul), for whom, see 46:35c.

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116 And when We said unto the angels, “Prostrate yourselves before Adam,” they prostrated, save Iblīs; he refused.

116 See 2:30c; 7:11c.

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117 We said, “O Adam! Truly this is an enemy unto thee and thy wife. So let him not expel the two of you from the Garden, such that thou wouldst be wretched.

118 Truly it is for thee that thou shalt neither hunger therein, nor go naked,

119 and that thou shalt neither thirst therein, nor suffer from
the heat of the sun.”

117–19 For the warning to Adam and Eve that Satan is an enemy unto them, see 7:21–22c. Let him not expel the two of you from the Garden is an admonition from God to Adam and Eve that they should not obey Satan, for he will cause them to leave the Garden through his deceiving them to eat from the forbidden tree (K1). Such that thou wouldst be wretched refers to the hardship and fatigue that Adam and Eve would experience because of the need to earn a livelihood in this world (M, Z). In other words, by obeying Satan, they would leave their state of comfort in the Garden and descend into the life of this world, which is filled with hardship; see also 2:36; 7:24–25. Thus, the references in v. 118 to being neither hungry nor naked, and in v. 119 to neither being thirsty nor experiencing the sun’s heat, evoke the state of complete ease and comfort that Adam and Eve experienced in the Garden, which is juxtaposed to the hardships of the life of this world which they would encounter if they were to succumb to Satan’s suggestions. For other accounts of Adam and Eve’s being warned by God, Satan’s deceiving them, their fall from Paradise, and their remorse over their actions, see 2:35–37 and 7:19–23.

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120 Then Satan whispered to him. He said, “O Adam! Shall I show thee the Tree of Everlastingness and a kingdom that never decays?”

121 So they both ate therefrom. Then their nakedness was exposed to them, and they began to sew together the leaves of the Garden. Adam disobeyed his Lord, and so he erred.

120–21 See 7:21–22c. The offer made by Satan (who presents himself as a sincere adviser to Adam and Eve in 7:21) to show them the Tree of Everlastingness was an invitation to achieve immortality (Bg). According to the Muʿtazilites, the last part of v. 121, Adam disobeyed his Lord, and so he erred, means that Adam committed a minor sin (ṣaghīrah; R). However, according to others, Adam did not commit a sin in the real sense of the term. Rather, he is metaphorically characterized as “disobeying” God because his proximity to Him dictated that he choose the most optimal of paths, whereas he ended up choosing one that was less optimal, but not actually sinful (Aj). According to al-Rāzī, Adam’s actions took place before he became a prophet, an interpretation that would
be favored by the majority of theologians for whom prophethood and sin are mutually exclusive. On whether prophets can sin, see also 22:52c; 27:10–11c.

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122 Then his Lord chose him, and relented unto him and guided [him].

122 For God’s pardoning of Adam, see 2:37c.

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123 He said, “Get down from it, both you together, each of you an enemy to the other. And if guidance should come unto you from Me, then whosoever follows My Guidance shall not go astray, nor be wretched.

123 This verse is understood to be an address to Adam and Eve and their future progeny, indicating their banishment from Paradise, but also the means by which they could recover their original nature while on earth—by following God’s Guidance. See also 2:38–39c; 7:24–25c. For the significance of the fall of Adam and Eve, see 7:24–25c.

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124 But whosoever turns away from the remembrance of Me, truly his shall be a miserable life, and We shall raise him blind on the Day of Resurrection.”

125 He will say, “My Lord! Why hast Thou raised me blind, when I used to see?”

126 He will say, “Thus it is. Our signs came unto you, but you forgot them. Even so, this Day shall you be forgotten!”
Thus do We recompense whosoever is prodigal and believes not in the signs of his Lord. And surely the punishment of the Hereafter is more severe and more lasting.

The remembrance of Me can refer to the Quran in particular (JJ), in which case it would be translated “My Reminder,” or to the guidance that reminds people of God and calls them to Him in general (Aj). A miserable life is a life that is constricted (Kl, Ṭ), especially spiritually. Or, it may refer to a life in which one is merely given to the things of the world and lives in a state where he is fearful of their being taken away from him, which is contrasted with the life of the believer—that is, one who lives in hope for the world to come, who may be safe from evil and disbelief, and whose life is whelmed in the grace (barakah) of faith (Bd). Juxtaposing such people with the believers, al-Zamakhsharī calls attention to 16:97: Whosoever works righteousness, whether male or female, and is a believer, We shall give them new life, a good life, and We shall surely render unto them their reward in accordance with the best of that which they used to do.

Some people are said to be raised blind on the Last Day and in the Hereafter, even though they could see with their physical sight while alive on earth. This form of blindness in the Afterlife is the direct result of spiritual blindness in the life of this world, as in 17:72: And whosoever was blind in this [life] will be blind in the Hereafter, and further astray from the way; see also 17:97, and 22:46: Truly it is not the eyes that go blind, but it is hearts within breasts that go blind. For the various types of spiritual blindness in this world, see 5:71c. From another perspective, those who were spiritually blind in this life will come to “see” the reality of things in the next life; that is, they will come to witness, in a crystal-clear manner, the truths they rejected in this life (see 20:102–4c; 50:22).

To forget Our signs (v. 126) means to abandon and disbelieve in God’s signs (JJ), namely, the proofs brought by His messengers (Aj). For God’s “forgetting” the disbelievers on the Last Day, see 7:51c and 45:34c. For the prodigal, see 10:12c. The promise that the chastisement of the Hereafter is more severe and more lasting means that the disbeliever’s perpetual blindness in the Hereafter is more intense than any kind of constriction that he will experience in this life (Z). Alternately, it can mean that God’s leaving the disbeliever in his state of blindness in the Hereafter is more intense and longer-lasting than the blindness that results from his turning away from God’s signs (Z).
Does it not serve as guidance for them, how many generations We destroyed before them, amid whose dwellings they walk? Truly in that are signs for those possessed of intelligence.

Along with a number of other verses (17:17; 19:74; 36:31; 38:3; 50:36), this verse refers to the generations that were destroyed for their refusal to accept the messengers sent to them by God (see also 6:6; 7:4; 21:11; 22:45, 48; 47:13, which speak of the destruction of towns for the same reason). For an almost identical verse, see 32:26. For the meaning of those possessed of intelligence, see 20:53–54c.

And were it not for a Word that had already gone forth from thy Lord and a term appointed, it would be inevitable.

If God had not already determined to put off the disbelievers’ punishment until the Day of Judgment (JJ, Sh), their destruction would be inevitable (JJ); see also 10:19; 11:110; 41:45; 42:14, 20.

So bear patiently that which they say, and hymn the praise of thy Lord before the rising of the sun and before its setting, and in the hours of the night glorify [Him], and at the ends of the day, that haply thou mayest be content.

Cf. 50:39–40. Before the rising of the sun and before its setting refers to the dawn prayer (ṣuhb or fajr) and the late afternoon prayer (‘asr) respectively (JJ, Q), while in the hours of the night refers to the night prayer (‘ishā’; Q). The ends of the day refers to the midday prayer (zuhr) and the sunset prayer (maghrib) respectively, since the midday prayer stands at the end of the first part of the day and the beginning of the second part of the day, while the sunset prayer stands at the end of the second part of the day (Q); see also 50:39–40c. That haply thou mayest be content means that, by virtue of glorifying God at these times, one will be
content with the reward that will be given by God (JJ). It can also mean that one will become generally content with whatever is given by God in the life of this world.

According to a spiritual interpretation, this verse means that those treading the path of spiritual perfection should be patient and devoted solely to their Master. They should turn away from sins and from being concerned with people’s opinions of them, occupying themselves instead with the constant remembrance and invocation (dhikr) of God until the false sense of self disappears in the Presence of the Knower of the Unseen, through which they will become content in witnessing the Beloved (Aj).

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Strain not thine eyes toward the enjoyments We have granted certain classes of them, as the splendor of the life of this world, that We may test them concerning it. The provision of thy Lord is better and more lasting.

131 In the first part of this verse, the Prophet is being admonished not to desire the things of the world that have been given to the Makkans who are rejecting him; see also 15:88c. That We may test them concerning it means “that We may punish them in the Afterlife on account of it” (Z). The provision of thy Lord is better and more lasting means that the rewards that God has promised the Prophet in the Hereafter are far better and longer lasting than the enjoyments He has given the disbelievers in this life (Ṭū); cf. 28:60; 42:36. See also v. 73, where God Himself is described as better and more lasting (see also 20:71–73c).

From a spiritual perspective, the provision of God that is being referred to here is the virtue of trust in God (tawakkul), since having complete trust in Him is better and more lasting than one’s own efforts in seeking out the things one wants (Su). Alternatively, provision here could be a reference to both contentment with God and total reliance upon Him (Su).

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And bid thy family to prayer and be steadfast therein. We ask no provision of thee; We provide for thee. And the end belongs to reverence.
132 Some say that family (ahl) refers to the Prophet’s close relatives, while others say that it refers to the people of his faith (R), in which case thy family would be rendered “thy people” instead, since ahl can mean either “family” or “people.” Although this injunction is addressed to the Prophet, it applies to the believers in general (Q). We ask no provision of thee; We provide for thee is similar to 51:57–58: I desire no provision from them; nor do I desire that they should feed Me. Truly God is the Provider, the Possessor of Strength, the Firm. The phrase the end belongs to reverence means that Paradise is for those who are reverent (see 2:2c; JJ). Elsewhere in the Quran, it also says that the end belongs to the reverent (7:128; 11:49; 28:83).

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133 They say, “Why has he not brought us a sign from his Lord?” Has there not come unto them the clear proof of that which is in the scriptures of old?

133 The Makkans made repeated requests for the Prophet to bring them a sign (6:37; 10:20; 13:7, 27; see also 6:37c; 10:20c). The clear proof of that which is in the scriptures of old is a reference to the various stories in the Quran that are also found in the previous scriptures, accounts that serve as clear proofs that the Quran comes from God (Kl). Alternatively, this part of the verse can be a reference to those parts of the Torah and the Gospel that mention the Prophet Muhammad (Kl); see 7:157c.

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134 Had We destroyed them with a punishment before it, they would have said, “Our Lord! If only Thou hadst sent a messenger unto us, we would have followed Thy signs before being abased and disgraced.”

134 Some say that this verse is meant to expose the Makkans as liars who would always reject truth (IK). Al-Rāzī notes the irony of their statement: if they were punished, they would present their excuse; but now that the Prophet has come to them, they do not stand on any firm ground as they continue to reject him. See also 6:109; 28:47; 35:42.
Say, “Each is waiting, so wait! For you shall come to know those who are the companions of the sound path, and those who are rightly guided.”

135 That *each is waiting* means each party is waiting to see what its outcome will be, either in this life or at the time of death (R). The words *for you shall come to know* are intended to threaten and frighten the disbelievers (R); see also 10:20c.