There is no general agreement as to when *al-Ḥajj* was revealed. Some say it is Madinan except for vv. 52–55, which are Makkan (IK), while others say it is Makkan except for vv. 19–22, which are from the Madinan period (Q). Most say it is a mix of Makkan and Madinan verses (Q). According to one tradition, it was called one of the most remarkable of sūrah for several reasons: it was revealed both at night and during the day, while on journey and while at home, and during war and during peace; it contains both abrogating and abrogated verses; and it has both muḥkam (unambiguous) and mutashābih (symbolic or allegorical) verses (Q). It takes its name from the mention of the ḥajj (pilgrimage) in v. 27 and also the broader discussion of it throughout.

*Al-Ḥajj* opens with a warning of the terrors of the destruction of the world and the Resurrection (vv. 1–4), which are compared to the individual life cycle of human beings (vv. 5–7). The traits of the misguided are described and compared with those of the righteous through the parable of a garden and by describing their reward or punishment in the Hereafter (vv. 8–25). The significance of the ḥajj is addressed in a passage that begins with a reminder that the rituals of the ḥajj were begun by Abraham and goes on to note that the true meaning of the rites of pilgrimage lies in the inner state of reverence (*taqwā*) that reaches God, not sacrificial meat or other physical aspects of the ḥajj (vv. 26–37).

The resistance to and rejection of other prophets by their peoples is mentioned in a passage that some commentators have explained in terms of the “story of the cranes,” more popularly
known in the West as the “Satanic Verses,” which are connected to various passages of the Quran, but are often discussed in connection with v. 52 of this sūrah. This sūrah contains an important passage thought by many scholars to be the first verses revealed giving the Muslim community permission to resort to the use of force to defend itself against persecution (v. 39–41); it also contains significant verses dealing with the relationship of Islam to other religions and the place of the Muslim community in history (vv. 17, 34, 67, 78).

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

1 O mankind! Reverence your Lord. Truly the quaking of the Hour is a tremendous thing. 2 On the day you see it, every nursing woman will forget what she nurses, and every pregnant woman will deliver her burden, and you will see mankind drunk, though drunk they will not be. Rather, the Punishment of God is severe. 3 And among mankind are those who dispute concerning God, without knowledge, and follow every defiant satan, 4 for whom it is decreed that, should anyone take him as a protector, he will cause him to go astray and guide him unto the punishment of the Blaze. 5 O mankind! If you are in doubt concerning the Resurrection, [remember] We created you from dust, then from a drop, then from a blood clot, then from a lump of flesh, formed and unformed, that We may make clear for you. And We cause what We will to remain in the wombs for a term appointed. Then We bring you forth as an infant, then that you may reach maturity. And some are taken in death, and some are consigned to the most abject life, so that after having known they may know nothing. And thou seest the earth desiccated, but when We send down water
upon it, it stirs and swells and produces every delightful kind. 6 That is because God is the Truth, and because He gives life to the dead, and because He is Powerful over all things, 7 and because the Hour is coming, in which there is no doubt, and because God will resurrect whosoever is in the graves. 8 And among mankind are those who dispute concerning God without knowledge, without guidance, and without an illuminating Book, 9 turning aside to cause others to stray from the way of God. Such shall have disgrace in this world, and We shall make him taste the punishment of the burning on the Day of Resurrection. 10 That is because of what your hands have sent forth, and because God wrongs not His servants. 11 And among mankind some worship God upon a brink: if good befalls him, he is content thereby, but if a trial befalls him, he is turned over upon his face, losing this world and the Hereafter. That is the manifest loss. 12 He calls, apart from God, upon that which neither harms him nor benefits him. That is extreme error. 13 He calls upon one whose harm is likelier than his benefit. What an evil ally, and what an evil friend! 14 Truly God will cause those who believe and perform righteous deeds to enter Gardens with rivers running below. Truly God does whatsoever He desires. 15 Whosoever thinks that God will not help him in this world and the Hereafter, let him stretch out a rope to Heaven. Then let him sever it and see if his scheming removes that which enrages. 16 Thus do We send it down as clear signs, and thus does God guide whomsoever He desires. 17 As for those who believe, and those who are Jews, the Sabeans,
the Christians, the Magians, and the idolaters, indeed God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection. Truly God is Witness over all things. Hast thou not considered that unto God prostrates whosoever is in the heavens and whosoever is on the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, and the beasts, and many among mankind? But for many the punishment has come due. Whomsoever God disgraces, none can ennoble. Truly God does whatsoever He will. These two adversaries dispute concerning their Lord. As for those who disbelieve, garments of fire shall be cut for them, and boiling liquid shall be poured over their heads, by which their innards and their skin will be melted. And for them shall be hooked iron rods. Whensoever they desire, in their grief, to leave it, they shall be returned unto it, while [being told], “Taste the punishment of the burning!” Truly God will cause those who believe and perform righteous deeds to enter Gardens with rivers running below, adorned therein with bracelets of gold and pearl, and therein their clothes will be of silk. And they shall be guided unto that which is good in speech, and be guided unto the path of the Praised. Truly those who disbelieve and turn from the way of God, and the Sacred Mosque which We have appointed for mankind—equal are those who dwell there and those who come from abroad—whosoever desires to deviate wrongfully therein, We shall cause him to taste a painful punishment. And [remember] when We assigned for Abraham the place of the House, [saying], “Ascribe no partners unto Me, and purify My House for those who
circumambulate, and those who stand, and those who bow and prostrate. 27 And proclaim the *hajj* among mankind: they shall come to thee on foot and upon all [manner of] lean beast, coming from all deep and distant mountain highways, 28 that they may witness benefits for them and mention the Name of God, during known days, over the four-legged cattle He has provided them. So eat thereof, and feed the wretched poor. 29 Then let them be done with their untidiness, and fulfill their vows, and circumambulate the Ancient House.” 30 Thus it is. And whosoever magnifies the sacred things of God, that is better for him in the eyes of his Lord. Cattle are permitted you, save that which is recited unto you. So shun the filth of idols, and shun false speech, 31 as *hanīfs* before God, not ascribing partners unto Him. And whosoever ascribes partners unto God, it is as if he fell from the sky and the birds snatched him, or the wind swept him away to a place far off. 32 Thus it is. And whosoever magnifies the rituals of God, truly that comes from the reverence of hearts. 33 You shall have benefits in them, for a term appointed. Thereafter their lawful place of sacrifice shall be at the Ancient House. 34 For every community We have appointed a rite, that they might mention the Name of God over the four-legged cattle He has provided them. Your God is one God; so submit unto Him, and give glad tidings to the humble, 35 whose hearts quiver when God is mentioned, and who bear patiently what befalls them, who perform the prayer, and who spend of that which We have provided them. 36 And We have placed the sacrificial camels for you among God’s
rituals. There is good for you in them. So mention the Name of God over them as they line up. Then when they have fallen upon their flanks, eat of them, and feed the needy who solicit and those who do not. Thus have We made them subservient unto you, that haply you may give thanks. Neither their flesh nor their blood will reach God, but the reverence from you reaches Him. Thus has He made them subservient unto you, that you might magnify God for having guided you. And give glad tidings to the virtuous. Truly God defends those who believe. Truly God loves not any ungrateful traitor. Permission is granted to those who are fought, because they have been wronged—and truly God is able to help them—who were expelled from their homes without right, only for saying, “Our Lord is God.” Were it not for God’s repelling people, some by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, wherein God’s Name is mentioned much, would have been destroyed. And God will surely help those who help Him—truly God is Strong, Mighty—who, were We to establish them upon the earth, would perform the prayer, give the alms, and enjoin right and forbid wrong. And unto God is the end of all affairs. And if they deny thee, the people of Noah denied before them, as did ʿĀd and Thamūd, and the people of Abraham, and the people of Lot, and the inhabitants of Midian, and Moses too was denied. But I granted the disbelievers a respite; then I seized them in punishment. And how, then, was the change I wrought! How many a town have We destroyed while it did wrong,
laying thus fallen upon their roofs! And [how many] an abandoned well and lofty palace! Have they not journeyed upon the earth, that they might have hearts by which to understand or ears by which to hear? Truly it is not the eyes that go blind, but it is hearts within breasts that go blind. They bid thee to hasten the punishment, though God will not fail His Promise. And truly a day with your Lord is as a thousand years of that which you reckon. And how many a town did I grant respite while it did wrong. Then I seized it [in punishment], and unto Me is the journey’s end! Say, “O mankind! I am only a clear warner unto you!” And as for those who believe and perform righteous deeds, theirs shall be forgiveness and a generous provision. But those who endeavor to thwart Our signs, they shall be the inhabitants of Hellfire. And no messenger or prophet did We send before thee, but that when he had a longing, Satan would cast into his longing, whereupon God effaces what Satan cast. Then God makes firm His signs—and God is Knowing, Wise—that He might make what Satan casts to be a trial for those in whose hearts is a disease, and those whose hearts are hard—and truly the wrongdoers are in extreme schism—and so that those who have been given knowledge might know that it is the truth from thy Lord, and thus believe in it, and that their hearts be humbled before Him. And truly God guides those who believe unto a straight path. Yet those who disbelieve remain in doubt over it, till the Hour comes upon them suddenly or there comes upon them the punishment of a barren day. Sovereignty that Day shall
be God’s; He will judge between them, and those who believe and perform righteous deeds shall be in Gardens of bliss.  

57 And as for those who disbelieve and deny Our signs, theirs shall be a humiliating punishment.  

58 And as for those who emigrate in the way of God and are then slain or die, God will surely provide them with a beautiful provision. And truly God is the best of providers.  

59 He will surely cause them to enter an entrance with which they shall be content. And truly God is Knowing, Clement.  

60 Thus it is. And whosoever retaliates with the like of that which he has suffered, and is then aggressed upon, God will surely help him. Truly God is Pardoning, Forgiving.  

61 That is because God makes the night pass into the day and makes the day pass into the night, and because God is Hearing, Seeing.  

62 That is because God is the Truth and what they call upon apart from Him is false, and because God is the Exalted, the Great.  

63 Hast thou not considered that God sends down water from Heaven, and then the earth becomes green? Truly God is Subtle, Aware.  

64 To Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth. And God is truly the Self-Sufficient, the Praised.  

65 Hast thou not considered that God has made whatsoever is on the earth subservient unto you—and the ship sails upon the sea—by His Command? And He maintains the sky lest it fall upon the earth, save by His Leave. Truly God is Kind and Merciful unto mankind.  

66 And He it is Who gave you life; then He causes you to die; then He gives you life. Truly man is ungrateful.  

67 For every community We have appointed a rite they are to perform; so let them not
argue with thee over the matter. And call to thy Lord. Truly thou art following straight guidance. ⑥ And if they dispute with thee, say, “God knows best what you do. ⑦ God will judge between you on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein you used to differ.” ⑧ Knowest thou not that God knows whatsoever is in Heaven and on earth? Truly that is in a Book. Truly that is easy for God. ⑨ And they worship, apart from God, that for which He has sent down no authority, and that whereof they have no knowledge. And the wrongdoers shall have no helpers. ⑩ And when Our signs are recited unto them as clear proofs, thou seest denial upon the faces of those who disbelieve. They well-nigh pounce upon those who recite Our signs unto them. Say, “Shall I inform you of what is worse than that? The Fire God has promised to those who disbelieve. What an evil journey’s end!” ⑪ O mankind! A parable is set forth, so hearken unto it! Truly those upon whom you call apart from God will never create a fly, even if they gathered together to do so. And if the fly should rob them of aught, they could not rescue it from it. Feeble are the seeker and the sought! ⑫ And they did not measure God with His true measure. Truly God is Strong, Mighty. ⑬ God chooses messengers from among the angels and from among mankind. Truly God is Hearing, Seeing. ⑭ He knows that which is before them and that which is behind them. And unto God are all matters returned. ⑮ O you who believe! Bow, prostrate, and worship your Lord! And do good, that haply you may prosper. ⑯ And strive for God as He should be striven for. He has chosen [for] you—and has placed no
hardship for you in the religion—the creed of your father Abraham. He named you *muslims* aforetime, and herein, that the Messenger may be a witness for you, and that you may be witnesses for mankind. So perform the prayer and give the alms, and hold fast to God. He is your Master. How excellent a Master, and how excellent a Helper!

**Commentary**

1 O mankind! Reverence your Lord. Truly the quaking of the Hour is a tremendous thing.

1 The *Hour* refers to the eschatological events at the end of the world and the Day of Judgment. The *quaking* refers to the shaking of the earth at the end of the world (see *Sūrah 99*).

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2 On the day you see it, every nursing woman will forget what she nurses, and every pregnant woman will deliver her burden, and you will see mankind drunk, though drunk they will not be. Rather, the Punishment of God is severe.

2 *It in On the day you see it* most likely refers to the event of the quaking (*Q, R*). So great will the fear and shock be that women will forsake their nursing babies, pregnant women will miscarry, and people will be so affected by terror that they will appear as if drunk (*Ṭ*). There is disagreement among the commentators over whether this “shaking” refers to events leading up to and heralding the end of the world, to the destruction of the world itself, or to events on the Day of Judgment (*Q*).

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3 And among mankind are those who dispute concerning
God, without knowledge, and follow every defiant satan,

3 Some commentators believe that this verse must refer to those who disputed the existence of the Hereafter or the resurrection of the dead (e.g., 37:16), while others think that it is a reference to those people who called the Quran fables of those of old more generally (see 8:31c; R). A satan can refer to one of the forces of Satan as well as to a jinn or to a human being; see 2:14c. Some commentators argue that, although this verse deplores disputation about God when done in ignorance, there is implicit approval of those who discuss theological matters on the basis of true and reliable knowledge (Q, R).

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4 for whom it is decreed that, should anyone take him as a protector, he will cause him to go astray and guide him unto the punishment of the Blaze.

4 Some take this verse to mean that it is decreed for every defiant satan that, should anyone take him, namely, the defiant satan, as a protector, he will misguide that person. Another interpretation is that it is decreed for those . . . who follow a defiant satan that those followers will be misguided by that satan. (R).

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5 O mankind! If you are in doubt concerning the Resurrection, [remember] We created you from dust, then from a drop, then from a blood clot, then from a lump of flesh, formed and unformed, that We may make clear for you. And We cause what We will to remain in the wombs for a term appointed. Then We bring you forth as an infant, then that you may reach maturity. And some are taken in death, and some are consigned to the most abject life, so that after having known they may know nothing. And thou seest the earth desiccated, but when We send down water upon it, it stirs and swells and produces every delightful
That is because God is the Truth, and because He gives life to the dead, and because He is Powerful over all things.

5–6 That human beings are created from dust is an idea found in 3:59; 18:37; 30:20; 35:11 (which also mentions the drop); and 40:67 (which also mentions the drop, the blood clot, and the effects of growing old). Commentators see this verse as a reference not only to the fact that Adam, the progenitor of all human beings, was created from dust, but also to the fact that the animals that people eat and whose milk they drink are nourished by plants, which are themselves nourished by dust, and in this sense human beings are, in their physical bodies, made from dust (R). The drop is often understood to refer to semen (R), also mentioned in 32:8: Then He made his seed from a draught of base fluid.

The lump of flesh, formed and unformed is generally thought to mean that, after the blood clot settles in the womb, some pregnancies come to term, while others miscarry before producing fully formed human beings (R, T). This fact is thought to be indicated by cause what We will to remain in the wombs for a term appointed. With regard to these descriptions and a term appointed, some commentators mention a hadith that states, “Your creation is such that you are brought together in your mother’s belly for forty nights, then you are a blood clot for the same duration, then a lump of flesh for the same duration. Then God sends an angel who is given commands regarding four things, and thus he writes down one’s provision, one’s deeds, one’s life span, and whether one will be wretched or joyous.”

Some are taken in death refers to those who die before old age, while the most abject life refers to the weakness and loss of faculties one experiences in old age (IK). This verse is similar in theme to 30:54: God is He Who created you from weakness, then ordained strength after weakness, then ordained weakness and old age after strength; 36:68: And whomsoever We give long life, We cause him to regress in creation; and 16:70: And among you are those who are brought back to the weakest of ages, such that they know nothing after having had knowledge. Some commentators argue that people can be spared the infirmities and weaknesses of old age in accordance with the strength of their faith (Aj, R).

God is the Truth (al-Haqq; cf. 22:62; 24:25; 31:30) could also be rendered, “God is the Real/Reality.” The growth of vegetation from dry earth is a common symbol in the Quran for the resurrection of the dead, as in 35:9: And God is He Who sends the winds; then they cause clouds to rise. Then We drive them to a land that is dead, and thereby revive the earth after its death. Thus shall be the Resurrection! See also 16:65; 25:48–49; 30:19, 50; 35:9; 36:33; 43:11; 45:5;
and because the Hour is coming, in which there is no doubt, and because God will resurrect whosoever is in the graves.

As mentioned in 22:1c, the Hour refers to the end of the world. The inhabitants of the graves are also mentioned in 35:22; 60:13; 100:9.

And among mankind are those who dispute concerning God without knowledge, without guidance, and without an illuminating Book,

Cf. 31:20. The idea of an illuminating or luminous book is also found in 3:184 and 35:25. On disputing about God without knowledge, see 22:3c.

turning aside to cause others to stray from the way of God. Such shall have disgrace in this world, and We shall make him taste the punishment of the burning on the Day of Resurrection.

Turning aside translates an expression that literally means to turn one’s side to something or to bend one’s neck in pride or conceit and denotes an attitude of pride and haughtiness. Disgrace in this world is mentioned as a punishment throughout the Quran (e.g., 2:85, 114; 5:33, 41; 10:98; 39:26; 41:16).

That is because of what your hands have sent forth, and because God wrongs not His servants.
See 3:182, an almost identical verse. Commentators note that human beings’ words and deeds will be recorded in the book they will read from on the Day of Judgment (Q), to which reference is also made in 17:13–14; 18:49; 69:19, 25; 78:29; 84:7–10. “What hands have sent forth” has an idiomatic sense of what human beings have wrought and also evokes the idea that one’s deeds are sent, as it were, to the Hereafter, where one will meet them during judgment.

And among mankind some worship God upon a brink: if good befalls him, he is content thereby, but if a trial befalls him, he is turned over upon his face, losing this world and the Hereafter. That is the manifest loss.

Upon a brink is understood to mean “in a state of doubt” (Ṭ) or that one’s belief is superficial, on the outer reaches of one’s consciousness and not in the heart (R). According to al-Ṭabarî, this refers to people like the Bedouin of the Prophet’s time, who would come and embrace Islam if there were some material benefit to be had, but who would go back to their old ways once that benefit was no longer available. If their lives were going well, with material wealth and sons, they would affirm the Prophet’s veracity, but if they were afflicted with bad economic conditions and having only daughters, they would go back to their former ways.

For others this verse provides a general description of hypocrites, whose religion is informed by a superficial notion of what is good for them (Ṭ). They are upon a brink in that the slightest discomfort topples them from faith (R). They lose both this world—because the material goods they thought they would attain will be lost—and the Hereafter—because they were heedless of the true nature and rewards of faith (Ṭ). In this regard, when a man lamented to the Prophet that his new religion had brought him no good, the Prophet said, “Islam is not something spoken. Islam melts, as fire melts away the impurities of iron, gold, and silver” (R).

He calls, apart from God, upon that which neither harms him nor benefits him. That is extreme error.

He calls upon one whose harm is likelier than his
benefit. What an evil ally, and what an evil friend!

12–13 These verses are usually thought to refer to idols and false gods, which are often described as something that neither harms nor benefits (cf. 6:71; 10:18, 106, 20:89; 21:66; 25:55; 26:73). Some say v. 13 refers to the help one seeks from worldly powers, but this could also refer to idols, because the worship of idols, far from being innocuous, is considered, from a religious perspective, to be harmful in itself, as it diverts one’s attention from the worship of the One God (R).

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14 Truly God will cause those who believe and perform righteous deeds to enter Gardens with rivers running below. Truly God does whatsoever He desires.

14 On Gardens with rivers running below, see 2:25c.

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15 Whosoever thinks that God will not help him in this world and the Hereafter, let him stretch out a rope to Heaven. Then let him sever it and see if his scheming removes that which enrages.

15 Although this verse may be general in import, many commentators believe that him in not help him refers to the Prophet (R). It is also thought that this verse could refer to a group of believers who were so full of anger at the idolaters that they found the promised victory against them to be slow in coming; some believe it refers to the tribes of Asad and Ghaṭafān, who thought that the Prophet would not ultimately achieve victory; it can also refer to the Prophet’s enemies in general, who did not believe he would overcome them (R).

According to one interpretation, this verse alludes to individuals who are driven to hang themselves (Aj, Q, R) and are asked to see if this will cure their rage; the word translated Heaven (samā’), which also means “sky,” can also refer to the ceiling of a house. According to this interpretation, the absence of hope that God’s Help will come is a manifestation of the deep despair characteristic of those whose faith is upon a brink (v. 11), and the victims of this despair and lack of hope
are asked to meditate upon whether hanging themselves will change anything—the implied answer being that God’s relationship with the Prophet, and by extension the believers, will remain the same in this world and the Hereafter.

According to another interpretation of the imagery of this verse, the doubting or hostile ones are here being invited, since they believe that God is preparing to sever the victory He promised the Prophet, to seek some rope, or “means” (sabab), to Heaven, to try to sever it themselves, and then to see if their scheme (i.e., the scheme to sever that help to the Prophet) will assuage their anger and impatience (Q, Th). In another interpretation it is the very revelation from God that these persons are invited to try to sever (Th), and some say the imagery is meant to imply that no matter how far one goes or what bounds one passes, nothing can come between God’s Help and the Prophet (R).

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16 Thus do We send it down as clear signs, and thus does God guide whomsoever He desires.

16 The concept of clear signs also appears in 2:99; 17:101; 24:1, 34, 46; 28:36; 57:9; 58:5; 65:11.

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17 As for those who believe, and those who are Jews, the Sabeans, the Christians, the Magians, and the idolaters, indeed God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection. Truly God is Witness over all things.

17 On the identity of the Sabeans, see 2:62c. Magians translates majūs, the only instance of this word in the Quran. It likely comes from the Greek magos, which comes from the Old and Middle Persian mugh; it was originally a reference to a line of Persian priests (from which the word “magic” derives as well as “Magi,” the three who came from the East to visit the newly born Christ, as the use of sorcery was attributed to them by the ancient Greeks). To this day, however, majūs is understood by most Muslims to be a reference to Zoroastrians in general, not just the special class of priests. Historically, there has been debate, especially among Arabs, as to whether the Zoroastrians could be considered People of the Book, and it was common for different ritual and legal matters to be judged
differently; for example, many jurists forbade intermarriage with Zoroastrians but permitted the consumption of meat purchased from them, while others debated whether one could use their animals to hunt (Q); see also 9:29c, which addresses the legal treatment of the People of the Book. During Islamic history, many jurists (such as al-Shāfiʿī) accepted Zoroastrians as People of the Book, as we also see very generally in Persia and among Muslims of the Indian subcontinent.

For God’s judgment or disclosure of the truth in matters of religious disagreement on the Day of Judgment rather than in this world, see 2:113c.

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18 Hast thou not considered that unto God prostrates whosoever is in the heavens and whosoever is on the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, and the beasts, and many among mankind? But for many the punishment has come due. Whomsoever God disgraces, none can ennoble. Truly God does whatsoever He will.

18 The prostrating of the whole created world, not just human beings, is also mentioned in 13:15: And unto God prostrates whosoever is in the heavens and on the earth (see 13:15c). The worship of God by beings other than angels and human beings is mentioned in 13:13; 17:44; 34:10; 55:6. Prostration signifies not only the physical action, but also the very state of humble worship that prostration suggests (R).

The punishment has come due means that it is deserved (Ṭ). The structure of Whomsoever God disgraces, none can ennoble is similar to such other Quranic statements as 18:17: Whomsoever He leads astray, thou wilt find no protector to lead him aright; and 3:160: If God helps you, none shall overcome you. And if He forsakes you, who then can help you thereafter?

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19 These two adversaries dispute concerning their Lord. As for those who disbelieve, garments of fire shall be cut for them, and boiling liquid shall be poured over their heads,

19 Many commentators prefer to read this verse as a general description of
any two disputing parties, but others record different opinions about the specific individuals to whom this verse may refer. Some say that it refers to the six warriors who began the Battle of Badr at the front of their respective armies: ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the Prophet’s uncle Ḥamzah, and ʿUbaydah ibn al-Ḥārith on the Muslim side and three fighters from the Quraysh on the other (Q, R, Ṭ). Others believe that this verse refers to arguments between the Muslims and the People of the Book, because the latter claimed to be closer to God, an older community, and superior in other ways. Some commentators say the dispute refers to a conversation between the Garden and the Fire regarding the purpose for which they were created, and some mention a ḥadīth in which the Fire says, “The proud and the haughty enter me,” the Garden says, “The weak and poor enter me,” and God says, “Thou art My Mercy, I show mercy by thee. And Thou art My Punishment, I punish by thee whomsoever I will” (Q).

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20 by which their innards and their skin will be melted.

21 And for them shall be hooked iron rods.

22 Whenceover they desire, in their grief, to leave it, they shall be returned unto it, while [being told], “Taste the punishment of the burning!”

20–22 It is understood that the iron rods are those with which they will be beaten (IK). Although this passage is a concrete description of the fate of some in the Hereafter, it is also interpreted as a spiritual allegory: the malicious soul, unable to see beyond the ephemeralities of this world and understand the true nature of things, is beaten down from rising spiritually by the hooked iron rods of false belief in its own power to control its fate and continuously returned to a state of suffering by its pride and self-glorification (Aj). Taste the punishment of the burning is thought to be spoken by the custodians of the Fire (Ṭ).

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23 Truly God will cause those who believe and perform righteous deeds to enter Gardens with rivers running below,
adorned therein with bracelets of gold and pearl, and therein their clothes will be of silk.

23. Cf. 35:33. On Gardens with rivers running below, see 2:25c. Other references to the raiment and ornaments of the inhabitants of the Garden include 18:31; 44:53; and 76:21. The rivers running below and bracelets of gold and pearl contrast with the boiling liquid and garments of fire mentioned in v. 19.

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24. And they shall be guided unto that which is good in speech, and be guided unto the path of the Praised.

24. That they shall be guided means that they will be inspired toward these things (Ṭ). The idea of a good word or good speech is also mentioned in 14:24: A good word is as a good tree: its roots firm and its branches in the sky. In the present verse that which is good in speech is seen as referring to many things, including the testimony of faith, “There is no god but God” (lā ilāha illa’Llāh), or “Praise be to God” (al-ḥamdu li’Llāh), or the Quran itself. These words may also refer to what is spoken in the Hereafter, including the glad tiding and welcome that the believers will hear from God (see Sūrah 89) and the words of the angels, as in 39:73, when they say to inhabitants of the Garden, Peace be upon you; you have done well; so enter it, to abide [therein] (cf. 7:46; 10:10; 13:23–24; 14:23; 19:62; 25:75; 33:44; 36:58; R). Goodness in word and speech is an aspect of the paradisal state, as indicated by 78:35: They hear therein neither idle talk nor lying (cf. 19:62; 56:25; 88:11). The path of the Praised means the path of God, that is, the path to the Garden (Q).

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25. Truly those who disbelieve and turn from the way of God, and the Sacred Mosque which We have appointed for mankind—equal are those who dwell there and those who come from abroad—whosoever desires to deviate wrongfully therein, We shall cause him to taste a painful punishment.
25 Turn from renders ṣadda ʿan, which can mean either to be diverted oneself or to divert others. Those who dwell there refers to the local inhabitants of Makkah, and those who come from abroad to people who travel to Makkah to visit. This statement is interpreted to mean that neither has a greater right to be in Makkah and visit the Sacred Mosque than the other (IK, R, Ṭ). To deviate wrongfully is understood by many to mean idolatry and the worship of anything other than God (IK, Ṭ), though others believe it refers to certain kinds of economic transactions in the sacred precincts (IK).

26 And [remember] when We assigned for Abraham the place of the House, [saying], “Ascribe no partners unto Me, and purify My House for those who circumambulate, and those who stand, and those who bow and prostrate.

26 Cf. 2:125. On the account of Abraham and the Kaʿbah, see commentary on 2:125–27. Purify My House is understood to mean keeping it free from doubt and idolatry (Ṭ). To circumambulate the Kaʿbah is an essential part of the rite of the ḥajj and ʿumrah (see 2:203c) and standing, bowing, and prostrating are all components of the Islamic canonical prayer in addition to symbolizing worship in general. For other instances where bowing and prostrating are mentioned, see also 2:43, 125; 3:43; 9:112.

27 And proclaim the ḥajj among mankind: they shall come to thee on foot and upon all [manner of] lean beast, coming from all deep and distant mountain highways.

27 Commentators mention accounts that Abraham did not know how he could announce the pilgrimage to people; so God told him to speak the words and they miraculously echoed far and wide and settled into the hearts of all men and women (Ṭ). Some have understood the mention of going on foot to indicate that it was more meritorious to walk than ride when going on pilgrimage (IK, Ṭ). By lean beast some have understood camels (Ṭ), whose leanness is interpreted by some as an indication of their having come from deep and distant mountain highways (Q).
that they may witness benefits for them and mention the Name of God, during known days, over the four-legged cattle He has provided them. So eat thereof, and feed the wretched poor.

28 The benefits were those of both this world and the Hereafter; that is, people benefited from both the markets and trade that accompany the pilgrimage and the attainment of God’s Contentment and Reward in the Hereafter (T). Some understand known days to be the first ten days of Dhu’l-Ḥijjah (the twelfth month of the lunar calendar, during which the ḥajj takes place), while others see it as the days of tashrīq (the eleventh through the thirteenth days of that month; see 2:203c). Mention the Name of God . . . over the four-legged cattle refers to saying “In the Name of God” as one slaughters them for sacrifice. It is said that the idolaters would not eat the meat they slaughtered themselves, and this verse gave Muslims permission to eat the meat that they themselves had slaughtered if they wished, without making it obligatory (IK, Q). Wretched poor means those who are hungry and poor, unable to provide for themselves, and who are to be fed from the sacrifice (T).

Then let them be done with their untidiness, and fulfill their vows, and circumambulate the Ancient House.”

29 To be done with their untidiness is, according to some, an expression referring to the cutting of fingernails or the shaving or cutting off of hair associated with ending the pilgrimage and leaving the state of iḥrām (Q, R, T); that is, it refers to entering into a state of bodily cleanliness (see 2:196c). Al-Rāzī points out that the word tafath, rendered here as untidiness, is unknown outside of the exegetical literature (tafsīr) and that when a Bedouin was asked about it, he equated it with filth. Others say be done with their untidiness refers to conditions related to the rites of the ḥajj as a whole (T). Fulfill their vows means to perform the pilgrimage (IK). Ancient renders ʿaṭīq, which in addition to “very old” (it is mentioned as the first house established for mankind in 3:96) also means “freed,” and some commentators refer to a ḥadīth that says, “It was named the Free House, because no tyrant ever triumphed against it,” meaning that the Kaʿbah has withstood the
assaults of tyrants and attackers throughout the ages (IK, T); the most well known attack is recounted in Sūrah 105, when the Kaʿbah was said to have been defended against a Yemeni army by a swarm of birds sent by God. Ātiq can also mean that something is excellent or beautiful.

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30 Thus it is. And whosoever magnifies the sacred things of God, that is better for him in the eyes of his Lord. Cattle are permitted you, save that which is recited unto you. So shun the filth of idols, and shun false speech,

30 The sacred things are the ḥajj, the ‘umrah, Makkah and its environs, and indirectly whatever is prohibited there (T); sacred things (ḥurumāt) can also be rendered “forbidden things,” meaning those things that cannot be violated (cf. v. 32, where it is rituals that are magnified). Cattle are permitted refers to the different kinds of animals that can be sacrificed and consumed, and save that which is recited unto you indicates the prohibitions in the Quran against carrion, blood, pork, and anything that is consecrated to other than God (T). One should shun the filth of idols by not worshipping them and false speech by rejecting assertions about the idols, such as We do not worship them, save to bring us nigh in nearness unto God (39:3) and assigning daughters to God (16:57; T).

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31 as ḥanīfs before God, not ascribing partners unto Him. And whosoever ascribes partners unto God, it is as if he fell from the sky and the birds snatched him, or the wind swept him away to a place far off.

31 On the meaning of ḥanīf, that is, someone who is devoted to the One God, but not through a narrow sectarian focus, see 2:135c. The imagery of one who has fallen from the sky (or the heavens) is meant to convey helplessness (Q) and, according to one interpretation, symbolizes the fall of the soul from faith into a state where it is vulnerable to being snatched away by Satan and further swept along by its own caprice and base appetites (R).
Thus it is. And whosoever magnifies the rituals of God, truly that comes from the reverence of hearts.

Rituals translates *sha‘ā’ir*, which means not only the rituals themselves, but also the sacred things with which or places at which those rituals are performed. Since the rote *sh*-ʿ-*r* connotes the sense of “knowledge” or “consciousness,” al-Qurṭūbī describes them as “that in which God has something by which He makes known or teaches.” The verse places *reverence* in the heart, and the Prophet is reported to have said, “Reverence (*taqwā*) is here,” and pointed to his heart. To “magnify” the rituals means that one believes that worshipping God through the rites of pilgrimage is an important and weighty matter (R). Others interpret the “magnification” to mean that the sacrificial animals should be well fed and beautiful, and one should not use sick or injured animals (IK, Ṭ). This latter interpretation evokes the spiritual interpretation given to 2:71, where the sacrificial cow is likened to the soul that needs to be made ready and worthy for its spiritual death.

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You shall have benefits in them, for a term appointed. Thereafter their lawful place of sacrifice shall be at the Ancient House.

By most accounts this verse refers to the benefits derived from the sacrificial animals, such as their milk and wool and the ability to ride them (see, e.g., 36:71–73), as there apparently was reticence on the part of the pre-Islamic Arabs to make use of sacrificial animals in this way; see also 5:103, where these idolatrous prohibitions against riding or eating the meat of certain animals considered sacred are mentioned and rejected. Jurists have pointed out that it is permissible to ride the sacrificial animals if this is necessary (Q). One has these benefits for *a term appointed*, meaning until the animals are sacrificed in the pilgrimage rites (IK, Q). Regarding *Ancient House*, see 22:29c.

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For every community We have appointed a rite, that they might mention the Name of God over the four-legged
cattle He has provided them. Your God is one God; so submit unto Him, and give glad tidings to the humble,

34 Cf. v. 67. On each community being given its own religious way, see also 5:48: For each among you We have appointed a law and a way; 10:47: For every community there is a messenger; and 16:36: We indeed sent a messenger unto every community. Your God is one God (cf. 2:163; 16:22; 21:108; 41:6) means both that God is one and that He is unique, since one (wāḥid), as in English, can also mean “the same”; that is, not only is God one, but also each community worships the same God. See the essay “The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions.” Some commentators understand rite (mansak) to refer here specifically to sacrifice, while others give it the more general meaning of religious ritual (Q), and some understand it to refer to the physical place of religious ritual (R); on the concept of nusuk, to which mansak is related by root, see 6:162–63c.

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35 whose hearts quiver when God is mentioned, and who bear patiently what befalls them, who perform the prayer, and who spend of that which We have provided them.

35 Other verses also speak of the physical manifestations of knowledge and faith, as in 39:23: Their skin and their hearts soften unto the remembrance of God; and 5:83: Their eyes overflow with tears because of the truth they recognize. Al-Qushayrī notes that the quivering of one’s heart increases to the degree one is conscious of God’s Self-Disclosure in the world.

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36 And We have placed the sacrificial camels for you among God’s rituals. There is good for you in them. So mention the Name of God over them as they line up. Then when they have fallen upon their flanks, eat of them, and feed the needy who solicit and those who do not. Thus have We made them subservient unto you, that haply you may give thanks.
36 Sacrificial camels translates *budn*, whose meaning some jurists restrict to camels, while others say that it can refer to other animals such as cows (Q). The needy who solicit refers to people who request help or money, while those who do not are those who refrain from asking; see 2:273, which also mentions poor people who do not ask for help. Mention the Name of God refers to saying the formula “In the Name of God” as one slaughters an animal, and when they have fallen upon their flanks refers to when they die, since traditionally camels are slaughtered while standing (Q, R). In the pre-Islamic Age of Ignorance (jāhiliyyah; see 3:154; 5:50; 33:33; 48:26c) the idolaters would not eat the meat they sacrificed, and most jurists interpret this verse to mean that eating the sacrificial animal’s meat oneself is permissible and desirable though not obligatory, whereas it is religiously obligatory to feed others (Q).

The notion that all created things in the heavens and on the earth are “made subservient” to human beings appears many times throughout the Quran (e.g., 14:32–33; 16:12; 22:65; 31:20; 43:13; 45:12–13), although some commentators see this as a specific reference to animals that have been domesticated for such purposes (R).

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37 Neither their flesh nor their blood will reach God, but the reverence from you reaches Him. Thus has He made them subservient unto you, that you might magnify God for having guided you. And give glad tidings to the virtuous.

37 It is reported that the idolaters used to smear the blood of the sacrificed animals on the Ka’bah and that some Muslims wanted to do the same, but then this verse was revealed (Q). Reverence (*taqwā*) is mentioned in v. 32, and here is mentioned again to shed light on the inner reality of the ritual of sacrifice. In the last sentence of this verse, the voice switches from the second-person plural to the singular, thus signifying a direct address to the Prophet.

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38 The word translated *defends* here is the same word, with a different
preposition, that is translated as *repelling* in v. 40. In this verse it means literally something like “God repels [others] from those who believe.” The notion that God does not love the *traitor* (*khawwān*) is similar to the message of 4:107: *Surely God loves not the one given to treachery and sin.* It is reported by some that this verse was revealed in connection with certain believers who, while still in Makkah and suffering from the persecutions of the idolatrous Quraysh, desired to fight against them using perfidious and deceitful means (Q). In this connection al-Qūṭūbī mentions a *ḥadīth*, “A flag will be hoisted for every perfidious person on the Day of Judgment, which will read, ‘This is the perfidy of this person.’”

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This is the verse most frequently thought to be the first in permitting the believers to use force to defend themselves. *Permission is granted* refers to permission to fight. Previously, Muslims had been required to deal with the persecution and violence against them with patience and forbearance and in two notable cases through emigration from Makkah: the first was the emigration of some Companions to Abyssinia in 615, where they received the protection of the Negus; and the second was the major emigration of the Prophet and his Companions from Makkah to Madinah in 622.

According to some, this verse was revealed at the time of the emigration (*hijrah*) of the Prophet from Makkah to Madinah, and it is said that upon hearing this verse Abū Bakr said, “I knew that fighting would come to pass” (Q). Others say that it was revealed in connection with a group of believers who desired to emigrate from Makkah, but were hindered and overtaken by the disbelievers, and permission was given to them to fight back (T). In connection with v. 38, it is understood by some that initially a group of believers asked the Prophet for permission to fight back secretly using techniques like assassination, to which the revelation said, *God loves not any ungrateful traitor* (v. 38), after which permission was given to fight openly (T); see the essay “Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran.”

With slightly different voweling, the verse can be read to mean, “Permission is given to those who fight because they have been wronged” (T), and also, “He [God] gives permission to those who fight because they have been wronged” (R).  

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who were expelled from their homes without right, only for saying, “Our Lord is God.” Were it not for God’s repelling people, some by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, wherein God’s Name is mentioned much, would have been destroyed. And God will surely help those who help Him—truly God is Strong, Mighty—

40 The expulsion of the believers from their homes in Makkah, mentioned also in 2:191, 217, 246; 3:195; 8:30; 9:40; 8:30; 60:9, is one of the most often cited grievances of the Muslim community against the Quraysh. The believers were given permission to use force because of the wrongs committed against them: persecution and being forced to leave because of their faith, for saying “Our Lord is God.” The use of force is further contextualized by mentioning the protection of other houses of worship wherein God’s Name is mentioned much. Muslims are permitted to use force because of a prior use of force, namely, the expulsion from their homes. Likewise, God’s repelling people, some by means of others is also a justified use of force, because houses of worship would have been destroyed unless this “repelling” took place. By implication, such defense or “repelling” should take place in the future under similar conditions; that is to say, in this verse the use of force is conditioned by the actual expulsion of people from their homes and the potential destruction of different kinds of houses of worship.

Opinions differ regarding the religious communities to which each of these houses of worship corresponds. Monasteries renders ｓａｗāｍｉ‘, usually understood to be houses of Christian monks, but also associated by some with the Sabeans; churches renders ｂｉｙａ‘, which most have understood to refer to Christian houses of worship, but which may also refer to Jewish temples; synagogues renders ｓａｌａｗāt, usually understood to mean Jewish houses of worship but linked by some with the Sabeans (see 2:62); and mosques renders ｍａसājid, a word meaning “place of prostrations” and associated by most commentators with the houses of worship of Muslims themselves, although another opinion sees ｍａसājid as a general term referring to the previous three types of houses of worship (Ｔ); see 72:18c.

For many commentators and jurists, in keeping with their general theory of Islam’s supersession of all other forms of religion, this verse refers to the houses of worship in the past before the advent of Islam. Muslims, however, are prohibited from damaging or destroying the houses of worship belonging to peoples with whom there is a treaty (ａḥl ａl-ｄḥｉmmah) both within and outside of Islamic lands (Ｑ); for more discussion of these issues, see 9:29c and the essay “Conquest and
Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran.”

Those who help Him is understood to mean those who help God’s religion and His Prophet (Q, R).

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who, were We to establish them upon the earth, would perform the prayer, give the alms, and enjoin right and forbid wrong. And unto God is the end of all affairs.

41 Here, who follows upon and is to be identified with those who help Him, and according to some also corresponds to those referenced by the who mentioned in the first sentence of the previous verse (who were expelled; Ṭ). According to one opinion, this verse describes the conditions laid upon those whom God “establishes on the earth,” meaning those to whom God gives sovereignty and political power (Q, R). Others say that it is a description of the Emigrants or simply of all Muslims in general (Q, Ṭ). On the concept of enjoining right and forbidding wrong, see 2:207c and especially 3:104c.

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42 And if they deny thee, the people of Noah denied before them, as did Ād and Thamūd,

43 and the people of Abraham, and the people of Lot,

44 and the inhabitants of Midian, and Moses too was denied. But I granted the disbelievers a respite; then I seized them in punishment. And how, then, was the change I wrought!

45 How many a town have We destroyed while it did wrong, laying thus fallen upon their roofs! And [how many] an abandoned well and lofty palace!
As occurs frequently in the Quran, the Prophet is reminded that the trials he undergoes, whether they consist of denial, mockery, or violence, were experienced by previous prophets as well and that the final end of their opponents was defeat and destruction (e.g., 14:9–13; 35:25–26; 40:5, 22). The commentators explain the imagery of *fallen upon their roofs* as meaning that the roofs first collapsed and then the walls fell upon them afterward (R).

The prophet sent to Midian was Shuʿayb (see, e.g., 7:85; 11:84); Hūd (see, e.g., 11:50) was sent to the Ād, and Šāliḥ (see, e.g., 7:73) was sent to the Thamūd. *Change* in *And how, then, was the change I wrought* (cf. 34:45; 35:26; 67:18) renders *nakīr*, which carries the sense of altering something, especially from a state one likes to a state one dislikes (it is also the name traditionally given to one of the two angels who question and sometimes torment the dead while they are still in the grave). It is derived from the same root as *inkār*, “denial,” and hence some commentators understand this phrase to mean, “And how, then, was My Denial [of them]!” (R).

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**46** Have they not journeyed upon the earth, that they might have hearts by which to understand or ears by which to hear? Truly it is not the eyes that go blind, but it is hearts within breasts that go blind.

**46** Traveling *upon the earth* to see the vestiges of previous civilizations is mentioned throughout the Quran, including in 3:137; 6:11; 12:109; 16:36; 27:69; 30:9; 35:44; 40:21; 47:10; see 30:9c.

The blindness of hearts is alluded to throughout the Quran, in addition to deafness and dumbness. As discussed in the commentary on 2:7 and the introduction to Sūrah 47 and as exemplified in this verse, the heart is the seat of knowledge and the organ of spiritual understanding. This is further explicated in the *ḥadīth*: “In the body there is a lump of flesh: when it is healthy, the whole body is healthy, and when it is rotten, the whole body is rotten. Yea, it is the heart.”

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**47** They bid thee to hasten the punishment, though God will not fail His Promise. And truly a day with your Lord is as a thousand years of that which you reckon.
Different interpretations are given to *is as a thousand years of that which you reckon* (cf. 32:5). The *day* is understood to mean one of the six days in which God created the heavens and the earth (see 25:59; 32:4; 50:38) or as the period of reckoning on the Day of Judgment itself, as “one of the days of the Hereafter” (Q, Ṭ). For others this verse means that a day of the punishment and fear that the disbelievers will experience in the Hereafter will feel like a thousand years to them (Q, R). It is also interpreted to mean that for God a day or a thousand years are the same and that to Him it is immaterial whether they are punished soon or granted respite, which respite is mentioned in the subsequent verse (R).

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And how many a town did I grant respite while it did wrong. Then I seized it [in punishment], and unto Me is the journey’s end!

Cf. v. 45. The idea of God as the *journey’s end* also appears in 2:285; 3:28; 5:18; 24:42; 31:14; 35:18; 40:3; 42:15; 50:43; 60:4; 64:3.

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Say, “O mankind! I am only a clear warner unto you!”

These words form a common refrain uttered by the Prophet Muhammad and other prophets in the Quran (e.g., 11:25; 26:115; 29:50; 38:70; 46:9; 51:50; 67:26; 71:2).

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And as for those who believe and perform righteous deeds, theirs shall be forgiveness and a generous provision.

*Forgiveness and a generous provision* appears also in 8:4, 74; 24:26; 34:4. *Generous* (*karīm*) could also be rendered “honorable” or “noble."

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But those who endeavor to thwart Our signs, they shall
be the inhabitants of Hellfire.

51 Those who endeavor to thwart Our signs (cf. 34:5, 38) are understood to be those who deny them, call them sorcery, or consider them to be “tales of those of old” (R), denying realities such as the Resurrection and the Day of Judgment (R). Other examples of the disbelievers directing their hostility at the signs of God include those who dispute regarding the signs of God (40:4, 35, 56, 69; 42:35), conceive a plot regarding Our signs (10:21), or deviate with regard to Our signs (41:40).

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52 And no messenger or prophet did We send before thee, but that when he had a longing, Satan would cast into his longing, whereupon God effaces what Satan cast. Then God makes firm His signs—and God is Knowing, Wise—

52 Al-Rāzī notes, with approval, an opinion that interprets this verse as saying that all prophets are indeed mortal human beings, not angels, and thus not emotionless or impervious to temptation; yet because they are protected by God, these outside promptings have no influence. The Quran describes the Prophet as not unaffected by people’s rejection of his message, as described in 35:8: Let not thy soul be expended in regrets over them; and also 26:3: Perhaps thou dost torment thyself that they are not believers (cf. 18:6).

Some commentators connect this verse, and also 53:19–20 and 17:73–75, with an account referred to as the “story of the cranes” (qiṣṣat al-gharānīq), which in Western literature has come to be known as the “Satanic Verses.” According to this story, which has several different versions, the Prophet, while in the company of the Quraysh near the Ka‘bah, was reciting al-Najm (Sūrah 53). The accounts state that after reciting vv. 19–20, which mention three of the goddesses worshipped by the Quraysh, Satan cast words into the Prophet’s recitation, or “onto his tongue,” during a moment of inattention or drowsiness on the part of the Prophet. The Prophet then recited or was heard to recite (different versions are offered), “They are the exalted cranes, and their intercession is to be hoped for,” and continued his recitation through to the end of the sūrah. At the last verse of that sūrah, which mentions prostration, the Prophet prostrated. The Quraysh, apparently pleased that their goddesses had been exalted, gladly joined in the prostration and then celebrated Muhammad’s embrace of their religion. Afterward, Gabriel corrected the Prophet or, according to some accounts, Muhammad realized the error himself,
and v. 52 was then revealed to give him comfort after the sadness and apprehension he felt as a result of the incident.

Many of the early commentators transmit this account with significant differences in setup, wording, and import. Based on these accounts, it seems likely that many Muslims of the early centuries accepted that something like this incident actually happened or at least were comfortable enough with the story to pass it along as a subject of interest, as was often the case in the early *tafsīr* genre, which often registered material of varying quality that was sometimes at odds with a commentator’s own convictions. Once it is analyzed more closely, however, the incident appears highly implausible for several reasons.

Commentators who reject the account tend to begin by pointing out that the often contradictory versions of the story are poorly sourced and poorly corroborated (IK, Q), not unlike some other material to be found in the biographical and exegetical literature of the early centuries. As al-Qurṭubī points out, commentators on the Quran and historians did not employ consistently rigorous filters for what they would record and transmit, and often strange and baseless material is to be found in their works.

The story has also been attacked as incoherent on what might be called psychological grounds. The Prophet was a man known for his honesty and trustworthiness who had, for several years before this incident occurred, along with his followers suffered terribly for condemning the idols of the Quraysh. He had also resisted several offers of money and power to relinquish his mission. To have made such an enormous concession to idolatry would have undercut his message and authority and would have certainly destroyed his credibility in the eyes of his followers. As al-Rāzī observes, the Prophet’s greatest struggle was against the idols; in a sense, it defined his mission. Al-Māturīdī asks, if he could not distinguish Satan from Gabriel the first time, how could he do so when Gabriel came to correct him?

Chronological considerations also cast doubt on the story, or at least its connection with 22:52 and 17:73–75. *Sūrah 22* is considered by some to have been revealed in Madinah, while *sūrah 17* was revealed after the Prophet’s Night Journey and Ascension in the tenth or eleventh year of the revelation, in Makkah. Many of the versions of the story place the “story of the cranes” in the fifth year of the revelation, at the time when some Muslims had sought refuge in Abyssinia. *Sūrah 17* would have been revealed five or six years later, while *Sūrah 22* would have been revealed at least eight years later, according to some chronologies. If either 22:52 or 17:73–75 were meant to give comfort or explanation to the Prophet, such a time lag would be highly unusual. Did the so-called verses of the cranes remain in circulation during that time? Some accounts also mention that the refugees to Abyssinia returned to Makkah, because they heard the news that the idolaters had reconciled with the Prophet as a result of the incident of the cranes. Aside from the
illogic of refugees from idolatry returning because their leader had embraced idolatry, their return is more easily explained, according to critics of the story, by the conversion of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, one of the most prominent adversaries of the young community, to Islam, bringing with him a level of political support that made it safe for the refugees to return. Moreover, the Negus of Abyssinia was himself embroiled in a rebellion, which would have contributed to the refugees’ desire to leave.

There are also theological grounds for rejecting the incident as an explanation of v. 52. Al-Qurṭubī rejects the very possibility of Satan’s taking control of a human being (much less a prophet) in such a manner, citing the words of Satan in 14:22, And I had no authority over you, save that I called you, and you responded to me, and further argues that if Satan had this power to control a person’s speech, no human being could withstand it. From the point of view of the Islamic tradition, among both Sunnis and Shiites, the prophets are maʾṣūm, or “protected [from sin],” and from this perspective such an incident by definition would have been impossible.

Moreover, from what might be called a literary or thematic point of view, the verses in question do not necessitate this story as their basis. The thematic elements in 22:52 and 17:73–75 are not unique to those verses. In the case of 22:52, the context is that of those who endeavor to thwart the signs of God, which, as discussed in the commentary on 22:51, is a common description of the activity of the disbelievers as recounted in the Quran. In 22:52 had a longing renders the verb tamannā, and longing in his longing translates umniyah, a word that can mean “desires” or “false hopes.” The noun umniyah also appears in 2:78 (hearsay); 2:111 (hopes); 4:123 (desires); 4:119 (desires); 57:14 (false hopes). The verb tamannā also appears in 2:94–95; 3:143; 4:32; 28:82; 53:24; 62:6–7. Some commentators gloss umniyah as “recitation,” which, though not linguistically incorrect, is a rare secondary usage that stands in stark contrast to the Quranic usage of the term. The idea of “casting,” when it does not refer to the physical action of throwing, as when Moses casts his staff, is used in various ways in the Quran; examples include the casting of terror (3:151), love (20:39), Spirit (40:15), hearing (as in “to give ear”; 50:37), enmity and hatred (5:64), and peace (“to offer peace”; 4:91). Furthermore, the two parts of this verse are not connected in the way the story of the cranes would suggest, because in the text God first effaces what Satan casts, and then makes His signs firm. This means that the “making firm” of the signs of God is not brought about by means of effacing what Satan casts, but comes afterwards. Moreover, this “making firm” most logically connects with the previous verse, which mentions those people who endeavor to thwart Our signs, to yield the meaning, “They endeavor to thwart them, but God makes them firm.” Finally, the allegedly interpolated verses would directly contradict the explicit message of the remainder of the sūrah into which they were allegedly
inserted, which argues against such intercession (53:26) and reproaches those who assign daughters to God (53:21–23), the way the three goddesses were thought to be daughters of God by the Quraysh. As for those versions of the story that view 53:21–23 (the verses following those mentioning the names of the idols) as “replacements” for those that Satan cast, see comment on “abrogation,” or naskh, below.

Some accounts of the story of the cranes attach 17:73–75 to this verse. Against this view, many commentators relate, in connection with that passage, that the Prophet was apparently tempted to make some kind of compromise with the tribes of Quraysh and Thaqīf by offering some token of respect to their idols in the form of turning his face toward them as he walked by, which he did not do. This encounter is thematically not unrelated to the incident, described in Sūrah 80, in which the Prophet frowned at the pious persistence of a blind man while he (the Prophet) was talking to high-level members of the Quraysh. In the case of the frowning, the Prophet (incorrectly) made a practical judgment that it was more worthwhile to persuade the leaders of the Quraysh of the truth of Islam. In the matter of showing respect to the idols, he considered whether it was worthwhile to make some gesture that might reduce the Quraysh’s antagonism and even gain their assent, but ultimately he did not do so. In 17:74 it says that the Prophet would have inclined toward them a little, though in 17:73 it is clear they wanted more than that, namely, they wanted him to falsely ascribe something to God, so they could become friends. The danger of being lured by the desires of others is mentioned elsewhere, often where the Prophet is warned against following their caprices after the knowledge that has come to him (2:120, 145; see also 5:48; 13:37); none of these incidents are connected with the notion of Satan introducing something into the recitation of the Quran.

As for how the “story of the cranes” found its way into Islamic literature, in his commentary on 22:52 al-Māturīdī speculates that perhaps the Prophet uttered words like those reported in the story, but that he was registering the belief of the Quraysh themselves, as the Quran does in 10:18: And they say, “These are our intercessors with God.” Al-Rāzī doubts that words like this were spoken by anyone at all, arguing that no such formulation using the word gharānīq (“cranes”) was commonplace, but in fact at least one source from the second Islamic century reports that the phrase “Those are the exalted cranes whose intercession is desired” was part of a pre-Islamic prayer formula of the Quraysh. If that were the case, some type of miscommunication or misattribution would be more plausible.

Some of the credibility attached to the account stems from the assumption that Muslims would not invent a story that was so potentially embarrassing, but there are reasons to believe that the early community might not have been troubled by the account. It is conceivable that the historians and exeges passing on the story might have in hindsight seen the end result—namely, Gabriel’s correction of the
Prophet—as sufficient Divine protection against error and indeed as evidence of active participation by God in the life of the community and a warning against the promptings of Satan. Such a view is generally rejected by mainstream theologians and commentators, as described above. There are also interpretive reasons why such a story would have been transmitted, which is to say that the means by which it is employed to explain 22:52 actually serves exegetical purposes. First, it provides an “occasion for revelation” (sabab al-nuzūl) for this verse. Second, it supports the use of the word naskh, here rendered effaces, as referring to the technical sense of a later revelation replacing the wording or legal import of something that existed previously (on naskh as “abrogation,” see 2:106c). (In the tafsīr literature, naskh was not limited to one Quranic verse replacing another, though this came to be the accepted legal definition. It was also sometimes employed to refer to God’s overturning or replacing previous practices that were not originally Divinely ordained, and in rare cases it was thought by some to refer to the actual disappearance or forgetting of Quranic verses as determined by God.)

Some versions of the story indeed interpret 53:21–23 as the verses with which God “replaced” the words about the exalted cranes. Al-Rāzī and Ibn Kathīr, perhaps detecting this issue, note that in 22:52 one is dealing with “linguistic” naskh and not “technical” naskh, meaning that it is naskh in the plain Arabic sense of wiping away something rather than the legal definition, which combines both the revocation and the replacement of verses in the Quran. It is entirely plausible that, since some versions of the story provided a clear case of the removal and replacement of some verses, and since this is only one of two verses using the word naskh, the story was kept in circulation as evidence or support for the theory of naskh as “abrogation; for these issues, see 2:106c.

It is far from likely that the lore attached to the idols would have vanished immediately upon the conquest of Makkah and other towns controlled by idolaters. Indeed, the denizens of Ṭāʾif bargained for the right to temporarily worship their idols as part of an agreement to become Muslims and were much aggrieved when the Muslims destroyed those idols. It is conceivable that the story of the “exalted cranes” survived as an invention of bitter former idolaters, out of a kind of tribal pride that had yet to die out, possibly as the result of a misremembered incident related to the Prophet, the Quraysh, and the mention of their idols. Such a situation could have led to a series of stories that came down to the early commentators in the various forms of the story discussed above. The early transmitters of this story either saw no great theological or logical problem with the story or simply passed on a story they had heard without taking a firm position on it, as happens countless times in the early tafsīr tradition. Many commentators, in attempting to move the tafsīr genre from a collection of opinions to a normative account of the Quran, took great pains to demonstrate the baseless nature of the story.

The incident of the goddesses obscures rather than explains the verses it claims
to be connected with by taking common themes in the Quran and giving them an explanation that is in discord with how those elements are understood elsewhere; the accounts offer a strained and implausible chronology based upon revelations taking place years apart from one another; and the accounts themselves contradict one another in substantial ways, since some interpret the words as having been uttered by the Prophet, and others interpret them as merely heard by the idolaters.

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53 that He might make what Satan casts to be a trial for those in whose hearts is a disease, and those whose hearts are hard—and truly the wrongdoers are in extreme schism—

53 *What Satan casts*, that is, into the hearts of disbelievers (M). That God should make certain matters a trial is an idea found throughout the Quran (e.g., 2:102; 10:85; 17:60; 25:20; 37:63; 39:49; 54:27; 60:5; 74:3). The idea of hearts with disease (*marad*) is mentioned also in 2:10; 5:52; 8:49; 9:125; 33:12, 32, 60; 47:20, 29; 74:31. Such disease is often understood by commentators as a reference to hypocrisy, doubt, ignorance, and lack of faith (IK). The idea of hard or hardened hearts is also mentioned in 2:74; 57:16; and 39:22: *Woe unto those whose hearts are hardened to the remembrance of God!* The word schism renders *shiqāq* (also in 2:137, 176; 38:2; 41:52), which has the basic meaning of “fracture” or “separation” and connotes an attitude of opposition and hostility to the truth (R).

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54 and so that those who have been given knowledge might know that it is the truth from thy Lord, and thus believe in it, and that their hearts be humbled before Him. And truly God guides those who believe unto a straight path.

54 *Those who have been given knowledge* also appears in 16:27 and 30:56 describing those who speak truths to the disbelievers in the Hereafter, while in other verses *those who have been given knowledge* are contrasted with various kinds of disbelievers (e.g., 17:107; 28:80; 29:49; 34:6; 47:16; 58:11). The contrast between those who are given knowledge and disbelievers or those with weak faith
links knowledge (‘ilm) with belief (īmān). Here humbled renders a word that can also mean “at peace” or “content” (Aj, Q).

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55 Yet those who disbelieve remain in doubt over it, till the Hour comes upon them suddenly or there comes upon them the punishment of a barren day.

56 Sovereignty that Day shall be God’s; He will judge between them, and those who believe and perform righteous deeds shall be in Gardens of bliss.

57 And as for those who disbelieve and deny Our signs, theirs shall be a humiliating punishment.

55–57 The barren day is interpreted by some to refer to the Day of Judgment, called barren (‘aqīm) because there are no days after it (Q), an interpretation supported by the mention of God’s Judgment in the subsequent verse. Others see it as a reference to the Battle of Badr, because it would be a day when mothers would lose their children to battle and there would be no blessing in it for the disbelievers (R). The idea of the end of the world coming suddenly or while human beings are unaware is also mentioned in 6:47; 7:187; 16:45; 21:40; 26:202; 29:53; 43:66; 47:18.

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58 And as for those who emigrate in the way of God and are then slain or die, God will surely provide them with a beautiful provision. And truly God is the best of providers.

58 It is reported that this verse was revealed when two Emigrants died in Madinah, and some people said it was better to die fighting in the way of God than of natural causes (Q). Others generalize the meaning to include those who leave their homes to help the religion (R). Some mention 4:100: Whosoever forsakes his home, emigrating unto God and His Messenger, and death overtakes him, his
reward will fall upon God. One could also mention 3:169, *And deem not those slain in the way of God to be dead. Rather, they are alive with their Lord, provided for,* as this latter verse shares the language of God’s Provision for those who are slain. That God is the best of providers is also mentioned in 5:114; 23:72; 34:39; 62:11.

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59 He will surely cause them to enter an entrance with which they shall be content. And truly God is Knowing, Clement.

59 The entrance is the entrance into Paradise, which will not be preceded by any difficulties for the Emigrants (R). A description of entering Paradise in contentment is also mentioned in 89:28–30: *Return unto thy Lord, content, contenting. Enter among My servants. Enter My Garden.*

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60 Thus it is. And whosoever retaliates with the like of that which he has suffered, and is then aggressed upon, God will surely help him. Truly God is Pardoning, Forgiving.

60 This verse is understood as a general description of the plight of the believers who were persecuted and expelled from their homes in Makkah and forced to migrate to Madinah (Ṭ). Some commentators believe it refers to an incident in which some Muslims encountered idolaters during the month of Muḥarram, considered by the Arabs even before the advent of Islam one of the sacred months during which fighting was forbidden. The idolaters pressed to fight despite the tradition, and the Muslims responded in kind, but felt remorseful for having done so (Q, R, Ṭ); on the sacred months of the Islamic calendar, also see 9:36–37c.

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61 That is because God makes the night pass into the day and makes the day pass into the night, and because God is
Hearing, Seeing.

61 Some interpret this verse in combination with the previous one as an explanation of God’s Power; God has power over the day and night and thus has the power to grant help and victory (R).

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62 That is because God is the Truth and what they call upon apart from Him is false, and because God is the Exalted, the Great.

62 See 31:30, a nearly identical verse, and commentary.

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63 Hast thou not considered that God sends down water from Heaven, and then the earth becomes green? Truly God is Subtle, Aware.

63 The revival of the dead earth by rain is a common theme in the Quran (cf. 7:57; 16:65; 22:5; 29:63; 30:24; 41:39), often interpreted as a symbol of the ease with which God will raise the dead in the Hereafter or of the revival of dead hearts by the water of the spirit; see 2:72–73c.

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64 To Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth. And God is truly the Self-Sufficient, the Praised.

64 Self-Sufficient translates al-Ghanī, rendered in 47:38 as Rich; see 47:38c.
Hast thou not considered that God has made whatsoever is on the earth subservient unto you—and the ship sails upon the sea—by His Command? And He maintains the sky lest it fall upon the earth, save by His Leave. Truly God is Kind and Merciful unto mankind.

Cf. 31:31. The imagery of seafaring as a blessing bestowed by God is also mentioned in 14:32; 17:66; 30:46; 31:31; 43:12. In this context, where the sea wind is made subservient to the purposes of humanity, that God maintains the sky (samāʾ) is understood to mean that the natural order is Divinely maintained so that such travel is possible (R) and that the sky remains stable enough for ships to take to the sea (Z). It could also be understood as a metonym for whatever falls from the sky, such as rain, as in 11:52 and 71:11: *He will send the sky upon you with abundant rains.*

And He it is Who gave you life; then He causes you to die; then He gives you life. Truly man is ungrateful.

On the cycle of life, death, and then life again, which is understood to mean the life of this world, followed by death, followed by the life of the Hereafter, see 2:28c, which also mentions the state of “death,” or nonexistence, that precedes life in this world.

For every community We have appointed a rite they are to perform; so let them not argue with thee over the matter. And call to thy Lord. Truly thou art following straight guidance.

And if they dispute with thee, say, “God knows best what you do.
God will judge between you on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein you used to differ.”

For the statement *For every community We have appointed a rite*, see 22:34c; on the general question of the Divinely ordained differences among religions, see 5:48c and the essay “The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions.” Here, as in v. 34, the word rendered *rite* (*mansak*) can mean both a ritual act and a place of ritual significance.

*Let them not argue with thee* is understood to mean that the Prophet, and by extension all believers, should not engage in debate with members of other communities over such questions, although some understand this to mean that those who would argue with the Muslims should themselves stop their dispute and embrace Islam (R). If the disputants continue, the believers are to remind them of God’s Knowledge and that God will judge the differences between religions not in this world, but in the Hereafter (e.g., 2:113; 3:55; 5:48; 6:164; 10:93; 16:92, 124; 32:25; 39:3, 46).

**Knowest thou not that God knows whatsoever is in Heaven and on earth? Truly that is in a Book. Truly that is easy for God.**

God’s Knowledge of the heavens and the earth is also affirmed in 3:29; 5:97; 29:52; 58:7; 64:4; but this is the only instance in the Quran where the singular form of “heaven” (*samāʾ*) is used in such a context; see also 31:16: *If it be but the weight of a mustard seed, be it in a rock, in the heavens, or on the earth, God will bring it forth.*

**And they worship, apart from God, that for which He has sent down no authority, and that whereof they have no knowledge. And the wrongdoers shall have no helpers.**

The concept of *authority* (*sulṭān*) being sent down appears many times in the Quran (e.g., 7:71; 11:96; 12:40) and is often understood to mean a Divine
revelation or message. However, it can also refer to the authority of intellectual demonstration and in this respect is related to *that whereof they have no knowledge* (R). *Sulṭān* is also used for the influence or power of one thing over another (hence its use to mean a ruler), as in Satan’s words to his followers in 14:22: *I had no authority (sulṭān) over you, save that I called you, and you responded to me.*

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72 And when Our signs are recited unto them as clear proofs, thou seest denial upon the faces of those who disbelieve. They well-nigh pounce upon those who recite Our signs unto them. Say, “Shall I inform you of what is worse than that? The Fire God has promised to those who disbelieve. What an evil journey’s end!”

72 Many verses speak of the negative reactions of the disbelievers to the recitation of God’s signs, including 8:31; 19:73; 31:7; 34:43; 42:25; 46:7; 68:15; 83:13. The disbelievers’ *denial* manifests itself in the form of anger (R). Here the word *pounce* carries the sense of gripping something violently (Q, Ṭ). *Worse than that* means worse than the feeling of anger at the signs of God that they hear recited to them (Q, R).

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73 O mankind! A parable is set forth, so hearken unto it! Truly those upon whom you call apart from God will never create a fly, even if they gathered together to do so. And if the fly should rob them of aught, they could not rescue it from it. Feeble are the seeker and the sought!

73 The parable in this verse is commonly understood to refer to the idols that the Makkans took as objects of worship. The imagery of the idols being unable to retrieve something taken by a fly echoes the story of Abraham in 21:57–66, where Abraham destroys all the idols except one and blames the remaining idol. When blamed for the crime, he suggests that his accusers ask the remaining idol that
destroyed the rest, and the accusers themselves point out that the idols are unable to
do that. Cf. 7:191: *Do they ascribe as partners those who created naught and are
themselves created?* Parables describing the powerlessness of the idols also

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74 And they did not measure God with His true measure. Truly God is Strong, Mighty.

74 Cf. 6:91 and 39:67. This could also be translated, “They did not estimate
God as He ought to be estimated.” Some understand the phrase to mean that they did
not give God the honor due to Him, because they assigned partners unto Him that
were nothing but stones (R), and they did not know Him as He ought to be known
(T).

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75 God chooses messengers from among the angels and
from among mankind. Truly God is Hearing, Seeing.

75 God sends angels, such as Gabriel and Michael, as well as human beings
as messengers (T). This verse is seen also as a reaffirmation that God’s sending of
a man or an angel is not something novel (Q).

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76 He knows that which is before them and that which is
behind them. And unto God are all matters returned.

76 *That which is before them* is interpreted by some to refer to the Hereafter,
and *that which is behind them*, to this world (R); see also 2:255c; 20:110; 21:28.
*Unto God are all matters returned* also appears in 2:210; 3:109; 8:44; 35:4; 57:5
and refers to the ultimate return of all things to their origin with God.

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77 O you who believe! Bow, prostrate, and worship your
Lord! And do good, that haply you may prosper.

77  Bowing and prostrating are mentioned together also in 2:43, 125; 3:43; 9:112.

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78  And strive for God as He should be striven for. He has chosen [for] you—and has placed no hardship for you in the religion—the creed of your father Abraham. He named you *muslims* aforetime, and herein, that the Messenger may be a witness for you, and that you may be witnesses for mankind. So perform the prayer and give the alms, and hold fast to God. He is your Master. How excellent a Master, and how excellent a Helper!

78  In Arabic, the structure of *strive for God as He should be striven for* is similar to that in *they did not measure God with His true measure* from v. 74. This is understood to mean striving (jihād) to do what God commands and striving against what God has forbidden, and to do both for neither worldly purposes nor renown (Q). Others say it means that one who strives for God should not fear the reproach of the reproachful (Ṭ). Many understood this to mean that the Muslim community should strive in later times as they did in the earliest battles (R), while others say this as a call to spiritual effort, citing the ḥadīth in which, upon returning from the Tabūk campaign, the Prophet is reported to have said, “We have returned from the lesser striving to the greater striving.”

*Hardship* (ḥaraf) is understood to mean “confinement” or “straitening” (Ṭ). That God *has placed no hardship for you in the religion* can be interpreted as a reference to the concessions granted by God when it comes to fulfilling religious obligations in certain circumstances, such as shortening the prayers while traveling and praying while seated or lying down if one is ill (R). It is also thought to refer to the opportunity to make expiation for one’s sins (Bd). More generally, it is thought to emphasize that there is no sin or fault for which God does not provide a way out (65:2; Ṭ). A verse of related import is 2:185: *God desires ease for you, and He does not desire hardship for you.* In this connection some mention the *ahādīth:* “The best of your religion is that which is easiest of it,” and, “When I command you to do a thing, accomplish that which you can of it.”
The "creed of Abraham" is also mentioned in 2:130, 135; 3:95; 4:125; 6:161; 16:123, and in all cases except two is mentioned together with the concept of being a ḥanīf, or a primordial monotheist (see 2:135c). It is thought by some that he named you muslims refers to Abraham’s prayer with Ishmael in 2:128, Our Lord, make us submit unto Thee, and from our progeny a community submitting ( muslim) unto Thee, where the community refers to the Prophet and his followers (Q, R), that is, the Islamic community as a whole. The other common opinion is that it is God Who named them muslims (“submitters”) aforetime (before) and herein (in the Quran), so that this verse becomes a kind of foretelling of the formation of the Muslim community (Q, R).

In 2:135–36, the Prophet and his community are directly linked to Abraham and his descendants, and in other verses Muslims are commanded to follow his “creed” (millah; 3:95; 4:125; 6:161; 16:123). In this sense the you in He named you can refer not only to the followers of the Prophet Muhammad, but also to all those throughout history who followed the creed of Abraham, a ḥanīf (16:123), which would also include other prophets as described in 2:136.

The statement that the community will serve as witnesses for mankind is similar to 2:143: Thus did We make you a middle community, that you may be witnesses for mankind and that the Messenger may be a witness for you. Al-Rāzī notes that God wants witnesses for mankind to be upright and just, so that others can come to faith. Ibn Kathīr understands witnesses for to mean that they are “that which is witnessed” (mashhūd) as upholders of justice, and the Prophet is similarly “witnessed” by his community for his exemplary qualities; see also 2:143c. Some have understood middle community as a community that establishes a just mean between the inward and outward aspects of religion, between the law and the spirit. Others have pointed to the providential positioning of the Islamic world in the middle belt of the world geographically. Others have emphasized Islam’s preservation of the balance between the life of this world and otherworldliness.

The idea of holding fast to God is also mentioned in 4:146 and 4:175, and elsewhere the believers are also commanded to hold fast to the rope of God (3:103) and the tablets of Moses (7:145).