Most commentators consider *al-Qaṣaṣ* to be an entirely Makkan sūrah that was revealed after *Sūrah 27, al-Naml*, although some consider vv. 52–55 to be Madinan (JJ, Q) and others maintain that v. 85 was revealed during Muhammad’s migration from Makkah to Madinah (Āl, IJ, JJ). It takes its name from the story (qāṣaṣ) Moses tells his future father-in-law in v. 25 regarding his flight from Egypt.

*Al-Qaṣaṣ* begins with the story of Moses and Pharaoh and describes the oppression suffered by the Children of Israel, leading Moses’ mother to cast him into the river, after which he was rescued and cared for by the family of Pharaoh and ultimately reunited with his mother (vv. 3–13). This is followed by an account of Moses’ striking and killing an Egyptian who was quarreling with an Israelite and the subsequent flight of Moses from Egypt to Midian (vv. 14–22). There Moses meets two sisters, one of whom he will come to marry, and finds refuge for many years in the employ of his father-in-law (vv. 23–28). Then Moses encounters the fire from which he hears God speak to him; he has his first experience of the miracles he will perform in Egypt and requests that Aaron, his brother, be sent with him to confront Pharaoh (vv. 29–35). The confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh includes the issue of the latter’s claim to divinity and his boast about building a structure to climb up to Heaven to encounter and challenge the God of Moses (vv. 36–42).

The Prophet Muhammad is told that he was not present when Moses received his revelations and that in the intervening period
God sent prophets to other peoples, a reminder that only highlights the obstinacy and pride of the Prophet’s contemporaries who claimed to long for guidance from God, but who rejected His Prophet when he was sent (vv. 43–50). They are contrasted with those who, when they hear the truth, believe in it (vv. 51–55).

The last part of the sūrah emphasizes the ephemerality of the world in relation to the Hereafter; Moses’ contemporary Korah is presented as the epitome of wickedness and worldly extravagance and pride. The sūrah ends with a reminder that this world is coming to an end and that all things will return to God (vv. 56–88).

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

1 Ṭā. Sīn. Mīm. 2 These are the signs of the clear Book. 3 We recite unto thee in truth some of the account of Moses and Pharaoh, for a people who believe. 4 Indeed, Pharaoh exalted himself in the land, and made its people into factions, oppressing a party among them, slaying their sons and sparing their women. Verily he was among those who work corruption. 5 Yet We desired to be gracious to those who were oppressed in the land, and to make them imams, and to make them the heirs, 6 and to establish them in the land, and to show Pharaoh and Hāmān and their hosts that which they dreaded from them. 7 So We revealed to the mother of Moses, “Nurse him. But if you fear for him, then cast him into the river, and fear not, nor grieve. Surely We shall bring him back to you and make him one of the messengers.” 8 Then the House of Pharaoh picked him up, such that he would become unto them an enemy and a sorrow. Truly Pharaoh and Hāmān and their
hosts were sinners. And the wife of Pharaoh said, “A comfort for me and for you! Slay him not; it may be that he will bring us some benefit, or that we may take him as a son.” Yet they were unaware. But the heart of Moses’ mother became empty, and she would have disclosed it, had We not fortified her heart, that she might be among the believers. And she said to his sister, “Follow him.” So she watched him from afar; yet they were unaware. And We forbade him to be suckled by foster mothers before that; so she said, “Shall I direct you to the people of a house who will take care of him for you and treat him with good will?” Thus We returned him to his mother, that she might be comforted and not grieve, and that she might know that God’s Promise is true. But most of them know not. When he reached maturity and was firmly established [in life], We gave him wisdom and knowledge. Thus do We recompense the virtuous. He entered the city at a time of heedlessness among its people. And he found therein two men fighting—one from among his own faction and the other from among his enemies. Then the one from among his own faction sought his aid against the one who was from among his enemies; so Moses struck him with his fist and put an end to him. He said, “This is the work of Satan! Truly he is a manifest enemy, leading astray.” He said, “My Lord! Truly I have wronged my own soul. Forgive me.” So He forgave him. Verily He is the Forgiving, the Merciful. He said, “My Lord! Because Thou hast blessed me, I shall never be a supporter of the guilty.” Morning found him in the city, fearful and...
vigilant, and behold, the one who had sought his help the day before cried out to him for help! Moses said to him, “Truly you are clearly in error.” But when he desired to strike him who was an enemy unto them both, he said, “O Moses! Do you desire to slay me, as you slew a soul yesterday? You desire naught but to be a tyrant on the earth, and you desire not to be among the workers of righteousness.” Then from the outskirts of the city a man came running. He said, “O Moses! Truly the notables are conspiring against you, that they might slay you. So leave! Truly I am among your sincere advisers.” So he left from there, fearful and vigilant. He said, “My Lord! Save me from the wrongdoing people!” And when he turned his face toward Midian, he said, “Perhaps my Lord will guide me to the right way.” And when he arrived at the wells of Midian, he found there a community of people watering [their flocks]. And he found beside them two women holding back [their flocks]. He said, “What is your errand?” They said, “We water not [our flocks] until the shepherds have driven [theirs] away, and our father is a very old man.” So he watered [their flocks] for them. Then he turned toward the shade and said, “My Lord! Truly I am in need of any good that Thou mayest send down upon me.” Then one of the two came to him, walking bashfully. She said, “Truly my father summons you, that he might render unto you a reward for having watered [our flocks] for us.” When he came and recounted his story unto him, he said, “Fear not. You have been saved from the wrongdoing people.” One of the two said, “O my father!
Hire him. Surely the best [man] you can hire is the strong, the trustworthy.”

He said, “I desire to marry you to one of these two daughters of mine, on condition that you hire yourself to me for eight years. But if you complete ten, that will be of your own accord. And I desire not to be hard upon you. You shall find me, if God wills, to be among the righteous.”

He said, “So let it be between you and me. Whichever of the two terms I complete, let there be no enmity toward me. And God is Guardian over what we say.”

Then when Moses had completed the term and set out with his family, he perceived a fire on the side of the Mount. He said to his family, “Stay here. I perceive a fire. Perhaps I will bring you some news therefrom, or a firebrand, that haply you may warm yourselves.”

And when he came upon it, he was called from the right bank of the valley, at the blessed site, from the tree, “O Moses! Truly I am God, Lord of the worlds!”

and, “Cast thy staff!”

Then when he saw it quivering like a serpent, he turned in retreat without returning. “O Moses! Approach and fear not! Truly, thou art of those who are secure.

Insert thy hand in thy bosom; it will come forth white, without blemish. And draw thine arms to thyself against fear. These are two proofs from thy Lord to Pharaoh and his notables. Verily they are an iniquitous people.”

He said, “My Lord! Verily I have killed a soul among them, and I fear that they will slay me.

And my brother, Aaron, is more eloquent than me in speech. So send him with me as a helper to confirm me, for I fear they will deny me.”

He said, “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. With Our signs, you and those who follow you shall be the victors.”  

But when Moses brought them Our clear signs, they said, “This is naught but fabricated sorcery. We heard this not among our fathers of old.” Moses said, “My Lord knows best who brings guidance from Him, and whose end is the Abode. Truly the wrongdoers will not prosper.” Pharaoh said, “O notables! I know of no god for you other than myself. So kindle for me a fire, O Hāmān, for clay, and make me a tower, that haply I may behold the God of Moses, though truly I think he is among the liars.” And he and his hosts waxed arrogant upon the earth, without right, and they thought they would not be returned unto Us. So We seized him and his hosts, and cast them into the sea. So behold how the wrongdoers fared in the end. And We made them imams calling unto the Fire. And on the Day of Resurrection they will not be helped. And We caused them to be pursued by a curse in this world. And on the Day of Resurrection they will be among the repugnant. And indeed We gave unto Moses the Book—after We had destroyed the former generations—as a [source of] insight for mankind, and guidance and mercy, that haply they may reflect. And thou wast not on the western side when We decreed unto Moses the Commandment, and thou wast not among the witnesses. But it is We Who brought into being the generations, and lives grew long for them. And thou dwelt not among the people of Midian, reciting unto them Our signs. But it is We Who sent. And thou wast
not on the side of the Mount when We called out. But [thou art sent as] a mercy from thy Lord that thou mayest warn a people unto whom no warner has come before thee, that haply they may remember. (47) And [We did so] lest there be an affliction that would befall them because of that which their hands have sent forth at which they should say, “Our Lord! If only Thou hadst sent a messenger unto us, we would have followed Thy signs and been among the believers!” (48) But when the truth came to them from Us, they said, “Why was he not given the like of that which was given to Moses?” Did they not disbelieve in that which was given to Moses aforetime? They said, “Two sorceries, supporting one another.” And they said, “Truly we are disbelievers in each.” (49) Say, “So bring a book from God that provides better guidance than these two, that I may follow it, if you are truthful.” (50) And if they respond not to thee, then know that they follow only their caprices. And who is more astray than one who follows his caprice without guidance from God? Surely God guides not wrongdoing people. (51) And indeed We have caused the Word to reach them, that haply they may reflect. (52) Those unto whom We gave the Book before it, they are believers in it. (53) And when it is recited unto them, they say, “We believe in it; verily it is the truth from our Lord. Truly we were submitters even before it.” (54) It is they who will be given their reward twice over for their having been patient. And they repel evil with good, and spend from that which We have provided them. (55) And when they hear idle talk, they turn away therefrom and say, “Unto us our deeds, and
unto you your deeds. Peace be upon you! We do not seek out the ignorant.”

Surely thou dost not guide whomsoever thou lovest, but God guides whomsoever He will. And He knows best those who are rightly guided. And they say, “If we follow guidance along with thee, we shall be snatched away from our land.” Have We not established for them a secure Sanctuary, to which the fruits of all things are brought, as a provision from Our Presence? But most of them know not. And how many a town have We destroyed who exulted in their life of ease. There are their dwellings, uninhabited after them save for a few. And We, truly, are the Inheritor. And thy Lord never destroys towns until He sends a messenger to their mother city to recite unto them Our signs. And We never destroy towns, save when their people are wrongdoers. And whatsoever you have been given, it is an enjoyment of the life of this world, and its ornament. But that which lies with God is better and more lasting. Will you not understand? And is he unto whom We made a goodly promise and who receives it, like unto him whom We granted enjoyment in the life of this world and who then, on the Day of Resurrection, will be among those arraigned? And on the Day when he shall call out to them, and say, “Where are My partners, those whom you claimed?” Those against whom the Word has already come due will say, “Our Lord! These are those whom we perverted. We perverted them as we ourselves were perverse. We disavow [them] before Thee; it was not us whom they worshipped.” It will be said, “Call upon your partners.” So they will
call upon them, but they will not answer them. And they will see the punishment—if only they had been rightly guided!  And on the Day when He will call out to them and say, “What answer gave you to the message bearers?”  the tidings shall be obscured for them on that Day, and they shall not question one another.  But for he who repented, believed, and worked righteousness, perchance he will be among those who prosper.  And thy Lord creates what He will, and chooses; no choice have they. Glory be to God and exalted is He above the partners they ascribe!  And thy Lord knows what their breasts conceal and what they disclose.  And He is God; there is no god but He! To Him belongs praise at the beginning and at the end. To Him belongs judgment, and unto Him shall you be returned.  Say, “Have you considered: if God should make night come over you unceasingly until the Day of Resurrection, what god other than God would bring you light? Will you not, then, listen?”  Say, “Have you considered: if God should make day come over you unceasingly until the Day of Resurrection, what god other than God would bring you night, that you might rest therein? Will you not, then, see?”  Out of His Mercy He made for you night and day, that you may rest therein, and that you may seek of His Bounty, and that haply you may give thanks.  And on the Day when He shall call out to them, He will say, “Where are My partners, those whom you claimed?”  And We shall draw forth from every community a witness, and say, “Bring your proof.” Then they will know that the truth belongs to God. And that
which they used to fabricate will forsake them. Truly Korah was of the people of Moses, but he transgressed against them. And We gave him such treasure that the keys to it would be a heavy burden for a group of strong men. [Remember] when his people said to him, “Exult not! Surely God loves not the exultant. And with what God has given you, seek after the Abode of the Hereafter, and forget not your portion in this world. And be good, as God has been good to you. Seek not to work corruption upon the earth. Surely God loves not the workers of corruption.”

He said, “I have only been given it on account of knowledge I possess.” Did he not know that God has destroyed generations before him who were mightier in strength and greater in what they had amassed? And the guilty will not be questioned about their sins. And he came forth unto his people in his adornment. Those who desired the life of this world said, “Would that we had the like of that which has been given to Korah. Truly he is a possessor of great fortune!” But those who had been given knowledge said, “Woe unto you! The Reward of God is better for those who believe and work righteousness, and none shall receive it save the patient.” Then We caused the earth to engulf him and his house. And he had no party who could help him against God, nor could he help himself. And morning found those who had longed to be in his place the day before saying, “Alas! It seems God outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will among His servants. Had God not been gracious to us, He would have caused us to be engulfed [as well]. Alas! It
seems the disbelievers will not prosper!” That is the Abode of the Hereafter, which We ordain for those who desire neither dominance upon the earth, nor corruption. And the end belongs to the reverent. Whosoever brings a good deed, he shall have better than it; and whosoever brings an evil deed, those who perform evil deeds shall only be recompensed for that which they have done. Truly the One Who ordained the Quran for thee shall surely bring thee back to the place of return. Say, “My Lord knows best those who bring guidance, and those who are in manifest error.” And thou didst not hope that the Book would be delivered unto thee; rather, it was a mercy from thy Lord. So be not a support for the disbelievers. And let them not turn thee from the signs of God after they have been sent down unto thee. But call [others] to thy Lord and be not among those who ascribe partners unto God. And call not upon another god along with God. There is no god but He! All things perish, save His Face. Judgment belongs to Him, and unto Him will you be returned.

Commentary

For a discussion of the separated letters that appear at the start of some sūrah\(\text{s}, see 2:1c. On these particular letters, two of which also appear at the beginning of Sūrah 27, see 27:1c.

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These are the signs of the clear Book.

2 Signs translates āyāt, which is also used to denote the verses of the Quran; on the range of realities signified by the word āyah in the Quran, see also commentary on 2:106; 45:3–5. Other sūrahs of the Quran have a similar verse at the beginning (10:1; 12:1; 13:1; 15:1; 26:2; 31:2). The Book refers here to either the Quran itself or the Preserved Tablet (85:22; R). It is clear in its message, its blessings, and in the goodness it contains (Q).

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We recite unto thee in truth some of the account of Moses and Pharaoh, for a people who believe.

3 We recite means that God conveys it to Muhammad through the Archangel Gabriel (Q, R).

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Indeed, Pharaoh exalted himself in the land, and made its people into factions, oppressing a party among them, slaying their sons and sparing their women. Verily he was among those who work corruption.

4 Pharaoh exalted himself in the land means he was tyrannical and oppressive (T) in his own kingdom (R). Or it can refer to his claim to lordship, as described in 79:24, when he says, I am your lord most high (Q). Oppressing . . . them—“to oppress” can also mean “to deem weak” (cf. 7:75, 150)—refers to the Egyptians’ enslaving of (R, T) and forcing the Israelites into servile and demeaning labor (IK). Other than describing it as a punishment or suffering (ʿadhāb), the Quran does not give a specific reason for the slaughter of boys and sparing of girls (cf. 2:49). In light of the fact that Pharaoh repeats the same threat when Moses is an adult (7:127; 40:25), the Quran itself indicates that the murder of males was a form of collective punishment or control (R; cf. Exodus 1), rather than the result of a foretelling of future events, as is sometimes mentioned in the commentaries (R, T, IK), by soothsayers or astrologers (or even through a dream of Pharaoh) warning that a child would be born of the Israelites who would rise and destroy Pharaoh’s kingdom; see 20:25–28c.
Yet We desired to be gracious to those who were oppressed in the land, and to make them imams, and to make them the heirs,

5 Those who were oppressed in the land are the Israelites (Ṭ). The idea of making them imāms is also echoed in 21:73 with regard to Isaac and Jacob: And We made them imāms, guiding according to Our Command; and in 25:74, in a prayer by those who repent: Make us imams for the reverent. In 2:124 God makes Abraham an imām for mankind. To be an imām means to be foremost in matters of faith and worldly affairs (R) and to be a leader in doing good and in calling others to do what is good (Q). To make them the heirs means that they would inherit a land, though what precisely they would inherit is not described here. On this question, see 7:137c, and 26:59c, which mentions that one interpretation is that they inherited land and property similar to what the Egyptians possessed, though they did not inherit it from Pharaoh directly; see also 44:25–28.

and to establish them in the land, and to show Pharaoh and Hāmān and their hosts that which they dreaded from them.

6 Hāmān is also mentioned in vv. 8, 38; 29:39; 40:24, 36. In two of those verses, Pharaoh asks Hāmān to build a tower in order to proclaim Pharaoh a deity (v. 38; 40:36). The identity of Hāmān has long been a source of contention between Muslim scholars and some revisionist scholars and also among Muslims themselves. Matters have often not been clarified by the willingness of many classical commentators to pass along folkloric or legendary material that was derived, often uncritically, from Jewish, Christian, and other sources. This transmission of extra-Quranic material concerning this question has often resulted in a confusion between the Hāmān of the Quran and the Hāmān of the later commentary tradition. Many Muslim scholars who have examined this issue closely have concluded that the most plausible explanation for the name Hāmān is that it is a title (like the title Pharaoh, or Fir‘awn), not a personal name, and refers to the high priest of Amon (Ha-Amen), who would have had important governmental functions, such as being in charge of public works like constructing buildings, and
would have been second in authority only to Pharaoh. Revisionist or skeptical scholars have offered alternate derivations from various Biblical and apocryphal literature to explain the entry of the figure of Hāmān into the Quranic accounts of Pharaoh—arguments too complex to repeat here, but ones that essentially propose a confused borrowing from the Bible (specifically the figure of Haman from the book of Esther) or other traditions from the ancient Near East.

*That which they dreaded from them* is thought by some to refer to a prophecy given to Pharaoh and Hāmān by their soothsayer that an Israelite would be born who would rise up and destroy them (R, Ṭ), but it could also, and perhaps more plausibly, refer to a fear of losing control of a subject population who had hitherto been kept in check by periodic decimation of their male population (see v. 4; 2:49c). To *establish them in the land* (or “on the earth”) means to establish them in a land like that of the Egyptians (R).

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7 So We revealed to the mother of Moses, “Nurse him. But if you fear for him, then cast him into the river, and fear not, nor grieve. Surely We shall bring him back to you and make him one of the messengers.”

7 *Revealed to the mother of Moses* means that the message in this verse was cast into her heart (Ṭ). Other opinions mention that she saw it in a dream, though some say Gabriel appeared and told her. Al-Qurṭubī argues that an appearance by Gabriel, usually associated with prophethood, would not have made her a prophet, citing consensus in the Islamic tradition that she in fact was not a prophet. *Revealed* renders the verbal form of *waḥy*, a word often used to describe the process by which the Quran came to the Prophet, as in 53:4, *It is naught but a revelation revealed*, but it is also used for the inspiration God gave to the apostles of Jesus (5:111) and even the bee (16:68). Though classical Islamic theology distinguishes typically between *waḥy*, referring to the revelation given to the prophets and messengers, and *ilhām*, or “inspiration” given to saints and sometimes ordinary people (the latter appears as a verb in 91:8 in connection with the inspiration given to the human soul), the usage of the word *waḥy* in the Quran is somewhat more complex, or at least is not restricted to the conveyance of revelation to prophets and messengers.

Some say Moses’ mother would hide him in a garden and come and nurse him secretly (Ṭ). Al-Ṭabarī mentions several opinions regarding how long Moses’ mother waited before placing him in the river, but he notes there is no solid
evidence to specify such a time period. Bring him back to you is thought to mean that God would return Moses to her so that she could nurse him (v. 13; Ṭ). She is told to fear not that Moses would die or be lost, nor grieve over her separation from him (Q). Some note that fear is suffering over what may come, and grief is suffering for what has gone by (R); the absence of both fear and grief is a state often attributed to those who achieve salvation and enter the Garden, as in the common Quranic refrain No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve (e.g., 2:38; 3:170; 5:69; 6:48; 46:13). The story of Moses’ separation and return to his mother is also told in 20:37–40.

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8 Then the House of Pharaoh picked him up, such that he would become unto them an enemy and a sorrow. Truly Pharaoh and Hāmān and their hosts were sinners.

8 Such that he would become unto them an enemy and a sorrow does not mean that this was the intention of those from the House of Pharaoh who took the baby; rather, it refers to the ultimate end God had in store for them (R, Ṭ). Sinners translates khāṭiʾ, which can also mean those who make a mistake, and for a minority of commentators their hosts were sinners (khāṭiʾ) means not that they were sinning, but that they were making a mistake in understanding the nature of the situation (R).

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9 And the wife of Pharaoh said, “A comfort for me and for you! Slay him not; it may be that he will bring us some benefit, or that we may take him as a son.” Yet they were unaware.

9 In the Islamic tradition the wife of Pharaoh is named Āsiyah and is considered by many to have been one of the saintliest women to have ever lived, as mentioned in a ḥadīth that singles out in this regard Āsiyah, Mary the mother of Jesus, the Prophet’s first wife, Khadijah, and his daughter Fāṭimah (see 3:42c; 66:11:c). The Quran’s account does not say that it was the wife of Pharaoh who plucked Moses from the water, though some commentaries assert this (Q; in the Biblical account, Exodus 2:6, it is the daughter of Pharaoh who finds Moses).
According to the commentaries, in response to his wife’s statement that the child would be a blessing and a comfort, Pharaoh said, “A comfort for you, but for me, no,” and some commentators mention a hadīth from the Prophet saying that had Pharaoh agreed with his wife’s positive and hopeful appraisal of Moses’ arrival, God would have guided Pharaoh to faith just as He guided his wife (Q, Ṭ). Yet they were unaware refers to their ignorance of the fate that awaited them (Ṭ), though some say it could refer to the fact that the Israelites did not know that Moses would save them (Ṭ).

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But the heart of Moses’ mother became empty, and she would have disclosed it, had We not fortified her heart, that she might be among the believers.

The first instance of heart renders ḥudūd, and the second renders qalb. Some lexicographers say qalb pertains more to the essence, or “kernel,” of the heart, while ḥudūd signifies the container or outward dimensions of the heart, though the terms are sometimes treated synonymously. In Sufi literature there is often a hierarchy of such terms—ḥudūd, qalb, sirr (“secret” or “mystery”), and rūḥ (“spirit”)—to describe the depths and layers of human beings’ inner reality. That Moses’ mother’s heart became empty means it was empty of everything except for the remembrance of her son and her grief over his absence (Ṭ), or she forgot or was made to forget the promise that God had made her regarding Moses (v. 7). Became empty may also be a way of saying that she was completely driven to mental distraction and could not think (R) or that she was overcome by anxiety and fear (R), as alluded to in a similar metaphor used in 14:43 to describe the terror of the end of the world: Running with necks outstretched and heads upraised, their glance returning not to them, their hearts vacant. The verb translated became can also have the more particular sense of something that happens in the morning, so that it would be rendered, “And morning found the heart of Moses’ mother empty” (Q). What she would have disclosed was that Moses was her son and she had placed him in the river (R, Ṭ); she might have exclaimed something like, “Oh, my son!” (Q).

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And she said to his sister, “Follow him.” So she watched him from afar; yet they were unaware.
11 Moses’ mother instructed his sister to follow him to see what would happen to him, whether he lived or died (R, T). *They were unaware* means that those of the House of Pharaoh were oblivious to her presence or that they did not know that she was his sister or what her intentions were (R, T).

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12 And We forbade him to be suckled by foster mothers before that; so she said, “Shall I direct you to the people of a house who will take care of him for you and treat him with good will?”

12 Cf. 20:40. *We forbade him to be suckled by foster mothers* means that God caused the infant Moses to refuse suckling by any woman other than his mother (R). His sister then suggested to the House of Pharaoh that there was a woman who could take care of him and suckle him, and so Moses was reunited with his mother (T).

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13 Thus We returned him to his mother, that she might be comforted and not grieve, and that she might know that God’s Promise is true. But most of them know not.

13 *God’s Promise* refers to Moses’ return to his mother, which was foretold in v. 7 (T). This promise is a part of the story of Moses, but the healing of his mother’s heart is described as an end in its own right, and the compassion and solicitude toward her suffering as a mother evokes the consolation received by Mary during her labor pains in 19:23–26.

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14 When he reached maturity and was firmly established [in life], We gave him wisdom and knowledge. Thus do We recompense the virtuous.
See also 12:22, which speaks of wisdom and knowledge being given to Joseph at the time of his maturity (ashudd), or adulthood, a concept also used in connection with the age at which orphans become independent of their custodians (e.g., 6:152; 17:34). For a fuller discussion of the various ages given for “maturity” in Islamic Law, see 4:6c. Was firmly established renders the verb istawā, a word that has a rich range of meaning, including “to mount” (e.g., 10:3; 25:59; 32:4), “to turn or direct oneself to” (e.g., 2:29), and “to be equal to or the same as” (e.g., 4:95; 16:75; 35:19). It implies the stage at which one achieves the balance and sure footing of adulthood, and spiritually it indicates when a person has become balanced inwardly between hope and fear, humility and dignity, and dependence and autonomy, a time when true wisdom begins (Aj). As a physical description, it is thought to refer to the age of forty (the age of prophethood, as it is commonly known in Muslim tradition, and the age at which Muhammad first received the revelation; Q). Some treat these two ideas as synonymous, but for others the difference between maturity and being firmly established is that between physical maturity, on the one hand, and reaching one’s intellectual and psychological maturity, on the other, the first often associated with the end of puberty and the second with reaching the age of forty (R); others say they refer to thirty-three and forty years old, respectively (Ṭ).

By wisdom (ḥukm) is understood the wisdom that is possessed by a prophet before his investiture with prophethood, while knowledge refers to understanding in religious matters (Ṭ); some think that in this context it refers to knowledge in the religious tradition of Moses’ forefathers among the Israelites (Q), but others say it refers to the wisdom to judge between people (M). Thus do We recompense the virtuous (cf. 6:84; 12:22; 37:80, 105, 110, 121, 131; 77:44; see also 29:69c; 37:80c) refers to how God rewarded and blessed the mother of Moses by giving her a son, returning him to her after she was forced to relinquish him, and giving him sound judgment and intelligence (Q). Some have made the point that this verse could not refer to prophethood, since according to the Islamic tradition prophethood is never given as a reward for merit (R).

He entered the city at a time of heedlessness among its people. And he found therein two men fighting—one from among his own faction and the other from among his enemies. Then the one from among his own faction sought his aid against the one who was from among his enemies;
so Moses struck him with his fist and put an end to him. He said, “This is the work of Satan! Truly he is a manifest enemy, leading astray.”

15 The city is thought to be the capital city in which Pharaoh resided (R), though some specify that it was Heliopolis (R) or Memphis (Ṭ); it is unclear where this information originates (cf. Exodus 2:11–15). Some commentators understand time of heedlessness to mean a time when most of the inhabitants were asleep at midday (Q, Ṭ); most commentators note that by this time Moses would have been identifiable as part of Pharaoh’s retinue and was even called “the son of Pharaoh” (Q, R, Ṭ). Others say that by this time Moses had already shown his opposition to Pharaoh and had been cast out (R); heedlessness refers to the fact that the people did not know or remember Moses anymore (Q, Ṭ).

His own faction refers to the Israelites, and his enemies, the Egyptians (R). Others speculate that the adversary mentioned in this verse could have been another Israelite, but one who was a disbeliever and thus an enemy (M); the Biblical story mentions explicitly that it was an Egyptian (Exodus 2:12). Though the Quran’s account uses the word “enemy” to specify the person with whom this Israelite was quarreling in both this verse and v. 19, the Biblical account specifies that the Israelite’s first adversary was an Egyptian, but the second adversary was another Israelite; some Muslim commentators rely on the Biblical account in also identifying the adversary in this verse as Egyptian. The slightly different language in v. 19 (enemy unto them both rather than one who was from among his enemies in v. 15) could suggest, if one accepts the interpretation that enmity can also be a matter of whether one is a disbeliever, that the second adversary was a different kind of enemy and not necessarily that this second enemy was also an Egyptian; it can also be noted that v. 15 also mentions Satan as an enemy.

Put an end to him (qāḍā alayhi) is understood to imply that Moses did not intend to kill the Egyptian, but only to defend the Israelite (Q). Work of Satan signifies that it was “not appropriate” for a prophet to kill a person; the sin was not murder, but striking him in such a manner as to result in his death (Q). In general commentators are careful, here and elsewhere, to keep from attributing sin to Moses or any prophet.

16 He said, “My Lord! Truly I have wronged my own soul. Forgive me.” So He forgave him. Verily He is the
Forgiving, the Merciful.

16  *I have wronged my own soul* could also simply mean, “I have wronged myself.” Some suggest that the “wrong” may have been that Moses could have helped the Israelite without striking the Egyptian so forcefully (R). As to why someone whose intentions are pure—an assumption Muslims make for all prophets—would ask for forgiveness, some note that prophets are more careful and anxious about these kinds of matters than ordinary believers; some also note that, in addition, this verse shows the harm of unintended consequences (Q). See also 26:82, which speaks of Abraham’s *hope* for forgiveness; 26:82c, on the theological questions this issue raises for those commentators who believe that prophets have certainty of forgiveness from God; and 48:2–3c.

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17 He said, “My Lord! Because Thou hast blessed me, I shall never be a supporter of the guilty.”

17 Moses was *blessed* by being given wisdom and knowledge (v. 14; Q). Some note that his gratitude for blessings did not stem from his being forgiven, because this was said before he was made a prophet and could have had certain knowledge of God’s Forgiveness (Q). For some *never be a supporter of the guilty* refers specifically to the fact that Moses had been a member of Pharaoh’s household, but he now desires to no longer participate in the wrongs they committed; or it can mean something more universal and general, functioning more as a supplication asking God to never let him be a supporter of wrong (Q, R, Ṭ).

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18 Morning found him in the city, fearful and vigilant, and behold, the one who had sought his help the day before cried out to him for help! Moses said to him, “Truly you are clearly in error.”

18 *Morning found him . . . fearful* could also be rendered simply as, “He became fearful” (see the similar issue in 28:10c; Q). He was *vigilant* in that he was keen to see what the consequences of striking and killing the Egyptian would be (T). Moses tells the man who *cried out to him for help* that he was *clearly in error*.
— that is, clearly doing wrong— because this was the same man who only the
day before had quarreled with the other man whom Moses had struck (Q, Ṭ). In the
Exodus account (2:13), it is said that Moses came upon two Israelites, but this
account does not specify the other person’s identity other than saying he was an
enemy to them both, though some Quran commentators describe him as a second
Egyptian with whom the same Israelite was quarreling (Th; see 28:15c).

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19 But when he desired to strike him who was an enemy
unto them both, he said, “O Moses! Do you desire to slay
me, as you slew a soul yesterday? You desire naught but to
be a tyrant on the earth, and you desire not to be among the
workers of righteousness.”

19 These words are usually thought to be spoken by the enemy, but some say
they could also be spoken by the Israelite whom Moses had helped previously (R).
According to this latter reading, it was this statement that exposed the incident from
the day before, which led to Moses’ flight (R, Ṭ). Here tyrant renders jabbār,
which al-Rāzī explains is a human being who commits violence and oppression
without regard for consequences and without searching for the best way to go about
one’s actions.

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20 Then from the outskirts of the city a man came running.
He said, “O Moses! Truly the notables are conspiring
against you, that they might slay you. So leave! Truly I am
among your sincere advisers.”

20 Some commentators say that the man who came running was “a believer
from the people of Pharaoh” (Q, R) or an Israelite (Ṭ). As noted in 28:19c, some
think that the reason Moses’ deed was discovered was that what the Israelite said
to him in v. 19 was loud enough to be heard by others (Ṭ). Notables (mala”) can
also mean “council” or “group of leaders.” The Quran also discusses the
notables—a class of people who were often the most hostile to the prophets—of the
Queen of Sheba (27:29); the Quraysh (38:6); the people of Hūd (7:65); the people
So he left from there, fearful and vigilant. He said, “My Lord! Save me from the wrongdoing people!”

Fearful and vigilant (cf. v. 18) is the same way Moses is described after he struck and killed the Egyptian; he is concerned that he would be caught and killed by Pharaoh’s forces (Ṭ). Moses’ prayer is understood to highlight his reliance upon God and his realization that God was his only refuge (Q).

And when he turned his face toward Midian, he said, “Perhaps my Lord will guide me to the right way.”

Some say that Moses did not know how to get to Midian, and only had his trust in God’s Benevolence to guide him along the right way. It is said that he had no provisions or money (R, Ṭ) and that he did not even have a specific destination, but only trusted in God (R). Midian was the land of the people of Shuʿayb (see 7:85c).

And when he arrived at the wells of Midian, he found there a community of people watering [their flocks]. And he found beside them two women holding back [their flocks]. He said, “What is your errand?” They said, “We water not [our flocks] until the shepherds have driven [theirs] away, and our father is a very old man.”

Commentators note that the two women held their flocks back either because they were not strong enough to make their way to the water, because they did not want their animals to mix with the others, or out of modesty in order to avoid mingling with the men watering their flocks (Q, R). Though the act of holding
back is usually understood to mean they were holding the flocks back, some say it could mean that they were holding the other people back from their flocks (T). Moses asked them why they were staying away rather than watering their flocks (T). Their reply meant that their father was too old to do so himself, and had he been present, they would not have had to stay back with their flocks (R, T). What is your errand? can also be rendered, “What is your situation?” or “What is going on with you?”

The plain sense of the passage indicates that Moses, as a strong man in that particular social context, was able to move the animals forward and give them water. However, some commentators mention certain popular accounts in which a heavy rock that ten men could not lift was blocking another well; Moses lifted it, allowing the women’s animals to drink (Q, R, T); such popular accounts are, however, often dismissed (R). Most Muslims say that the father of the women, named Jethro in the Bible, was identical with the prophet Shuʿayb, though the Quran does not explicitly indicate this (R); see 7:85c; cf. 11:84–86c; 29:36–37.

So he watered [their flocks] for them. Then he turned toward the shade and said, “My Lord! Truly I am in need of any good that Thou mayest send down upon me.”

Moses turned toward the shade of a tree (T), by which some understand that the time was the middle of a hot day (R). Most commentators say that I am in need of any good that Thou mayest send refers to the fact that Moses was hungry, as he had been traveling for days without provisions (Q, T). In need of renders faqīr, a word that denotes a state of dependence and poverty in relation to something else and is used in both a material and a spiritual sense.

Then one of the two came to him, walking bashfully. She said, “Truly my father summons you, that he might render unto you a reward for having watered [our flocks] for us.” When he came and recounted his story unto him, he said, “Fear not. You have been saved from the wrongdoing people.”
25 Moses went to the father of the women and recounted the story of his flight from Egypt. The father told him to fear not, because Pharaoh had no power in that land (Ṭ).

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26 One of the two said, “O my father! Hire him. Surely the best [man] you can hire is the strong, the trustworthy.”

26 The woman called Moses strong, because of his actions in watering the flocks, and trustworthy, because of his noble conduct when he was approached to meet their father; according to certain accounts he insisted on walking in front of her out of modesty (My, Q, Ṭ), though this detail is not part of the Quran’s account and is likely a later embellishment.

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27 He said, “I desire to marry you to one of these two daughters of mine, on condition that you hire yourself to me for eight years. But if you complete ten, that will be of your own accord. And I desire not to be hard upon you. You shall find me, if God wills, to be among the righteous.”

27 I desire not to be hard upon you is in reference to the eight years of service the father requested for his daughter’s hand (Ṭ); he was saying that he would be fair and reasonable in his demands during that period of time (R).

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28 He said, “So let it be between you and me. Whichever of the two terms I complete, let there be no enmity toward me. And God is Guardian over what we say.”

28 The two terms are the eight years and ten years (Ṭ). Some say that it was at this time that Moses was given his staff, though others say the staff was given to...
him later by Gabriel (T). *Enmity* renders ʿudwān, which could also mean “injustice.” *Let there be no enmity* means that neither would go outside of the bounds of their agreement (R).

***

29 Then when Moses had completed the term and set out with his family, he perceived a fire on the side of the Mount. He said to his family, “Stay here. I perceive a fire. Perhaps I will bring you some news therefrom, or a firebrand, that haply you may warm yourselves.”

29 Some say that Moses *completed the term* of the entire ten years and then stayed ten more (Q, R). The incident of Moses seeing the fire is also mentioned in 20:9; 26:10; 27:7. A *firebrand* refers to a burning log or branch with which one might start another fire (R, Ṭ).

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30 And when he came upon it, he was called from the right bank of the valley, at the blessed site, from the tree, “O Moses! Truly I am God, Lord of the worlds!”

30 For the manner in which the place or the tree and fire were blessed, see 27:8c. This verse is an important point of contention between theologians on the question of whether God’s Speech is created or uncreated, an argument that usually centers on the Quran itself in a controversy that arose some two centuries after the revelation of the Quran (see the essay “The Quran and Schools of Islamic Theology and Philosophy”). In this verse the question involves the nature of the voice coming from the tree: are the words that Moses hears created or uncreated, and, if Speech is one of God’s Attributes, what does the answer to that question mean for the unchanging Essence of God? It is said that God spoke to Moses directly, without intermediary, based on 4:164: *And unto Moses God spoke directly* (kallama Allāhu Mūsā taklīman).

The commentators embellish the Quranic account with legendary material about the origin of Moses’ staff. It is said in these later sources that Moses’ staff was the staff of Adam given to him by Gabriel. In another story, when Moses agreed to
work for his father-in-law, he was told to go into a house where there were several staffs and choose a staff to use; when he opened the door, one of the them fell onto him. Jethro then told him to put it back and get another one, but the same staff fell onto him again and again. At that, Jethro told his two daughters, “This is a prophet” (Q, R). These are legendary accounts, but nonetheless highlight the importance in Islamic sacred history of the connections (genealogical or otherwise) between the prophets and the significance of Moses’ staff. For more on Moses’ staff, see 7:106–8c.

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and, “Cast thy staff!” Then when he saw it quivering like a serpent, he turned in retreat without returning. “O Moses! Approach and fear not! Truly, thou art of those who are secure.

31 Serpent renders jānn, which evokes the meaning of jinn, since jānn is considered by some to be a synonym for jinn or to refer to a certain kind of jinn. Without returning means that he retreated without the intention of returning. It also means that he did so without waiting (Ṭ).

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Insert thy hand in thy bosom; it will come forth white, without blemish. And draw thine arms to thyself against fear. These are two proofs from thy Lord to Pharaoh and his notables. Verily they are an iniquitous people.”

32 Bosom (jayb) is understood to mean that part of his shirt covering his bosom. For the meaning of jayb, see 24:31c; it can refer to the chest area up to the collarbones. In 20:22 it is not jayb, but janāḥ (“side”) where Moses places his hand, which would entail his placing his hand using the same motion. The displaying of the “white hand” (cf. 20:22; 26:33; 27:12) is one of the miracles that Moses would perform later in the presence of Pharaoh; see 27:12c.

Draw thine arms to thyself is interpreted by some to signify a gesture associated with a lack of fear, the opposite of extending the arms out in fear or in a gesture of defense (R). Others see in the action of bringing the hands to the chest a
means of allaying fear (Q), although how this occurs is not clearly explained. In this case, fear is interpreted to mean Moses’ fear of the staff that became like a living serpent (R) or his fear of Pharaoh (Q). The two proofs are the hand and the staff (T).

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33 He said, “My Lord! Verily I have killed a soul among them, and I fear that they will slay me.

33 Cf. 26:14. This verse refers to the striking and killing of the Egyptian described in v. 15.

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34 And my brother, Aaron, is more eloquent than me in speech. So send him with me as a helper to confirm me, for I fear they will deny me.”

34 Moses’ request for Aaron’s help is mentioned also in 20:29–30 and 26:13; see 20:29–35c.

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35 He said, “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. With Our signs, you and those who follow you shall be the victors.”

35 Strengthen thine arm is an idiom meaning “help thee” (T) or “strengthen thee” (Q). The authority given to Moses and Aaron is also mentioned in 23:45, and the idea of Moses bringing a manifest authority appears in 4:153; 11:96; 40:23. That authority (sulţān) is sent down (e.g., 7:71; 11:96; 12:40) is often understood to mean a Divine revelation or message; see also 22:71c; 69:29c. Sulţān is also used to denote the influence or power of one thing over another, as in Satan’s words to his followers in 14:22: And I had no authority over you, save that I called you, and you responded to me. They shall not reach you means that the
Egyptians will not be able to harm Moses and Aaron (R).

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36 But when Moses brought them Our clear signs, they said, “This is naught but fabricated sorcery. We heard this not among our fathers of old.”

36 We heard this not can mean that the people had not heard of the notion of the worship of the One God (T) or that Moses was saying something earlier peoples had not heard of and hence was novel (Q). The clear signs were fabricated, or false, because in their eyes Moses was lying about their source (R). For al-Rāzī, the point of this verse is partly to condemn blind conformity to forefathers’ beliefs, as in 5:104: “Sufficient for us is that which we have found our fathers practicing.” What! Even if their fathers knew naught and were not rightly guided? (cf. 2:170). Condemnations of slavish conformity to ancestral beliefs are also addressed to the Children of Adam in 7:28: When they commit an indecency, they say, “We found our fathers practicing it, and God has commanded us thus.” Similar verses can be found with regard to the Egyptians (10:78), Abraham’s people (21:53–54), and human beings in general (31:21; 43:24).

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37 Moses said, “My Lord knows best who brings guidance from Him, and whose end is the Abode. Truly the wrongdoers will not prosper.”

37 In whose end is the Abode (dār; cf. 6:135), Abode usually refers to the Abode of the Hereafter (dār al-ākhirah; e.g., 2:94; 6:32; 16:30; 29:64), but only in its beatific sense (R). The end does not mean only “what is last,” but also the result or outcome of a thing. The Quran also speaks of the end belonging to the reverent (e.g., 7:128; 11:49; 13:35; 28:83).

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38 Pharaoh said, “O notables! I know of no god for you
other than myself. So kindle for me a fire, O Hāmān, for clay, and make me a tower, that haply I may behold the God of Moses, though truly I think he is among the liars.”

38 See also 79:24, where Pharaoh says: I am your lord most high. It is not known whether the tower was ever actually begun or built (R). Some traditions exist that Pharaoh actually had such a structure built, climbed to the top, and shot an arrow toward the sky, which miraculously fell back down and struck him, drawing blood (R, Ṭ); al-Rāzī finds such accounts to be “not for the sane” and wonders how anyone could think of building a structure taller than a mountain, and if so, then go on to propose employing a weapon from the top of it. The order to build it can be seen as a kind of rhetorical move on Pharaoh’s part, perhaps said with a sense of irony; see 40:36–37c.

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39 And he and his hosts waxed arrogant upon the earth, without right, and they thought they would not be returned unto Us.

39 The return to God is one of the great certainties mentioned throughout the Quran, but denied by those who disbelieve (cf. 23:115; 84:14).

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40 So We seized him and his hosts, and cast them into the sea. So behold how the wrongdoers fared in the end.

40 Asking how people fared in the end is a common refrain in the Quran, and is an invitation to meditate upon the ultimate downfall of previous peoples (e.g., 12:109; 30:9, 42; 35:44; 40:21, 82; 47:10). The drowning of the Egyptians is also mentioned in 7:136; 8:54; 10:90; 17:103; 20:77–79; 26:65–66 (cf. Exodus 14–15).

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41 And We made them imams calling unto the Fire. And on
the Day of Resurrection they will not be helped.

41 Imāms calling unto the Fire is understood by some to refer to those who were foremost in performing actions and upholding beliefs that led them to the Fire and in calling others to follow them (R), in the sense that what they called for necessarily led to punishment (Q).

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42 And We caused them to be pursued by a curse in this world. And on the Day of Resurrection they will be among the repugnant.

42 The curse in this world refers to the successive plagues and humiliation the Egyptians suffered for disobeying Moses’ call and to their ultimate doom (Ṭ). As in other contexts in the Quran, the idea of a curse (la‘nah) has the sense of being distanced from God or from the good (Q). Repugnant renders maqbūḥ, which also has the sense of something that is detestable or ugly, denoting both moral and physical ugliness, or something that is accursed and to be kept at a distance (R). On the Day of Judgment it is said that inward ugliness will manifest itself outwardly (R).

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43 And indeed We gave unto Moses the Book—after We had destroyed the former generations—as a [source of] insight for mankind, and guidance and mercy, that haply they may reflect.

43 The Book refers to the Torah (R), and former generations refers to ancient peoples such as those of Noah, Lot, and Šāliḥ (Ṭ). Insight renders bašā’ir (sing. bašīrah; cf. 6:104; 7:203; 12:108; 17:102; 45:20; 75:14). Bašīrah, like the English word “insight,” can be both an attribute of a person and something by which one gains insight (Q); hence its rendering in 17:102 as clear portents and in 75:14 as testimony.
And thou wast not on the western side when We decreed unto Moses the Commandment, and thou wast not among the witnesses.

But it is We Who brought into being the generations, and lives grew long for them. And thou dwelt not among the people of Midian, reciting unto them Our signs. But it is We Who sent.

44–45 And thou addresses the Prophet Muhammad, and the western side refers to the side of the mountain where Moses received his mission (T). In these verses, God is telling the Prophet that he was not witness to these events experienced by previous prophets (T). Lives grew long for them (cf. 20:86; 21:44; 57:16) is understood to imply that, over the course of time, people came to abandon the remembrance of God (Q) or to indicate the long period of time between Moses and Muhammad (R). Some commentators say that these verses are talking about the foretelling of the Prophet Muhammad in the Book of Moses, a prophecy that came to be lost and misunderstood over time (Q); see also 3:65–66, 78, 187, and especially 7:157, which are also understood to refer to such prophecies in the Bible; see also 7:157c. It is We Who sent refers to the sending of Muhammad (Q), or it is telling the Prophet Muhammad that he was not sent to previous peoples and God had sent different prophets to peoples at different times (R).

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And thou wast not on the side of the Mount when We called out. But [thou art sent as] a mercy from thy Lord that thou mayest warn a people unto whom no warner has come before thee, that haply they may remember.

46 When We called out is thought to refer not to Moses’ initial investiture with the mission of going to Pharaoh, but with the giving of the Law or with the encounter described after the destruction of the calf (Q), for which see 2:55c; 7:155c. Some commentators understand this call to be directed not to Moses, but to the community of Muhammad and to consist of: “O community of Muhammad, I gave unto you before you asked of Me, and I answered you before you called unto
Me” (Q, Ṭ). Others say that Moses was told at this moment of the coming of the community of Muhammad and that he would not live to see it (R). These commentators use imagery similar to the covenant recounted in 7:172: *Thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their progeny and made them bear witness concerning themselves;* that is, according to this interpretation, the aforementioned words addressed to the community of Muhammad were spoken to them while they were “in the loins” of their forefathers (R). For some, *a mercy* (cf. 21:107) refers to the Quran (Ṭ). Others interpret *[thou art sent as] a mercy* to mean, “[We did that] as a mercy” or “[We sent thee, Muhammad,] as a mercy” (Q).

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47 And [We did so] lest there be an affliction that would befall them because of that which their hands have sent forth at which they should say, “Our Lord! If only Thou hadst sent a messenger unto us, we would have followed Thy signs and been among the believers!”

For the idea that, before the advent of Muhammad’s mission, the people of Arabia were asking for a prophet, see 2:89c. It is thought that the present verse refers to the Quraysh, but some say it refers to the Jews (Q), though the first is more likely, because al-Qaṣaṣ is considered a Makkān sūrah. And [We did so] lest there be is a phrase that indicates a grammatical elision, which is interpreted by commentators such that the verse would mean, “Were it not for the fact that the disbelievers, when they experience God’s Punishment, plead that God sent them no messenger, [God would have punished them sooner, or God would not have sent a prophet].” It is thus interpreted to mean that, with the advent of the Prophet Muhammad, any possible excuse for disbelieving was gone (Bḍ, Q, R, Ṭ, Z). This verse should be read especially in light of v. 59; other verses relevant to the condition of those peoples who were destroyed include 6:131; 11:117; 15:4; 17:16. At the end of this particular section in v. 59 it is reaffirmed that God does not destroy or punish a town or city until a messenger has been sent to them. In this sense the sending of the Prophet Muhammad and his presence among them remove the excuses the disbelievers may have been insincerely offering for their previous conduct (Q), to which v. 48 alludes.

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2108
But when the truth came to them from Us, they said, “Why was he not given the like of that which was given to Moses?” Did they not disbelieve in that which was given to Moses aforetime? They said, “Two sorceries, supporting one another.” And they said, “Truly we are disbelievers in each.”

When Muhammad came to them as a prophet, the Quraysh disbelieved in him and asked why his revelation was not like the revelation given to Moses; this verse asks them why, then, when the revelation of Moses was available to them before, they did not believe in it (T). Or the verse can have a more general significance, meaning that Moses was denied by the disbelievers of his time just as Muhammad was in his (R).

For some, that which was given to Moses refers specifically to miracles, such as the white hand (20:22) and the staff (20:69; Q). For others, it is revelation all at once, as with the Torah, rather than in parts (R), as mentioned in 25:32: And the disbelievers say, “Why was the Quran not sent down upon him as a single whole?” The two sorceries refer, according to some, to the Torah and the Quran, or the Torah and the Gospel (T). Reading sorceries (sihrān) as “sorcerers” (sāhirān), some have proposed Moses and Muhammad, or Moses and Aaron, or Jesus and Muhammad (Q, T).

According to some, the Quraysh would consult with local Jews on matters related to religion and prophethood, and when they described Muhammad to them, the Jews told the Quraysh to challenge Muhammad in the way mentioned in this verse (Q). It shows that, far from being sincere, the Quraysh were issuing these challenges cynically (R); see also 6:7c; 43:57–58c.

Say, “So bring a book from God that provides better guidance than these two, that I may follow it, if you are truthful.”

The Prophet is commanded to challenge the Quraysh regarding the two books (two sorceries) they demeaned in the previous verse. Similar challenges to produce something like the Quran are made in 2:23; 10:38; 11:13; 17:88.
And if they respond not to thee, then know that they follow only their caprices. And who is more astray than one who follows his caprice without guidance from God? Surely God guides not wrongdoing people.

The idea of following one’s caprices (ahwā’, sing. hawā’), or egotistical desires, is a theme present in such verses as 25:43, which speaks of one who takes his caprice as his god, and other verses in which the Prophet is warned not to follow or be influenced by the whims and desires of other people (e.g., 2:120, 145; 6:56; 38:26); also see 45:23c; 53:2–3c.

And indeed We have caused the Word to reach them, that haply they may reflect.

We have caused the Word to reach them is understood to mean, “We elaborated the Word for them” (Ţ) or “We completed the Word for them” (Q). Them refers to the Quraysh, the Jews, or both (Q). The Word means the contents of the Quran (Ţ).

Those unto whom We gave the Book before it, they are believers in it.

And when it is recited unto them, they say, “We believe in it; verily it is the truth from our Lord. Truly we were submitters even before it.”

These verses are thought to refer to the People of the Book who believed in the Prophet Muhammad (Ţ). Before it means before the Quran (Ţ); that is, they were monotheists or believed in the coming of a prophet before the advent of the Quranic revelation (Q). Or it can refer to those who were devoted to their
own religion before but followed Muhammad when he came, including people such as ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām, who was Jewish, and Salmān al-Fārsī, who was Zoroastrian (Ṭ); others also mention certain Christian monks such as Bahīrah and Waraq, other Christians from Syria, or others from Abyssinia who returned with the Muslims who had sought refuge there before the Muslim community as a whole migrated from Makkah to Madinah (Q, R). Submitters renders muslimīn; regarding the universal capacity of the term islām to refer to correct religion as such and not only Islam, see 2:128c; 3:19c; 3:85c; 5:3c, as well as the essay “The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions.” These are people who receive a reward twice over in v. 54 (Ṭ). For a similar set of issues regarding the faith of members of other religious communities, see also commentary on 3:110–15; 5:82–83.

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54 It is they who will be given their reward twice over for their having been patient. And they repel evil with good, and spend from that which We have provided them.

Some say that their reward is given twice over because they believed in the foretelling of the coming of Muhammad and then accepted him when he was sent; or because they accepted their previous prophet and then accepted Muhammad as well (R). The virtues mentioned here are celebrated elsewhere in the Quran as attributes of the believers, for example, in 41:34: The good deed and the evil deed are not equal. Repel [evil] with that which is better; then behold, the one between whom and thee there is enmity shall be as if he were a loyal protecting friend; and 2:2–3: The reverent . . . believe in the Unseen and perform the prayer and spend from that which We have provided them (cf. 2:254; 8:3; 13:22; 32:16; 35:29; 42:38).

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55 And when they hear idle talk, they turn away therefrom and say, “Unto us our deeds, and unto you your deeds. Peace be upon you! We do not seek out the ignorant.”

For the attitude of forbearance and patience in the face of ignorant talk or abuse, see 19:47c; 25:63c. Some report that this verse was revealed in connection with an incident in which certain People of the Book embraced Islam in the
presence of Abū Jahl, the early leader of those opposed to the Prophet; when these
new converts were leaving the gathering, Abū Jahl followed them hurling insults
and abuse at them, to which they responded simply, “Peace be upon you” (Q, R);
see also 109:6c.

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56 Surely thou dost not guide whomsoever thou lovest, but
God guides whomsoever He will. And He knows best those
who are rightly guided.

56 It is generally thought that this verse was revealed in connection with the
Prophet’s uncle and patron, Abū Ṭālib (Ṭ). According to Sunni accounts, when Abū
Ṭālib was on his deathbed, the Prophet said to him, “Say, ‘There is no god but
God,’ and I can bear witness for you on the Day of Resurrection.” He responded,
“Were it not for the fact that the Quraysh should shame me by saying, ‘He did it
only out of fear of death,’ [I would do so].” This is the accepted version of events
among Sunnis, but Shiites believe that at the end of his life Abū Ṭālib did embrace
the faith of his nephew. Some point out that although the verse is addressed to the
Prophet, it applies to all people and is exemplified in the examples of other
prophets who were unable to guide some of those they loved: Adam and his son
Cain (5:27–31), Noah and his son (11:42–46), Abraham and his father (9:114; Aj).

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57 And they say, “If we follow guidance along with thee,
we shall be snatched away from our land.” Have We not
established for them a secure Sanctuary, to which the fruits
of all things are brought, as a provision from Our Presence?
But most of them know not.

57 The statement in this verse by some of the Prophet’s people indicates that
they believed that what he said was true, but they feared being ostracized and
losing their secure place, because the other Arabs did not share that belief (Q). The
Sanctuary (ḥaram) was a place of relative safety and security in comparison with
the surrounding lands of Arabia (Q). On the notion of the sanctuary and its
privileged conditions, see 5:97c; 27:91c; 29:67c. *Most of them know not* that it is God Who established them in the first place and kept them safe (Ṭ). At a spiritual level, this verse can refer to those who offer various kinds of excuses to themselves or others as to why they have not or cannot embark on the spiritual life or why they cannot give up such and such in their attachment to the world (Aj).

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58 And how many a town have We destroyed who exulted in their life of ease. There are their dwellings, uninhabited after them save for a few. And We, truly, are the Inheritor.

58 This verse is connected to the previous one in that the rejection of faith for the sake of retaining the objects of this world will eventually lead to loss of both those worldly goods and salvation in the Hereafter (R). *How many a town have We destroyed?* is also asked in various forms in 7:4; 21:11; 22:45; 47:13; 65:8. *Exulted in their life of ease* means that they did not know that they ought to have thanked God for what they had (Q). *Save for a few* does not mean that a few of the people remained, but that some of the ruins still stood, and people such as travelers would use them as temporary dwellings while on their journeys. In this sense it could also be rendered “save a little” (Q). The implication in *We, truly, are the Inheritor* is that, because of the utter destruction, none were left to inherit them but God (Ṭ). In a more general sense, a foundational teaching of the Quran is that all things return to God (e.g., 2:210; 3:83; 8:44; 11:123); He is the Inheritor of all things.

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59 And thy Lord never destroys towns until He sends a messenger to their mother city to recite unto them Our signs. And We never destroy towns, save when their people are wrongdoers.

59 Most commentators understand this verse to be a reference to Makkah, which came to have (and still has) the traditional title Umm al-Qurā, meaning “Mother of Towns” (Q, Ṭ). By mother city (lit. “mother”) is meant the greatest or largest of them (Th, M). Bytowns is meant those towns around Makkah (M) or all towns, as most Muslims understand the title. Some say this verse can refer to all
peoples who have towns and a central city to whom messengers have been sent (M). In other verses it is also said that God never destroyed a city or town before sending it a warner (e.g., 6:131; 11:117; 26:208).

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60 And whatsoever you have been given, it is an enjoyment of the life of this world, and its ornament. But that which lies with God is better and more lasting. Will you not understand?

60 The inferiority of this transient world in comparison with the more enduring Hereafter or with what lies with God is a major theme of the Quran (see, e.g., 4:77; 7:169; 12:57; 16:30; 87:17). Some say that this world in relation to the Hereafter is like a speck of dust in relation to the sea, and that the realities of the Hereafter are lasting in that they never come to an end, unlike all things in this world, which certainly will end (R). The idea of the goods of this world as an ornament is also mentioned in 33:28.

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61 And is he unto whom We made a goodly promise and who receives it, like unto him whom We granted enjoyment in the life of this world and who then, on the Day of Resurrection, will be among those arraigned?

61 The question in this verse—whether one who is promised the rewards of the Garden and then ultimately reaches them is like one who enjoys the world but loses a place of felicity in the Hereafter—serves as a reminder that poor and afflicted believers are superior in the sight of God to disbelievers who are wealthy and comfortable in this world (Q). Arraigned (muḥdar) has a negative connotation, as it is associated with being called to account (R); or it means being “made present” (a more literal rendering) in the Punishment of God (T). Some say that the two people being compared in this verse are the Prophet (in other opinions, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib or the Prophet’s uncle Ḥamzah) and Abū Jahl (see 28:55c), respectively (T).
And on the Day when he shall call out to them, and say, “Where are My partners, those whom you claimed?”

The partners (ascribed unto God) in this question posed on the Day of Judgment (cf. v. 74) can refer to inanimate objects such as idols, but also to living objects of worship, such as jinn, angels, or human beings; for the same or a similar question, see 6:22; 16:27; 40:73; 41:47. This verse thus describes a situation where those who have been resurrected now have knowledge of the Oneness of God and the truths that the prophets brought, but this knowledge has not come to them through reflection; it has come of necessity rather than by choice (R). The them is thought to refer to the leaders who misguide, which seems to be implied by the subsequent verse (R). You claimed refers to those leaders’ claims that these objects of worship would help or intercede for those who put their faith in them (Q).

Those against whom the Word has already come due will say, “Our Lord! These are those whom we perverted. We perverted them as we ourselves were perverse. We disavow [them] before Thee; it was not us whom they worshipped.”

In the Quran the language of the Word “coming due” (e.g., 10:96; 36:7, 70; 39:71; 40:6) usually means the Word of punishment and requital, as when a guilty person receives a deserved or preordained sentence; see 10:33c; 36:7c. The words spoken in this verse are those of the leaders among the disbelievers and wrongdoers and those who misguided others, as also mentioned in such verses as 2:166: When those who were followed disavow those who followed (R). Perverted renders aghwā, and were perverse renders ghawā, both of which come from the same root; the former means to entice or lure someone from the way, and the latter means to stray or err. Some understand the leaders’ disavowal to imply that it was not they whom the followers worshipped, but their own egotistical desires and attachments (R).
It will be said, “Call upon your partners.” So they will call upon them, but they will not answer them. And they will see the punishment—if only they had been rightly guided!

The idolaters are to call upon those whom they worshipped instead of or alongside God (Q); cf. 7:195; 17:36; 34:22. Since the former idolaters will know the inescapable certainty of their situation, some commentators interpret this verse to mean that not even they will expect an answer from their former objects of worship; rather, this experience is part of their chastisement (R).

*If only they had been rightly guided* is the first part of a conditional statement whose completion would be, “they would have been saved from the Fire” (Q) or “they would have known the truth” (R). Some read the whole sentence as the complete conditional statement: “They would have seen the punishment, if they had been rightly guided.” *They* may refer to the idolaters, who, had they been rightly guided in the world, would have had known to fear the punishment in the Hereafter; or *they* may refer to the idols, which would see the punishment if they were actually living beings capable of being guided (R).

And on the Day when He will call out to them and say, “What answer gave you to the message bearers?”

This verse is often understood in light of the fact that the prophets will be asked about the response of those to whom they were sent, as in 5:109: *The Day when God will gather the messengers and say, “What response did you receive?”* they shall say, “We have no knowledge. Truly it is Thou who knowest best the things unseen.”

The tidings (anbā’) are understood to be pleas or arguments that shall be obscured for them, meaning that there are no valid arguments those people can
make on their own behalf in the Hereafter (Q); or perhaps their news of each other will be obscured and they will not be able to question one another (R).

*Question one another* can also mean “inquire about one another,” but this will not occur (cf. 23:101) because of the terror of the Day (Q, R). However, in other verses (7:44–50; 37:27, 50; 52:25) some kind of mutual questioning is said to take place among the condemned, and in 74:40 such “questioning” is a part of the felicitous state of being in the Garden; on how this apparent disparity is dealt with, see 23:101c. The seeming contradiction in the accounts of whether people will “question one another” is similar to the question of whether God will speak to people on the Day of Resurrection, as some verses imply that He will and others that He will not; on this question, see 2:174c. On the similar issue of how or whether the guilty will be “questioned,” see 28:78c.

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67 But for he who repented, believed, and worked righteousness, perchance he will be among those who prosper.

67 On the concept of repentance in the Quran, see 2:37c; 2:128c; 4:17–18c; 9:14–15c; 25:71c. Commentators often point out that in the Quran phrases such as *perchance, it may be,* and *haply* (usually ‘asā or la‘alla) denote not a possibility, but something that will necessarily come to pass because it is God Who is speaking (Q); see also 2:21c; 11:12c. This interpretation implies that such terms are meant to give hope to those who repent, believe, and do good works (R).

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68 And thy Lord creates what He will, and chooses; no choice have they. Glory be to God and exalted is He above the partners they ascribe!

68 Many commentators say that *thy Lord . . . chooses* refers to the selection by God of prophets, and that this verse is a response either to those among the Quraysh who thought that a man of higher social standing and power than Muhammad would have merited the office of prophet or to those Jews who believed that the prophet should have been a Jew rather than an Arab (Q); on this subject, see 2:139c; 3:26c; 43:31c. For others it is thought to refer to the privilege
of intercession (ṣafāʿah; Q; see 2:48c; 2:255c). No choice have they means that it is not they who decide who will be a prophet or messenger (Q). It can also mean, according to some, that in all matters it is God, not the creature, Who decides (Q).

Some commentators, most notably al-Ṭabarī, read this verse, “Thy Lord creates what He will, and chooses that which is choicest of what they have;” understanding it to mean that God chooses the best among them for Himself. Al-Qūṭubī points out that al-Ṭabarī prefers this interpretation, because otherwise the verse, which can be rendered more literally as, “No choice had (kāna) they,” would imply that the idolaters had no choice in the past, but would in the future, an inference that al-Qūṭubī rejects, since kāna can apply to the future as well as the past.

On a spiritual level, this verse is understood to express a fundamental fact about the relationship between God and human beings, namely, that in their spiritual lives people must understand their own power of choice in submitting to what God chooses for them (Aj). Ibn ʿAjībah quotes a saying of the Sufi master Abuʾl-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258), “Forsake the directing of things, and if you must direct things, then let it be to direct yourself not to direct things,” referring to the art of submitting one’s will to the Will of God both outwardly and inwardly.

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69 And thy Lord knows what their breasts conceal and what they disclose.

69 Cf. 27:74. According to this verse, God knows the opponents’ inner thoughts of enmity against the Prophet and their contempt for God’s choice, not only their outward abuse and hostility toward him (R). The concealing of thoughts and intentions within breasts (ṣudūr) is an important idea in the Quran, which frequently describes that God knows what lies within breasts (e.g., 3:119; 5:7; 8:43; 11:5; 29:10; 31:23; 39:7; 40:19; 42:24; 57:6; 64:4; 67:13; 100:10).

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70 And He is God; there is no god but He! To Him belongs praise at the beginning and at the end. To Him belongs judgment, and unto Him shall you be returned.

70 At the beginning and at the end can mean at the beginning and end of time or this world and the next. The end renders al-ākhirah, which can also mean “the last” and is usually rendered “the Hereafter,” especially when it is juxtaposed
against *al-dunyā*, or “this world” (*al-dunyā* literally means something like “the lower” or “the nearer”). In this verse *al-ākhirah* is coupled with the beginning (*al-ūlā*), which can also mean “the first.”

*Judgment* here renders *ḥukm*, which can also convey the sense of the power of decision, dominion, or rule as well as wisdom. In this world, all judgment and power are rightfully exercised only as a function of God’s Judgment and Power, and in the Hereafter God will judge and decide directly between and among His creatures, which is part of that to which they *shall be returned* (R; e.g., 4:141; 10:93; 22:56; 27:78).

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71 Say, “Have you considered: if God should make night come over you unceasingly until the Day of Resurrection, what god other than God would bring you light? Will you not, then, listen?”

72 Say, “Have you considered: if God should make day come over you unceasingly until the Day of Resurrection, what god other than God would bring you night, that you might rest therein? Will you not, then, see?”

73 Out of His Mercy He made for you night and day, that you may rest therein, and that you may seek of His Bounty, and that haply you may give thanks.

71–73 *Unceasingly* renders *sarmad*, a term that in the language of Islamic philosophy came to be associated with the notion of eternity. The alternation of night and day and the blessings particular to each half of the daily cycle are mentioned frequently in the Quran (e.g., 2:164; 3:190; 10:6; 13:3; 17:12; 22:61; 24:44; 31:29; 35:13; 39:5; 45:5). In this passage it is the alternation of activity and rest, exposure and hiddenness that is evoked, and human beings are asked to contemplate what the day, which enables work and the fulfillment of needs, would be like without the night’s rest and tranquility, and similarly to contemplate what the night’s quiet and rest would be like without the light of the day by which one is able to see (R). Human beings are then asked why they would worship a being who
can neither provide nor take away the alternating of day and night, followed by the questions Will you not, then, listen? and Will you not, then, see? These rhetorical questions correspond to the half of the daily cycle that precedes them: during the night one depends more upon hearing, while during the day one depends more upon sight.

The night and the day can refer, in the context of the spiritual life, to periods of psychological and spiritual difficulty and ease, to confusion and clarity. A basic teaching of Islamic spirituality is the notion that it is through the alternation of the rhythms of the night and the day of the soul that one progresses and matures spiritually: if one experiences the expansion of the day too much, one becomes bold and importunate, but if one is relentlessly subject to the night of contraction, one becomes despairing and timid (Aj).

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74 And on the Day when He shall call out to them, He will say, “Where are My partners, those whom you claimed?”

74 See 28:62c.

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75 And We shall draw forth from every community a witness, and say, “Bring your proof.” Then they will know that the truth belongs to God. And that which they used to fabricate will forsake them.

75 It is thought that the bringing forth from every community a witness refers to prophets, as suggested by 4:41, which addresses the Prophet: How will it be when We bring forth a witness from every community, and We bring thee as a witness against these (Q, T). Alternately, it would include all those who could be named “witnesses” for their communities, since there will have been many generations within various communities without prophets actually living among them (R). Bring your proof is thought to be addressed to the communities that rejected their prophets, meaning that they should bring any evidence on their own behalf that they were justified in their rejection of the messengers sent to them (T). That which they used to fabricate refers to the idols that they invented (Q) and the lies that they told (R).
Truly Korah was of the people of Moses, but he transgressed against them. And We gave him such treasure that the keys to it would be a heavy burden for a group of strong men. [Remember] when his people said to him, “Exult not! Surely God loves not the exultant.

In the Bible the story of Korah (Qārūn), a prominent Israelite who rebelled against Moses, is told in Numbers 16; cf. 29:39c. Korah’s station in life exemplifies the lesson of v. 60, namely, that wealth and power in the world will not save one from the Punishment of God. Transgressed renders baghā, which can refer to his disbelief in God (Q) or his contemptuous attitude toward others stemming from his great wealth (Q); or it may point to his failure to give charity in accordance with proper belief, flaunting his wealth, or mistreating people (R). Some say that his attitude and actions stemmed partly from his jealousy of Moses and Aaron and the station that God had bestowed upon them. Here the admonition Exult not is understood to mean that he should not be wanton or miserly with this wealth, denying it from those who have a right to some of it (Q), and that he should not celebrate the things of this world as if there were no consequences in the Hereafter (R).

The meaning of the keys to such treasure here is interpreted variously to mean that they were literally keys to manifold treasures so numerous that a single man could not carry them; or that the nature of the burden was one of knowledge—he had so many different keys for different treasures they were difficult to count or keep track of; or that the keys were carried along with the treasures. It can also be interpreted to mean that these were keys of knowledge, meaning that Korah was proficient and knowledgeable in so many different areas that even the combined skills of a group of people could not equal his (R); keys are used with regard to knowledge in connection with God’s Knowledge of the Unseen in 6:59: And with Him are the keys of the Unseen (R).

And with what God has given you, seek after the Abode of the Hereafter, and forget not your portion in this world. And be good, as God has been good to you. Seek not to
work corruption upon the earth. Surely God loves not the workers of corruption.”

77 Korah is advised to use his wealth for good works, rather than wasting it or being miserly with it (Q), although the advice also has general applications. *Forget not your portion in this world* is thought to mean that one should in waste one’s life by neglecting to do good works, be charitable, or prepare for the Hereafter (Q, T); others interpret it to mean that one should not go to extremes of asceticism and detachment from the world and enjoy what God has made permissible (Q, R, T). Here al-Qurṭūbī quotes a saying of ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar (sometimes attributed to the Prophet or to ʿAlī): “Work for this world as though you would live forever, and work for the Hereafter as though you were to die tomorrow.” Some say that the *portion in this world* refers to one’s coffin or grave (Q), and thus the phrase points to the important spiritual attitude of remembering death. The root of *good* in *And be good, as God has been good to you* is ḥ-s-n, which also has the sense of beauty and virtue.

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78 He said, “I have only been given it on account of knowledge I possess.” Did he not know that God has destroyed generations before him who were mightier in strength and greater in what they had amassed? And the guilty will not be questioned about their sins.

78 *On account of knowledge* renders ʿalā ʿilm, which appears also in 7:52; 39:49; 44:32; 45:23. Some think that here it means Korah possessed certain skills and proficiencies that enabled him to become wealthy (some say he was a goldsmith; others transmit a tradition that he was an alchemist, which are both mentioned and dismissed by commentators). In this instance of ʿalā ʿilm, it is clear that Korah attributes the blessings he possesses to knowledge he has, but in other instances this phrase can also be used to mean that God acts based upon His Knowledge (translated with knowledge or knowingly; 7:52; 44:32; 45:23). In other instances the sense of ʿalā ʿilm is more open to interpretation; see 39:49c. Some commentators read ʿindī, rendered here as *I possess*, to mean “in my opinion,” which is another usage of the word and which would make the translation, “I have only been given it on account of knowledge, in my opinion” (R, T).

Other verses in which disbelievers are reminded of those *generations* or...
Some interpret the guilty will not be questioned about their sins to mean that the guilty of one generation will not be questioned about or held responsible for the sins of another generation (T). That the guilty are not questioned about their sins is similar in meaning to 30:57: Nor can they make amends (Q); and 41:24: And if they seek favor, they will not be granted favor. It can also mean that God has no need to question them about their deeds, because He already knows these deeds completely (R).

Because other verses indicate that people will be questioned, such as 15:92, So by thy Lord, We shall question them all, some note that there are different kinds of questions to be asked—those that seek information, those that call one to account, and those that are meant as rebuke (R)—and these different verses can be referring to those different kinds of questions, so that God questions them in one respect, but does not question them in another. For a similar issue of whether and how people will question one another, see 28:66c.

According to the Sufis, one should not exult in one’s own attainments or be pleased with one’s own state, words, or actions; they believe that individuals who look at their own accomplishments with a sense of glory should be considered wretched (Aj).

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79 And he came forth unto his people in his adornment. Those who desired the life of this world said, “Would that we had the like of that which has been given to Korah. Truly he is a possessor of great fortune!”

80 But those who had been given knowledge said, “Woe unto you! The Reward of God is better for those who believe and work righteousness, and none shall receive it save the patient.”

79–80 The commentators relate various descriptions of the fantastic wealth and luxury displayed by Korah (Q, T). Although it is more plausible that those who had been given knowledge refers to people of piety and wisdom, some
commentators say that it refers to the “rabbis” or “priests” (ḥbār; Q), though this would have been somewhat of an anachronism as applied to the time of Moses. These people who had been given knowledge point out that one must be patient and steadfastly obedient in the world in order to attain success in the Hereafter (Q).

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81 Then We caused the earth to engulf him and his house. And he had no party who could help him against God, nor could he help himself.

82 And morning found those who had longed to be in his place the day before saying, “Alas! It seems God outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will among His servants. Had God not been gracious to us, He would have caused us to be engulfed [as well]. Alas! It seems the disbelievers will not prosper!”

81–82 Some commentators relate that because of the enmity, rebellion, and scurrilous actions that Korah undertook against Moses, God granted the latter the power to call upon the earth to swallow him (Q, T). Party renders fiʾah, a word that in other contexts refers to a group upon whom one can call for support in a battle (see 8:15–16c). In both instances in v. 82, it seems renders kaʾanna, which some understand as providing emphasis: “Indeed, God outspreads,” or with an implicit verb, “Alas! [Know that] God outspreads” or “Alas! [Do you not know that] God outspreads?” (Q, T). Others read this phrase as meaning, “Alas for you! Truly God outspreads,” which is possible depending on how the letters are voweled (Q, R). The idea that God outspreads and straitens also appears in 13:26; 17:30; 29:62; 30:37; 34:36, 39; 39:52). And morning found those could also mean simply “and it came to be that those.”

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83 That is the Abode of the Hereafter, which We ordain for those who desire neither dominance upon the earth, nor corruption. And the end belongs to the reverent.
That refers to the Garden (Q), which one will attain not through dominance or corruption, but by no longer dominating or corrupting (R). Dominance renders ʿuluww, which also can mean “ascendancy,” “exaltedness,” or “grandeur.” The end can denote the outcome of something, and the Quran also states elsewhere that the end belongs to the reverent (7:128; 11:49; 13:35). Corruption (fasād), a word that literally means “rot,” is used here, as in most instances in the Quran, to mean corruption in the broadest sense, including ethical and financial corruption, decadence, and immorality.

Whosoever brings a good deed, he shall have better than it; and whosoever brings an evil deed, those who perform evil deeds shall only be recompensed for that which they have done.

That the reward for good deeds is multiplied is also mentioned in 6:160: Whosoever brings a good deed shall have ten times the like thereof (see also 2:245, 261; 4:40; 64:17).

Truly the One Who ordained the Quran for thee shall surely bring thee back to the place of return. Say, “My Lord knows best those who bring guidance, and those who are in manifest error.”

This verse is often recited by Muslims as a prayer of protection for those who are about to set out on a journey. What is ordained consists of the commands and prohibitions of the Quran, to be followed in this life, after which one will be returned to God after death (R); or ordained the Quran for thee signifies “bestowed the Quran upon thee” (T).

Some understand this verse to be a promise to the Prophet that he would return to Makkah victorious (Q, R, T). It is said in some traditional sources that this verse was revealed neither in Makkah nor in Madinah, but in Juhfah, between Makkah and Madinah, during the Prophet’s emigration (hijrah); its purpose was to console the Prophet in his sadness at having to leave his home by informing him that he
would return to it (Q, R). *The place of return* refers to one’s death, or to the Day of Resurrection, or to the Garden (Q, Ṭ).

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86 And thou didst not hope that the Book would be delivered unto thee; rather, it was a mercy from thy Lord. So be not a support for the disbelievers.

86 The first part of this verse is taken to mean that the Prophet did not know beforehand that he was to be chosen as a messenger by God (Q). Some say that this verse could also be read, “Thou didst not hope that the Book would be delivered unto thee, but only for mercy from thy Lord” (R, Z). For the notion of what it means to be a *support* (ẓāhir), see 28:17c.

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87 And let them not turn thee from the signs of God after they have been sent down unto thee. But call [others] to thy Lord and be not among those who ascribe partners unto God.

87 In this verse the Prophet is told not to let the disbelievers’ lies, denials, and efforts to harm him or shake him from his mission (Q, R); rather, he should call them to the affirmation of the Oneness of God. It is said that this verse was revealed when the Quraysh were trying to induce the Prophet to praise or magnify their gods (Q), but some assert that the real audience for this verse is not the Prophet himself, but the community of believers as a whole (R).

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88 And call not upon another god along with God. There is no god but He! All things perish, save His Face. Judgment belongs to Him, and unto Him will you be returned.

88 *Face* renders *wajh*, a word with a rich range of meanings. For some it means God Himself (Q, Th), the Divine Essence or Self (*al-Dhāt*; Z), or
Truth/Reality (al-Ḥaqq; Th). Others emphasize the Face as what one faces, interpreting the verse to mean that all objects of aspiration other than God will come to nothing (M). Some say this verse means that all actions are empty except for those that lead one to God (Su) or that all things perish except those things by which one approaches God (IK, Q). This latter meaning echoes the opinion that Face refers to God’s religion (Q, Tb). Others say that this verse means anything that lives will die, except God (Qu). Others interpret it to mean all things perish except God, the Garden, the Fire, and the Throne (Th). See also commentary of 55:26–27: All upon it passes away. And there remains the Face of thy Lord. Ibn Kathîr cites a ḥadîth of the Prophet: “The truest words spoken by a poet were those of [the pre-Islamic poet] Labîd, ‘All that is other than God is false (ḥāṭil)” (ḥāṭil can also mean “vain” or “void”); the poem continues, “And every enjoyment will without doubt vanish.” Wajh can also be understood to mean that aspect of the Divine Reality that is turned toward His creation.

For some, perish (ḥālik) means to become nothing or to be annihilated (R), while for others it means to be removed, through death, from a state of being able to benefit from the Face of God; in this latter sense perishing or being destroyed does not mean that a thing becomes literally nothing. Al-Râzî uses the example of a garment, which, when it becomes tattered or ripped to the point of becoming unusable, is said to have perished or been destroyed, even though its constituent parts remain. He extends this imagery to the heavens and the earth, which will be destroyed, but whose parts will not become literally nothing, as suggested by 14:48: On the Day the earth shall be changed into other than the earth, and the heavens [too]. For others, “perishing” means that a thing is essentially or by its nature perishable and subject to destruction; that is, a “perishing” thing is ephemeral or contingent (R), which is the status of all created beings.