All commentators agree that *al-Rūm* was revealed during the Makkan period, although some maintain that v. 17 is from the Madinan period (Aj, Āl) and others maintain that vv. 27–28 are from the Madinan period (IJ). The *sūrah* takes its name from the mention of the defeat of the Byzantines, or Romans, *al-Rūm*, in v. 2. According to some commentators, God’s promise that the Byzantines would prevail after having been defeated (v. 3) follows upon the last verse of the previous *sūrah*, which promises that God will guide those who strive for His sake (Āl, Sy). Others maintain that the two *sūrah* are linked by the promise that *truly God is with the virtuous*, which ends *Sūrah* 29, and the promise in vv. 4–5 that *on that day the believers shall rejoice in God’s Help* (Aj).

From the mention of the battle between the Sassanids and the Byzantines and the prediction of the eventual victory of the Byzantines (vv. 2–6) followed by a criticism of the disbelievers for failing to reflect upon the signs of God (vv. 7–9), the *sūrah* proceeds to a discussion of the disparate ends of believers and disbelievers (vv. 10–16). This leads into the *sūrah*’s central theme, the abundance of signs of God in the created order and the inability of many human beings to understand them, because they follow caprice rather than knowledge (vv. 17–29). Beginning with a reference to the original or primordial nature of human beings, the *fitrah*, in one of the Quran’s more famous verses (v. 30), vv. 30–34 contrast those who follow the *upright religion* with those who divide religion into factions (v. 32). Challenging
the disbelievers to bring something to substantiate their claims (v. 35), the sūrah then touches upon several broader Quranic themes, such as virtue toward relatives and employing one’s wealth in a just manner (vv. 38–39), the phases of human existence (v. 40), and the extent of human corruption (v. 41).

After calling again to the upright religion (vv. 43), al-Rūm returns to the contrast between the believers and disbelievers (vv. 44–45), which leads into another extended passage on its central theme, the importance of reflecting upon God’s signs (vv. 46–51). A reminder of the Prophet’s inability to guide those whom God has not guided (vv. 52–54) is then followed by a discussion of the difficulties that will confront the guilty upon the Hour of Judgment (vv. 55–57). The sūrah concludes with a reminder that their hearts are sealed (v. 59) and that one must thus remain steadfast when confronted by them (v. 60).

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

1 Alif. Lām. Mīm. 2 The Byzantines have been defeated in a land nearby. Yet after being defeated they will prevail within a few years—unto God belongs the affair, before and after, and on that day the believers shall rejoice in God’s Help. He helps whomsoever He will, and He is the Mighty, the Merciful. 6 [This is] God’s Promise—God fails not His Promise, but most of mankind know not. 7 They know some outward aspect of the life of this world, but of the Hereafter they are heedless. 8 Do they not reflect upon their souls? God did not create the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them, save in truth and for a term appointed. Yet truly many among mankind believe not in the meeting with their Lord. 9 Have they not journeyed upon the earth and observed how those before them fared in the end? They were greater than
them in strength. They tilled the earth and built upon it more than have they, and their messengers brought them clear proofs. For God would never wrong them, but themselves did they wrong. Then the end of those who committed evil deeds was most evil, for they denied God’s signs and mocked them. God originates creation, then brings it back; then unto Him shall you be returned. And on the Day when the Hour is come, the guilty shall despair. They have no intercessors from among those they ascribed as partners, and they will then disbelieve in those they ascribed as partners. And on the Day when the Hour is come, that Day they will be separated. As for those who believe and perform righteous deeds, they will be made joyous in a Garden. But as for those who disbelieved and denied Our signs and the meeting of the Hereafter, they will be arraigned unto the punishment. So glory be to God when you enter upon the eve and when you rise at morn; His is the praise in the heavens and on the earth—when the sun declines and when you reach noontide. He brings forth the living from the dead, and brings forth the dead from the living, and He revives the earth after its death. Even so shall you be brought forth. Among His signs is that He created you from dust. Then, behold, you are human beings ranging far and wide. And among His signs is that He created mates for you from among yourselves, that you might find rest in them, and He established affection and mercy between you. Truly in that are signs for a people who reflect. And among His signs are the creation of the heavens and the earth and the
variation in your tongues and colors. Truly in that are signs for those who know.  

23. And among His signs is your sleep by night and day and your seeking His Bounty. Truly in that are signs for a people who hear.  

24. And among His signs is that He shows you lightning, arousing fear and hope, and that He sends down water from the sky, then revives thereby the earth after its death. Truly in that are signs for a people who understand.  

25. And among His signs is that the sky and the earth stand fast by His Command. Then, when He calls you forth from the earth with a single call, behold, you will come forth.  

26. Unto Him belongs whosoever is in the heavens and on the earth; all are devoutly obedient unto Him.  

27. He it is Who originates creation, then brings it back, and that is most easy for Him. Unto Him belongs the loftiest description in the heavens and on the earth, and He is the Mighty, the Wise.  

28. He sets forth for you a parable from yourselves: have you, among those whom your right hands possess, partners in what We have provided for you, such that you are equal with respect to it, with you fearing them as you fear each other? Thus do We expound the signs for a people who understand.  

29. Nay, those who do wrong follow their caprices without knowledge. So who will guide those whom God has led astray? And they shall have no helpers.  

30. Set thy face to religion as a ħanīf, in the primordial nature from God upon which He originated mankind—there is no altering the creation of God; that is the upright religion, but most of mankind know not—  

31. turning unto Him. And reverence Him and perform the
prayer; and be not among the idolaters, among those who have divided their religion and become factions, each party rejoicing in that which it has. And when harm befalls the people, they call upon their Lord, turning to Him in repentance. Then, when He lets them taste of His Mercy, behold, a group among them ascribe partners unto their Lord. Let them be ungrateful for that which We have given them: “So enjoy yourselves! For soon you will know.” Or have We sent down upon them any authority that speaks of that which they ascribe as partners unto Him? And when We cause the people to taste some mercy, they rejoice in it. But should an evil befall them because of that which their hands have sent forth, behold, they despair. Have they not considered that God outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will? Truly in that are signs for a people who believe. So give unto the kinsman his right, and unto the indigent and the traveler. That is better for those who desire the Face of God. It is they who shall prosper. That which you give in usury that it might increase through other people’s wealth does not increase with God. But that which you give in alms, desiring the Face of God—it is they who receive a manifold increase. God it is Who created you, then nourished you; then He causes you to die; then He gives you life. Is there anyone among those you ascribe as partners who does aught of that? Glory be to Him and exalted is He above the partners they ascribe. Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of that which men’s hands have earned, that He may let them taste
some of that which they have done, that haply they might return. Say, “Journey upon the earth and observe how those before fared in the end, most of whom were idolaters.” And set thy face to the upright religion before there comes a day from God that none can repel. That Day they will be spread asunder. Whosoever disbelieves, his disbelief is to his own detriment. And whosoever works righteousness, they make provision for their souls, that from His Bounty He may recompense those who believe and perform righteous deeds. Truly He loves not the disbelievers. And among His signs is that He sends the winds as bearers of glad tidings to let you taste of His Mercy, that the ships may sail by His Command, and that you may seek of His Bounty, and that haply you may give thanks. We have indeed sent messengers unto their people before thee, and they brought them clear proofs. Then We took vengeance upon those who were guilty; and it is incumbent upon Us to help the believers. God is He Who sends the winds, then they cause clouds to rise, and He spreads them in the sky as He will and makes them into fragments, whereupon you see the rain emerging from their midst. Then when He bestows it upon whomsoever He will among His servants, behold, they rejoice, though previously, before it was sent down upon them, they had been in despair. So observe the vestiges of God’s Mercy, how He revives the earth after its death. Truly that is the Reviver of the dead, and He is Powerful over all things. And were We to send a wind and they were to see it turn yellow, after that they would
Surely disbelieve. Surely thou dost not make the dead to hear; nor dost thou make the deaf to hear the call when they turn their backs; nor dost thou guide the blind from their straying. Thou makest none to hear, save those who believe in Our signs and are submitters. God is He Who created you from weakness, then ordained strength after weakness, then ordained weakness and old age after strength. He creates whatsoever He will, and He is the Knowing, the Powerful. And on the Day when the Hour is come, the guilty will swear that they had tarried naught but an hour; thus were they perverted. And those who have been given knowledge and belief will say, “Indeed, you tarried in God’s Book until the Day of Resurrection; and this is the Day of Resurrection! But you knew not.” On that Day the excuses of those who do wrong will benefit them not; nor can they make amends. And indeed We have set forth for mankind in this Quran every kind of parable. And if thou bringest them a sign, those who disbelieve will surely say, “You make naught but false claims.” Thus does God seal the hearts of those who know not. So be patient. God’s Promise is indeed true. And let not those without certainty disquiet thee.

Commentary

1 Alif. Lām. Mīm.

1 The Arabic letters alif, lām, and mīm, which also appear in 2:1; 3:1; 29:1; 31:1; and 32:1, are among the separated letters (al-muqattāʿāt) that are found at the beginning of twenty-nine sūrahs and whose meaning is considered by most
The Byzantines have been defeated

in a land nearby. Yet after being defeated they will prevail

within a few years—unto God belongs the affair, before and after, and on that day the believers shall rejoice

in God’s Help. He helps whomsoever He will, and He is the Mighty, the Merciful.

2–5 These verses provide the only reference in the Quran to political events contemporary to Muhammad and his followers beyond the Arabian Peninsula. According to the majority of commentators, these verses were revealed in response to the disbelievers heckling the Muslims after the Persian Empire had defeated the Byzantine Empire in Syria. In the first part of the seventh century, the Persian ruler Khusraw Parwīz (r. 590–628) sent an army under the command of General Shahrbarāz (d. 630) to Byzantium. These forces conquered parts of Syria, taking Damascus in 613 and Jerusalem in 614, during which time another Sassanid army under General Shahīn had conquered Egypt and laid siege to Constantinople. For many people the complete defeat of the Byzantine Empire seemed imminent. The Byzantine ruler had entrusted the command of his army to a man called Juhannas. In a land nearby most likely refers to the battles that he lost to Shahrbarāz at Adhriʿat and Busrah, which are the closest parts of Syria to the land of the Arabs. The Prophet and his Companions heard of this defeat while in Makkah and were saddened. The Prophet disliked the fact that the Sassanids had the upper hand over the Byzantines, as the former were Magians and the latter were followers of an Abrahamic religion. The disbelievers of Makkah, however, were said to have been exultant and gloating. When they met the Prophet’s Companions, they said to them, “You are People of the Book, and the Christians are People of the Book. We are without a revealed scripture, and our brothers the Persians have defeated your brothers the Byzantines. If you ever fight us, we will defeat you too” (Ṭ, W).

Despite the defeats they had suffered, the Quran predicted that the Byzantines
would prevail within a few years. In this context, a few translates bidʿ, which indicates a period between three and nine years (Sh, Ṭ, Z). In 622 the tide began to turn when the Byzantine emperor Heraclius defeated the Persians at Issus, south of the Taurus Mountains. This was the first in a series of victories that culminated in the Battle of Nineveh in 627, after which the Persian Empire weakened considerably, having fallen from the apparent greatness it had reached at the time these verses are said to have been revealed. In the context of the geopolitical events to which these verses refer, unto God belongs the affair; before and after refers to God’s ability to make one army victorious over another. Metaphysically, it can also be understood to mean before everything existed and after everything ceases to exist, since God is the Originator of all things and the One to Whom all things return (ST).

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6 [This is] God’s Promise—God fails not His Promise, but most of mankind know not.

The first phrase of this verse can also be read as an abbreviated structure substituting for a verbal construction meaning, “God has promised them [victory].” In both readings, it refers to God’s Promise that the Byzantines would defeat the Sassanids (IK, Sh). That God fails not His Promise (cf. 22:47; 39:20) is a general statement confirming the repeated Quranic assertion that God’s Promise is true (see 30:60c).

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7 They know some outward aspect of the life of this world, but of the Hereafter they are heedless.

This verse refers to those who know how to prosper in this world, but who are ignorant of religious and spiritual matters (IK, Ṭ). They know the outward vanities of this world, but are ignorant of the inner realities and final ends of all things (R, Z).

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8 Do they not reflect upon their souls? God did not create
the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them, save in truth and for a term appointed. Yet truly many among mankind believe not in the meeting with their Lord.

8  Do they not reflect upon their souls? represents one of the Quran’s many invitations to reflect upon the nature of God’s creation in order to facilitate spiritual understanding; see also 11:24, 30; 13:3; 16:17; 37:155; 56:62; see commentary on 3:191; 45:3–6, 23. Many understand this verse to mean that were the disbelievers to reflect upon themselves and how they were created, they would find evidence of both the Oneness of God and God’s Ability to resurrect them (Bd, IK, R, Sh, Ṭ). In this sense, it is similar to the question posed to the disbelievers in 23:115: Did you suppose, then, that We created you frivolously, and that you would not be returned unto Us? (R). To reflect upon their souls could also be understood to mean to reflect “within themselves” and upon themselves (Aj, Q, Sh). Here, as in many verses, the Quran maintains that were human beings to reflect, they would see that God did not create the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them, save in truth (cf. 15:85; 46:3; see also 10:5; 14:19; 16:3; 39:5; 45:22; 64:3; 6:73c; 29:44c; 44:38–39c). That all things are created for a term appointed (cf. 13:2; 22:5; 31:29; 35:13; 39:5; 46:3), which is understood as a reference to the Day of Resurrection (Sh), points to the finitude of all that exists and to their being created with a final end in mind (R). That they disbelieve in or deny the meeting with their Lord (cf. 6:31; 32:10) would thus mean both that they deny the Resurrection and that they do not understand that everything in the created order will eventually come to an end, since all things perish, save His Face (28:88).

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9  Have they not journeyed upon the earth and observed how those before them fared in the end? They were greater than them in strength. They tilled the earth and built upon it more than have they, and their messengers brought them clear proofs. For God would never wrong them, but themselves did they wrong.

9  Have they not journeyed upon the earth and observed how those before them fared in the end? (cf. 12:109; 30:42; 35:44; 40:21, 82; 47:10) refers to the ruins and traces of bygone peoples that the Arabs would have seen when traveling,
vestiges that provide profound lessons regarding the nature of life on earth, as indicated in 22:46: *Have they not journeyed upon the earth, that they might have hearts by which to understand or ears by which to hear?* The call to reflect upon the fate of bygone peoples complements the call in the previous verse to contemplate *their own souls*, since all peoples and all souls eventually pass away.

In the context of pre-Islamic Arabia, such a call would have served as a reminder that even an individual’s legacy as preserved by the tribe would eventually be wiped away with the tribe itself. The Quran mentions frequently the fate of the guilty, the corrupt, the wrongdoers, and those who denied God’s messengers as an admonition to the disbelievers (see 3:137; 6:11; 7:84, 86, 103; 10:39, 73; 16:36; 27:14, 69; 37:73; 43:25). That they were greater in strength, tillage, and building indicates that, although they had greater control over the world around them than those who now oppose the Prophet, they too were destroyed (see 35:44; 40:21, 82). That *their messengers brought them clear proofs* (cf. 7:101; 9:70; 10:13, 74; 14:9; 35:25; 40:22, 83) refers to prophetic miracles or to the rulings of Divine Law (Q, Sh). *God would never wrong them*, because they had been given fair warning through the sending of a messenger (Q), *but themselves did they wrong* (cf. 2:57; 9:70; 16:33, 118; 29:40) by failing to follow the prophets and clear proofs that had been sent to them.

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10 Then the end of those who committed evil deeds was most evil, for they denied God’s signs and mocked them.

10 In the Hereafter the evildoers will receive the worst of all fates, that of being cast into the Fire (Z). Some say this verse refers to their punishment within the Fire, while others say it refers to the Fire itself (IJ).

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11 God originates creation, then brings it back; then unto Him shall you be returned.

11 *Originates creation, then brings it back* (cf. 10:4, 34; 27:64; 30:27) refers to the composition of human beings from dust and their resurrection, or to the beginning of all creation and the eventual return of all things to God; see 10:4c. *Then unto Him shall you be returned* (cf. 2:28, 245; 10:56; 11:34; 21:35; 28:70, 88; 29:17, 57; 39:44; 41:21) refers to the Resurrection and the return of all things to
And on the Day when the Hour is come, the guilty shall despair.

They have no intercessors from among those they ascribed as partners, and they will then disbelieve in those they ascribed as partners.

Despair translates *yublis*, which indicates being broken and silent, having lost any opportunity to present an argument on one’s own behalf, and being acutely aware of this state (Q). Just as they despair of being able to argue on their own behalf, those whom they claimed could intercede for them (see 39:3c) now declare themselves innocent of what the disbelievers worshipped, as in 2:166, which describes the Day of Judgment as one when those who were followed disavow those who followed, and they see the punishment, while all recourse will be cut off from them (T; also see 14:22c; 59:16); regarding the question of intercession, see 2:48c; 2:255c. And they will then disbelieve in those they ascribed as partners can also be understood to mean “though they disbelieved on account of those they ascribe as partners” (Z). Although they have now learned that believing in them was incorrect, this knowledge has come too late to save them.

And on the Day when the Hour is come, that Day they will be separated.

On the Day the believers and the disbelievers will be separated from one another in a definitive and lasting manner. For this reason the Day of Resurrection is also referred to as the Day of Division (37:21; 44:40; 77:13–14, 38; 78:17; see also 10:28).

As for those who believe and perform righteous deeds,
they will be made joyous in a Garden.

15 Made joyous translates yuḥbarūn, which also indicates being blessed and honored (Q, Ṭ). In this context Garden renders rawdah, which means a place where water collects and vegetation is abundant, such as the verdant land that surrounds a spring or well (Q).

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16 But as for those who disbelieved and denied Our signs and the meeting of the Hereafter, they will be arraigned unto the punishment.

16 The signs denied by the disbelievers could refer to revelation in general, the verses of the Quran in particular, the signs of God in the created order, the signs of the end of time, or to all of these, as each of these is mentioned in the Quran as being among God’s signs; see commentary on 2:106; 30:20, 22; 45:3–6. All people will be arraigned before God (see 36:32, 53), but only the disbelievers will be arraigned unto the punishment (cf. 34:38).

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17 So glory be to God when you enter upon the eve and when you rise at morn;

18 His is the praise in the heavens and on the earth—when the sun declines and when you reach noontide.

17–18 In this context, glory be to God is understood as an injunction to glorify or praise God, either generally or specifically within the five daily prayers, in which one recites “Glory be to God, the Magnificent” when bowing and “Glory be to God, the Most Exalted” when prostrating (Q). Together, these two verses are interpreted as a reference to the five daily prayers: the eve refers to the sunset prayer (maghrib) and the night prayer (‘ishā'); at morn, to the morning prayer (fajr); when the sun declines, to the late afternoon prayer (‘aṣr); and noontide, to the early afternoon prayer (zuhr; Q).
19 He brings forth the living from the dead, and brings forth the dead from the living, and He revives the earth after its death. Even so shall you be brought forth.

19 This verse answers the rhetorical question posed in 10:31: And who brings forth the living from the dead, and brings forth the dead from the living? God brings forth the living from the dead when creating human beings the first time and when resurrecting them after death. God brings forth the dead from the living when causing them to die. These functions are related to the two Divine Names Muḥyī (“Giver of Life”; 30:50; 41:39) and Mumīt (“Bringer of Death”); see also 3:27c; 6:95c; 10:31c. This is one of many verses where the manner in which God revives the dead earth is employed as a metaphor for resurrection; see also 7:57; 16:65; 22:5; 25:48–49; 29:63; 30:24, 50; 35:9; 36:33; 41:31, 39; 43:11; 45:5; 50:9–11.

20 Among His signs is that He created you from dust. Then, behold, you are human beings ranging far and wide.

20 Among His signs, which begins vv. 20–25 and v. 46 as well as 41:37, 39 and 42:29, 32, can be understood to mean that these signs are indications of God’s complete Power and Lordship over all things (Aj). On one level, God’s having created human beings from dust is a reminder of their humble origins and of God’s Ability to resurrect them from dust, just as He brought them forth from clay, as in 36:79: He will revive them Who brought them forth the first time. It can also be understood as a reminder that human beings are of two natures, one spiritual and one physical, and that the physical nature, made of clay and dust, must not be allowed to dominate over the luminous spiritual nature (Aj). Behold translates the particle idhā, which in this context indicates immediacy, thus conveying the manner in which God is believed to bring forth creation suddenly through the command “Be!” (R; see 2:117c; 3:47; 6:73; 16:40; 19:35; 36:82c; 40:68). That human beings range far and wide alludes to all races being of one origin, as in the ḥadīth: “God created Adam from a handful [of dust] taken from throughout the earth. Hence the sons of Adam vary as the earth varies; so they are white, red, black, and [colors] in between” (IK).
And among His signs is that He created mates for you from among yourselves, that you might find rest in them, and He established affection and mercy between you. Truly in that are signs for a people who reflect.

That God made for human beings mates from among yourselves (or “from your souls”; cf. 16:72; 35:11; 42:11; 78:8) is also understood to mean “from yourselves” when seen as an allusion to the creation of Eve from Adam’s rib (IK, T), though some commentators are skeptical of this association, feeling it relies too heavily on the Biblical tradition (see Genesis 2:21–23). A direct account of Eve’s creation is not found in the Quran, only in the Hadith literature; see 4:1c. Although many understand the present verse as an address to men, telling them of the benefits to be found in their wives (Aj, IK, R), viewed in a broader Quranic context especially in relation to those verses that state that God created human beings from a single soul (4:1; 6:98, 7:189, 31:28, 39:6) and its mate from that same soul (see 7:189c and 39:6), it is most likely an address to both men and women, telling of the manner in which God has extended His own Love and Mercy to them through the love and mercy that they manifest toward one another. In this sense, the purpose of marriage is not limited to producing children; it also represents a spiritual good in and of itself and a means by which men and women can encounter God’s Love and Mercy in each other. In this vein, the Prophet is reported to have said, “The believer whose faith is most complete is the one whose character is the best; and the best among you are those who are best to their wives.”

And among His signs are the creation of the heavens and the earth and the variation in your tongues and colors. Truly in that are signs for those who know.

That the created order serves as a sign of God’s Omnipotence and Oneness is a theme found throughout the Quran, though it is stated more explicitly in this pericope (vv. 20–25) than in most others. The variation in the tongues and colors indicates the differences between languages and races. The difference in tongues can also be understood as a reference to different types of speech, as individuals reveal something of their true nature by the content of their speech.
Colors can, moreover, be understood as a reference to different states or conditions of human beings. Variation can also be seen as a reference to the different means by which people see and understand God’s signs. As Ibn ʿArabī writes, “The Divine signs that have come in the Wise Reminder [i.e., the Quran] have come in great variation. Because of their variation, those addressed by them have a variety of descriptions. Among them are signs for a people who reflect (13:3; 30:21; 39:42; 45:13; cf. 10:24); signs for a people who understand (2:164; 13:4; 16:12; 30:24); signs for a people who hear (10:67; 16:65; 30:23); signs for a people who believe (45:3; cf. 6:99; 15:77; 16:79; 27:86; 29:24, 44; 30:37; 39:52); signs for those who know (30:22); signs for a people who are reverent (10:6); signs for those possessed of intelligence (20:54, 128); signs for the possessors of intellect (3:190); and signs for those who possess insight (3:13).” Ibn ʿArabī then enjoins, “So differentiate as He has differentiated and do not step beyond to what has not been mentioned [in the Quran]. On the contrary, put every sign and everything else in its place” (Futūḥāt, IV 105.30–33). In this sense, those who discern signs (15:75) are those who know which signs speak to which human types and to which faculties and are able to differentiate between them accordingly.

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23 And among His signs is your sleep by night and day and your seeking His Bounty. Truly in that are signs for a people who hear.

This verse could be understood to mean “your sleep by night and your seeking His Bounty by day” (Aj, Q), in which cases sleep by night refers to death and day and your seeking His Bounty refers to Resurrection (Q). It could also be understood to mean your sleep during both night and day and your seeking His Bounty during both (Aj). A people who hear, or “listen,” is understood to mean those who reflect upon and understand what they hear (Aj, IK, Q). What is heard could be the Quran, the truth, God’s exhortation (Q), or all three.

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24 And among His signs is that He shows you lightning, arousing fear and hope, and that He sends down water from the sky, then revives thereby the earth after its death. Truly in that are signs for a people who understand.
24  Lightning arouses fear of the destructive forces it may herald, yet hope for the rain it may bring; see 13:12–13c. This is one of several verses to invoke God’s ability to revive the earth after its death as an argument for His ability to resurrect human beings (cf. 7:57; 16:65; 22:5; 29:63; 30:19, 50; 35:9; 41:39; 43:11; 45:5; 50:9–11; 57:17).

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25  And among His signs is that the sky and the earth stand fast by His Command. Then, when He calls you forth from the earth with a single call, behold, you will come forth.

25  That all things stand by His Command indicates that nothing would exist, were it not for God’s Direction and Wisdom, or His Permission (Q); see also 22:65; 35:41. Then when God calls human beings to the Resurrection (Aj, IK, Q) they rise again, by His Command; see also 17:52; 36:53; 79:13–14. As in v. 20, behold renders the particle idhā, indicating a sudden event. Just as God is said to create human beings out of nothing in an instant through His Word and Command, so too will He resurrect them suddenly, and they will have as much choice in the matter as they did when they were brought forth the first time.

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26  Unto Him belongs whosoever is in the heavens and on the earth; all are devoutly obedient unto Him.

26  That all of creation is devoutly obedient (qānit) indicates an existential and spiritual obedience that carries with it a sense of constancy and in the human order also serenity (cf. 2:116, 238; 3:17, 43; 4:34; 16:120; 33:31, 35; 39:9; 66:12). In this sense, everything is also said to prostrate unto God, as in 16:49: And unto God prostrates whatever crawling creatures or angels are in the heavens or on the earth, and they do not wax arrogant (cf. 13:15; 22:18; 55:6), and in the repeated assertion that whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth glorify God (59:1; 61:1; 62:1; 64:1; also see 17:44; 24:41; 57:1; 59:24).

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27  He it is Who originates creation, then brings it back,
and that is most easy for Him. Unto Him belongs the loftiest description in the heavens and on the earth, and He is the Mighty, the Wise.

27 Regarding the assertion that it is God Who originates creation, then brings it back (cf. 10:4, 34; 27:64), see v. 11; 10:4c. That is most easy for Him is understood to mean that the process of creation and resurrection is easy for God (Ṭ), or resurrecting human beings could be even easier for God than creating them the first time (IK, Q, R,Ṭ). Unto Him belongs the loftiest description (cf. 16:60) is understood to mean the most exalted description, which cannot be attributed to anything else (Aj). Thus some link it to the phrase Naught is like unto Him (42:11; Aj, IK, Ṭ) or to the Muslim testimony of Divine Unity, “There is no god, but God” (Aj, IK, R, Ṭ); see 16:60c.

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28 He sets forth for you a parable from yourselves: have you, among those whom your right hands possess, partners in what We have provided for you, such that you are equal with respect to it, with you fearing them as you fear each other? Thus do We expound the signs for a people who understand.

28 The parable established here compares the relationship between God and those whom the idolaters ascribe as partners to God to the relationship between human beings and their own slaves or servants. The rhetorical questions indicate that no one would envision a slave or servant having an equal share in the master’s wealth or fear that the slave would have an equal right to it, just as God, the Absolute Sovereign, would not fear anything else sharing in His Power. The argument is that if one cannot envision this state of affairs for one’s own limited sphere of sovereignty, how can one attribute it to the universal sovereignty of God (IK, Q,Ṭ)? Also see commentary on 16:71, 75–76. This verse is understood by some as a response to the devotional chant that the idolaters are reported to have sung when circumambulating the Kaʿbah, “At Thy service, Thou hast no partner, save the partner that Thou hast. Thou dost possess him and whatsoever he doth possess” (IK, Q). Regarding the manner in which God is said to expound the signs, see 6:97–98, 126; 7:32, 174; 9:11; 10:5, 24; 13:2; 41:44; 6:46c; 6:55c; 41:3c.
Nay, those who do wrong follow their caprices without knowledge. So who will guide those whom God has led astray? And they shall have no helpers.

From a Quranic perspective, to follow one’s own caprices and desires is the opposite of following God and God’s messengers; see commentary on 2:120; 45:18, 23. Those who follow caprice have thus taken a course directly opposite to that of guidance, as in 47:14: *Is one who stands upon a clear proof from his Lord like one whose evil deeds are made to seem fair unto him, and like those who follow their caprices?* The answer to the rhetorical question *So who will guide those whom God has led astray?* is found in 4:88: *Whomsoever God leads astray, thou wilt not find a way for him.* There could therefore be no helpers among human beings, jinn, or angels who would help the disbelievers (see also 3:22, 56, 91; 16:37; 42:8; 48:22), as none can thwart God.

Set thy face to religion as a *ḥanīf,* in the primordial nature from God upon which He originated mankind—there is no altering the creation of God; that is the upright religion, but most of mankind know not—

To *set,* “turn,” or “submit” one’s face to or toward religion (see 6:79; 10:105) means to orient one’s whole being toward worship and obedience to God (see also 2:112; 3:20; 7:29; 30:43; 31:22). The present verse is thus taken by most commentators to be a command to follow the religion for which God created human beings. It is addressed directly to the Prophet or to all who hear the message (Aj). Some commentators take the first phrase to mean, “Follow the religion as a *ḥanīf* and follow the primordial nature in which God created you” (Q, Ģ). In another interpretation, *primordial nature (fitrah)* modifies *religion,* which is referred to as “primordial” because human beings were originally created for religion, as in 51:56: *I did not create jinn and mankind, save to worship Me* (Q). As a *ḥanīf* is understood by most to mean in a straight and upstanding manner, neither inclining nor adhering to past religions that have been altered or abrogated (Q). For *ḥanīf* (pl. *bunafā‘,*), which derives from the verb *hanifa,* meaning “to incline,” see
Hanîf is usually employed in the Quran with reference to Abraham (2:135; 3:67, 95; 4:125; 6:79, 161; 16:120, 123), but in general it indicates one who inclines away from misguidance and toward belief in the Oneness of God (tawḥīd; IŞ). Thus in 10:105, the Prophet is enjoined, Set thy face toward the religion as a ḥanîf, and be thou not among the idolaters (see also 22:31; 98:5). The basic understanding of ḥanîf may best be illustrated by a famous ḥadīth qudsî: “God says, ‘Verily I created My servants as ḥunafāʾ. Then the satans came to them and distracted them from their religion’” (IK). Seen in this light, to be truly devout (ḥanîf) and incline toward the worship of God and away from idolatry is to live according to one’s primordial nature (fiṭrah), in which all human beings have been created. One cannot change this underlying nature as a servant or worshipper of God, because there is no altering the creation of God (Q, R). This phrase is also understood to mean that there is no change in God’s religion (IK, Q); that is, there is no change in the substance or universal truths of religion, only in the forms in which these truths are revealed in different religions.

The reference to the fiṭrah is read by some to mean that human beings are born for Islam, so that anyone who follows any other religion is “astray” or “misguided” (IK). But al-Qurūbî maintains that it is impossible for the fiṭrah mentioned here to be Islam in its particular sense, because “Islam (submission) and īmân (faith) are declaring with the tongue, embracing with the heart, and performing with the limbs,” implying that if fiṭrah pertains to the original human nature, which is related to the spirit, it cannot pertain to the specific practices of a particular religious tradition because these can only be performed while a spirit resides in a body in this world. From this perspective, the upright religion (cf. 6:161; 9:36; 12:40; 30:43; 98:5) could refer to religion as such and thus to any religious practice that accords with the fiṭrah. Nonetheless, most interpret upright religion as a reference to Islam in particular (IK, Q). Regarding the upright religion, see 6:161c.

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31 turning unto Him. And reverence Him and perform the prayer; and be not among the idolaters,

32 among those who have divided their religion and become factions, each party rejoicing in that which it has.

31–32 Turning unto Him translates munībîna ʿalayhi, which can mean turning unto God in repentance or returning to God (Q). In this context, perform the
prayer can be seen as a general injunction to follow all of the practices of religion (Ṭū), as these are the means by which one acts in accord with the fiṭrah while in this world. Although the injunction to be not among the idolaters or polytheists is clearly a call to monotheism, in this context it is also seen as a call to avoid hidden polytheism, meaning that one should seek only to please God in one’s worship (R). To do otherwise constitutes a hidden polytheism on account of which human beings have divided their religion and become factions (R). Being divided into factions is understood by many as a reference to being divided into various sects or even making false religions out of true religion (Ṭs), but it can also be seen as a reference to those who worship God with the goal of seeking something of this world, or even those who do so seeking Paradise, rather than those who do so with a sincere heart, seeking only God (R).

In other passages, dividing religion into factions is an error attributed to previous religious communities, one that Muslims are enjoined to avoid (see 3:103–5; 6:65; 42:13–14; 98:4; 6:159c). When understood as a reference to religious sects, each party rejoicing in that which it has can be understood as a reference to competing creeds and tenets (Ṭs, Ṭū). But when understood as a reference to different modes of worship, it can be seen as a reference to the different aspects of God’s Bounty and Mercy in which different types of worshippers rejoice (R) and the injunctions that God has promulgated for each religious community.

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33 And when harm befalls the people, they call upon their Lord, turning to Him in repentance. Then, when He lets them taste of His Mercy, behold, a group among them ascribe partners unto their Lord.

33 This is one of several verses to mention human beings’ tendency to call upon their Lord in times of peril or adversity (cf., e.g., 10:12; 17:67; 39:8; Ṭ), such as illness and poverty (JJ); see 6:40–41c. Then, when He lets them taste of His Mercy by relieving them of such afflictions, they revert to heedlessness and to pursuing their caprices (Ṭ, Ṭb); see also 7:189–90c; 10:12c.

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34 Let them be ungrateful for that which We have given
them: “So enjoy yourselves! For soon you will know.”

34 Cf. 16:55; 29:66c. *So enjoy yourselves* is an ironic injunction indicating that people will continue to follow their caprices (v. 29) and rejoice in the tenets of their ways (v. 34), but that these are merely the ephemeral delights of this world, which stand in stark contrast to the rewards of the next life (see 3:14; 4:77; 9:38; 13:26; 20:131; 28:60; 40:39; 42:36; 43:35), since the world itself is *naught but the enjoyment of delusion* (3:185; 57:20). In this regard, the Prophet is instructed to say to disbelievers, *Enjoy your disbelief a little; truly you shall be among the inhabitants of the Fire* (39:8). In this sense, *those who disbelieve enjoy themselves and eat as cattle eat* (47:12) and give no thought to anything beyond their immediate interests and desires.

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35 Or have We sent down upon them any authority that speaks of that which they ascribe as partners unto Him?

35 Here *authority* can be understood to mean a revealed book (Q, T), as in passages that speak of God having sent Moses *with a manifest authority* (4:153; 11:96; 23:45; 40:23; 44:19; 51:38). It can also be understood to mean any proof that would attest to the truth of the idolaters’ position (IK, Q, Z). In this vein, 37:156–57 asks the disbelievers: *Or have you a manifest authority? Bring your Book, then, if you are truthful.* Elsewhere the Quran asks rhetorically, *Did We give them a book, such that they stand upon a clear proof from it?* (35:40; see also 6:148; 34:44; 43:21; 53:28; 68:37–38, 47).

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36 And when We cause the people to taste some mercy, they rejoice in it. But should an evil befall them because of that which their hands have sent forth, behold, they despair.

36 Cf. 42:48. People rejoice in their blessings, which they attribute to their own merits and which they believe are a testament to their own superiority, as in 39:49: *And when harm befalls man, he calls upon Us. Then, when We confer upon him a blessing from Us, he says, “I was only given it because of knowledge.”* The
judgment wrongdoers receive in the next life is the result of the acts of disobedience that *their hands have sent forth* (Q; 2:95; 4:62; 28:47; 42:48; 62:7; see also 5:80; 18:57; 36:12; 78:40), reinforcing the idea that human beings are responsible for their fate in the Hereafter. But there is also the suggestion that the misfortunes generated by their wrongdoing might be visited upon them in this life. From one perspective, their actions are *sent forth* to be confronted again at a later point in time or on the Day of Judgment, though from another perspective, actions are “brought forth” by their hands, thus making manifest what is in their hearts (Ţs). Those who do not succumb to the tendency to turn away from God when evil befalls them are the patient who, when affliction befalls them, say, “*Truly we are God’s, and unto Him we return*” (2:156).

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37 Have they not considered that God outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will? Truly in that are signs for a people who believe.

37 For *Truly in that are signs for a people who believe*, cf. 6:99; 16:79; 27:86; 29:24; 39:52. Regarding *God outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will* (cf. 13:26; 17:30; 28:82; 29:62; 34:36, 39; 39:52; 42:12); see 34:39c.

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38 So give unto the kinsman his right, and unto the indigent and the traveler. That is better for those who desire the Face of God. It is they who shall prosper.

38 According to Shiite commentaries, the first phrase of this verse is a specific injunction for the Prophet to give his family members their due (Ţs, Ţū). In accordance with this injunction, the Prophet is reported to have given his daughter Fāţimah a garden. But due to different understandings of what the Prophet had intended, this garden was viewed by the first Caliph, Abū Bakr, as property that belonged to the Muslim polity and not to Fāţimah (Qm, Ţs, Ţū). In contrast, most Sunni commentators see this as one of several injunctions to observe the rights of kin found throughout the Quran. The *right*, or due, that one is to give can be seen specifically as charity or generally as virtuous conduct toward relatives (see 2:83).
It is even said that giving charity to others while one’s relatives are in need will not be accepted by God as a good deed (Q). For a broader discussion of the categories of people among whom one’s wealth should be distributed, see 2:177c. That giving others their right, or due, is better means that it is better than keeping wealth just for oneself (Q). To give charity because one desires the Face of God indicates that one does not do it to obtain favors from others or for some other form of worldly gain (see 2:264c).

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39 That which you give in usury that it might increase through other people’s wealth does not increase with God. But that which you give in alms, desiring the Face of God—it is they who receive a manifold increase.

39 This is the earliest mention of usury (ribā) in the chronological order of the Quran. The last verses in the chronology of revelation (2:275–81) also deal with the concept of ribā, but are ambiguous enough to have led to centuries of debate over how one defines “usury”; see 2:275–81c; 3:130; 4:161c. In the context of this verse, ribā is understood as a reference to either usury, which is forbidden (see 2:275–81) or the seeking of increase, which is permissible (Ṭs). It is permissible to present a gift to another in the hopes of receiving something greater than it from that person, although it does not bring increase with God, because it is thought that actions are rewarded in accord with the intentions behind them (Q). That one receives a manifold increase from paying alms (zakāh) is meant as a contrast to the practice of ribā in pre-Islamic Arabia, where loans could compound exponentially, to the point of leaving the borrower in complete ruin (see 2:275–81c).

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40 God it is Who created you, then nourished you; then He causes you to die; then He gives you life. Is there anyone among those you ascribe as partners who does aught of that? Glory be to Him and exalted is He above the partners they ascribe.
This is one of many verses that refer to all the stages of existence and God’s function as the creative agent for each. For then He causes you to die; then He gives you life (cf. 2:28; 22:66; 45:26), see 2:28c. Glory be to Him and exalted is He above the partners they ascribe (cf. 10:18; 16:1; 39:67) is an affirmation of God’s utter transcendence.

Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of that which men’s hands have earned, that He may let them taste some of that which they have done, that haply they might return.

Corruption (fasād) implies all manner of decadence and injustice, in regard to both rebelling against God and oppressing others, thus failing to recognize the rights of all. It is often understood by commentators to mean open disobedience toward God. In both 2:27 and 13:25, corruption is presented as part and parcel of breaking the covenant: those who break God’s pact after accepting His covenant, and sever what God has commanded be joined, and work corruption upon the earth; and in 5:33 working corruption is linked to rejecting God’s messengers. In general, when human caprice is followed rather than Divine ordinances, corruption ensues, as in 23:71: Were the truth to follow their caprices, the heavens and the earth and those therein would have been corrupted. As such, corruption can be linked to all manner of iniquity, such as arrogance (see 7:74), oppression (26:183; 28:4), and failing to honor family relations (47:22). Though working corruption is an accusation made against several specific human collectivities, such as the Children of Israel (17:4) and the pre-Islamic Arabian tribes of Thamūd (26:152) and Midian (7:85; 29:36), it is recognized as a general human shortcoming. Thus the angels are reported to have said to God regarding the creation of the human being on the earth, Wilt Thou place therein one who will work corruption therein, and shed blood? (2:30). Working corruption implies a combination of spiritual and worldly corruption (e.g., 2:27; 7:74, 85–86, 103; 11:85; 13:25); and it is implicitly or explicitly connected to physical violence in several verses (e.g., 2:205; 5:64; 26:183; 27:48–49; 28:4). The opposite of working corruption (ifsād) is islāḥ, “setting things aright” or “making amends,” and elsewhere corruption is put in direct contrast to performing righteous deeds (ṣāliḥāt): Or shall We make those who believe and perform righteous deeds like those who work corruption upon the earth? Or shall We make the reverent like the profligate? (38:28).

In the present verse corruption is said to appear because of that which men’s
hands have earned while elsewhere it is said that it is through the works of men that corruption is repelled: And were it not for God’s repelling people, some by means of others, the earth would have been corrupted (2:251). The final ends of those who work corruption and those who oppose it are thus divergent. Heaven is ordained for the latter: That is the Abode of the Hereafter, which We ordain for those who desire neither dominance upon the earth, nor corruption (28:83); and punishment for the former: Those who disbelieve and who have turned from the way of God, for them We shall add punishment on top of punishment, for their having worked corruption (16:88).

That God will let them taste some of that which they have done means that God will allow them to experience some form of trial or punishment in this life in hopes that it may help them turn toward repentance and thus be forgiven and absolved of experiencing the full punishment in the Hereafter. That haply they might return thus implies that they might repent (Ṭ) and refrain from committing acts of disobedience in the future (IK, Ṭs).

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42 Say, “Journey upon the earth and observe how those before fared in the end, most of whom were idolaters.”


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43 And set thy face to the upright religion before there comes a day from God that none can repel. That Day they will be spread asunder.

43 Set thy face to the upright religion is understood to mean to not turn away from it in the least, lest one be unable to return to it, as in 9:127: Then they turn away. God has turned their hearts away, because they are a people who understand not (Ṭs). For set thy face, see 30:30c. Regarding the upright religion (cf. 6:161; 9:36; 12:40; 30:30; 98:5), see 6:161c. None can repel the Day of Resurrection, just as naught in the heavens or upon the earth can thwart God (35:44; cf. 8:59; 9:2–3; 11:20; 24:57; 29:22; 42:31; 46:32; 72:12). Thus none can avert the punishment that is their due, as in 6:134: Indeed, that which you are promised shall come to pass, and you cannot thwart [it]. Here a Day from God that none can repel can also be read, “a Day on which
none can repel God” (R, Ṭs), but the former meaning is more likely, as such a reading more closely corresponds to other Quranic verses, such as 21:40: *Nay, but it will come upon them suddenly, and confound them. Then they will not be able to repel it, nor will they be granted respite*. That people will be spread asunder refers to their being divided into those destined for the Garden and those destined for the Fire (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z); see 30:14c.

###

**44** Whosoever disbelieves, his disbelief is to his own detriment. And whosoever works righteousness, they make provision for their souls,

**45** that from His Bounty He may recompense those who believe and perform righteous deeds. Truly He loves not the disbelievers.

**44–45** That *his disbelief is to his own detriment* (cf. 35:39) relates to the broad Quranic teaching that those who turn away from God and deny God’s signs ultimately do wrong to themselves, as in 7:177: *Evil is the parable of the people who denied Our signs and wronged themselves*. That the righteous *make provision for their souls* means that their good deeds will translate into their being recompensed from God’s Bounty in the Hereafter. *Make provision* translates *mahada*, which can also mean “to spread out.” Some thus relate this verse to their spreading beds for themselves in the grave before the Resurrection (Ṭ) or in the Garden (Bḍ), or both (Ṭs). Others relate it to the manner in which God rewards good deeds with *ten times the like thereof* (6:160; IK).

###

**46** And among His signs is that He sends the winds as bearers of glad tidings to let you taste of His Mercy, that the ships may sail by His Command, and that you may seek of His Bounty, and that haply you may give thanks.

**46** That the *winds* come as *bearers of glad tidings* refers to their heralding
rain, as in v. 48, and all the benefits that derive from it (cf. 7:57; 25:48; 27:63). Regarding the Quranic use of “winds” and “wind,” see 30:48–49c. Seafaring is invoked as a blessing from God in several verses (14:32; 17:66; 23:21–22; 31:31; 35:12; 40:80; 42:32–34; 43:12; 45:12; 55:24; see also 2:164c). Here, as in other verses, the ships are understood by some as a spiritual symbol: the winds are the winds of guidance, spiritual inspiration, and the mercy of spiritual knowledge, and the ships allude to the meditations by means of which one courses upon the ocean of Divine Oneness to seek God’s Bounty (Aj).

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47 We have indeed sent messengers unto their people before thee, and they brought them clear proofs. Then We took vengeance upon those who were guilty; and it is incumbent upon Us to help the believers.

47 Regarding the meaning of clear proofs, see 30:9c. To this same opening phrase, 13:38 adds and it is not for a messenger to bring a sign, save by God’s Leave; and for every term there is a book, which follows upon other verses maintaining that for every people there is a guide (13:7), that there has been no community but that a warner has passed among them (35:24), and that God has sent a messenger unto every community (16:36). From this perspective, God takes vengeance upon those who were guilty, because they have rejected guidance and failed to heed the warnings that were sent to them by God (see 26:208–9c).

The translation of the last phrase, and it is incumbent upon Us to help the believers, is based upon reading upon Us to help the believers as modifying incumbent, which here renders haqqan. But haqqan can also be read as the end of a sentence (Aj), in which case the phrase might best be rendered, “and it was due. Ours is to help the believers,” as it is often by means of other people that God repels the unjust (see 2:250–51c; 22:40c). Both readings indicate that God took vengeance in order to aid the believers, but the second reading is somewhat more emphatic, indicating that God’s Vengeance was due and that it was just. The means by which God aids human beings can also be seen as a reference to His saving them in the Hereafter, as in a famous saying of the Prophet, “No Muslim defends the honor of his brother but that it is incumbent upon God to defend him from the Fire of Hell on the Day of Resurrection,” after which he recited and it is incumbent upon Us to help the believers (Bḍ, IK, Q, R, Ṭṣ).

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God is He Who sends the winds, then they cause clouds to rise, and He spreads them in the sky as He will and makes them into fragments, whereupon you see the rain emerging from their midst. Then when He bestows it upon whomsoever He will among His servants, behold, they rejoice,

though previously, before it was sent down upon them, they had been in despair.

Winds appears in the plural form ten times in the Quran, and each time it expresses God’s Mercy, as in 7:57: *He it is Who sends forth the winds as glad tidings ahead of His Mercy* (see also 25:48; 35:9). In contrast, when wind occurs in the singular, it is usually used to convey God’s Wrath and Punishment (see 3:117; 10:22; 17:69; 22:31; 30:51; 33:9; 41:16; 46:24; 51:41; 54:19; 69:6). This distinction is likely made because the winds of the south, east, and north are all said to bring mercy; only the west wind is said to bring punishment and destruction. Fragments renders kisaf, which could also mean “piled up” (IK). The people to whom the rain came may have been in despair because they were in need, and the rain relieved their despair (IK). Or they may have been in despair when the winds first arose, thinking that a violent storm was coming, and then became relieved when it only brought rain.

So observe the vestiges of God’s Mercy, how He revives the earth after its death. Truly that is the Reviver of the dead, and He is Powerful over all things.

The vestiges of God’s Mercy refers to the rain and all of the things that are given life through it (Bḍ). Vestiges translates āthār, which can also be read athar, meaning “the effect of God’s Mercy” (IJ, T). As with other passages that refer to the revival of dead earth (e.g., 7:57; 16:65; 22:5; 30:19, 24; 35:9; 36:33; 41:31, 39; 43:11; 45:5; 50:9–11), this passage also uses such imagery to argue for God’s ability to resurrect decayed bones (Aj). That is the Reviver of the dead thus indicates that God and no other has the ability to revive the earth, since He is
Powerful over all things, and that God has the ability to resurrect human beings. God’s reviving the earth by sending water is also understood as a symbol for spiritual revival. Thus al-Tustarī writes, “In its outer meaning it refers to the rain, and in its inner meaning it alludes to the life of hearts through remembrance” (ST).

And were We to send a wind and they were to see it turn yellow, after that they would surely disbelieve.

51 In contrast to their positive reaction to the winds of mercy and blessings mentioned in vv. 46–50, when people are confronted with a wind that removes those blessings, they think poorly of God, fail to reflect upon the blessings that they have been given, fail to trust in God (Bḍ), and thus come to disbelieve. In this context, turn yellow refers to either plants turning yellow from lack of rain or clouds changing color (N). After that means either after they were made glad or after the plants or clouds turned yellow (N). Together, vv. 48–51 indicate the manner in which disbelievers vacillate, first despairing of God’s Mercy and provision, then becoming glad when they arrive, and then disbelieving in God and God’s Mercy when some of the blessings are removed (N).

Surely thou dost not make the dead to hear; nor dost thou make the deaf to hear the call when they turn their backs;

nor dost thou guide the blind from their straying. Thou makest none to hear, save those who believe in Our signs and are submitters.

52–53 Cf. 27:80–81. Just as the Prophet is unable to make the dead hear in their graves, so too is he unable to make those who turn away from the revelation hear, as this ability lies with God alone (IK, Ṭ). A similar parallel is drawn in 6:36: Only those who hear will respond. As for the dead, God will resurrect them, and unto Him they shall be returned. That the Prophet cannot cause the dead to hear can also be understood as an allusion to those whose hearts are dead or...
sealed (N), as in v. 59. Blind then refers to those whose hearts are blind (Aj), as in 22:46: Truly it is not the eyes that go blind, but it is hearts within breasts that go blind. From a Quranic perspective, the Prophet cannot cause their hearts to see or hear because his function is only to convey the revelation (see 3:20; 13:40), and whomsoever God leads astray, no guide has he (7:186; 13:33; 39:23, 36; 40:33); the Prophet should thus concern himself only with guiding those who do listen.

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God is He Who created you from weakness, then ordained strength after weakness, then ordained weakness and old age after strength. He creates whatsoever He will, and He is the Knowing, the Powerful.

54 That human beings were created from weakness (cf. 4:28) refers either to their having been made from a base fluid (77:20; cf. 32:8; 86:5–7; Aj, Q, T), or to the weakness of a child at the beginning of life (Aj, Q, Z). Strength then refers to the period of youth and maturity, followed by the period of decline in old age. See also 22:5, where all of the stages of earthly life from conception to old age are cited as signs of God’s Power (see also 22:5c) as well as 36:68, which speaks of those whom God causes to regress in creation, and 16:70, which speaks of those who are brought back to the weakest of ages, such that they know nothing after having had knowledge (cf. 5:17; 24:25; 42:49).

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55 And on the Day when the Hour is come, the guilty will swear that they had tarried naught but an hour; thus were they perverted.

55 That the guilty seem to have tarried naught but an hour (cf. 10:45; 17:52; 20:102–4; 46:35; 79:46) refers either to their experience of the period in the grave before the Day of Resurrection or to their period of time on earth (Q), whose duration is as an hour or less in relation to the eternity of the Hereafter. Their claim may be made in ignorance or in order to argue that there is not enough proof against them (IK). Perverted translates yu’fakū, which literally means “turned away,” but which always carries a negative connotation, meaning turning away from truth toward falsehood—turning from telling the truth to lying or from beautiful actions to
ugly ones (Iṣ)—and thus becoming perverted or deluded (Tāj al-ʿarūs). In this latter sense, the last phrase can also mean “thus were they deluded” (Z) in their understanding of the relationship of this world to the Hereafter.

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56 And those who have been given knowledge and belief will say, “Indeed, you tarried in God’s Book until the Day of Resurrection; and this is the Day of Resurrection! But you knew not.”

Here, those who have been given knowledge and belief is understood to mean those who are given knowledge of and belief in God’s Book (Ṭ), which some identify specifically as the angels or the believers (IJ) or more generally as the angels, the prophets, and the believers (Aj, Z). In God’s Book means in God’s Knowledge that is written on the Preserved Tablet (85:22), in God’s Judgment and Decree (Aj), in the Quran (Aj), or in the book of deeds that is with God (IK). Their saying This is the Day of Resurrection implies a rebuke, similar to the disbelievers being told, This is the Day of Division that you used to deny (37:21).

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57 On that Day the excuses of those who do wrong will benefit them not; nor can they make amends.

The wrongdoers’ excuses do not benefit them, because they have been provided ample warning through the messengers and ample opportunity to repent, as in 35:24: And there has been no community but that a warner has passed among them (cf. 16:36). Thus they are commanded, O you who disbelieve! Make no excuses this day! You are only requited for that which you used to do (66:7); see also 16:84; 45:35.

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58 And indeed We have set forth for mankind in this Quran every kind of parable. And if thou bringest them a sign, those who disbelieve will surely say, “You make naught
but false claims.”

59 Thus does God seal the hearts of those who know not.

58–59 That God has set forth . . . every kind of parable (cf. 39:27) and employed every kind of parable (17:89; 18:54) means that God has shown people the truth, so that they may understand and follow it (IK), thus indicating why it is that the disbelievers have no excuse. Here a sign can mean verses of the Quran (Aj) or prophetic miracles (Aj, IK), such as Moses’ staff turning into a snake and his hand turning white (IJ) or the Prophet Muhammad’s cleaving of the moon (IK; see 54:1c). In this context, them in if thou bringest them a sign refers to the guilty (v. 55) as well as those whom the Prophet cannot make hear (v. 52) because God has “sealed their hearts” (v. 59); thus they will not believe, though every sign should come unto them, till they see the painful punishment (10:97). God’s sealing hearts (see also 2:7; 6:46; 7:100–101; 9:87, 93; 10:74; 16:108; 40:35; 63:3) indicates that He has cut off the faculties of understanding. In some instances it is combined with a reference to God taking away both hearing and sight (e.g., 6:46; 16:108), for although one may still have the use of these faculties, one does not understand the images one perceives through them; see 2:7c; 63:3c.

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60 So be patient. God’s Promise is indeed true. And let not those without certainty disquiet thee.

60 That God’s Promise is indeed true (cf. 4:122; 10:4, 55; 18:21; 28:13; 31:33; 35:5; 40:55, 77; 45:32; 46:17) hearkens back to v. 6. Here it is understood as a reference to God’s Promise to aid the Prophet, to make him prevail (IJ, T, Z), and to render his veracity clear (R). The command to not be disquieted by the uncertainty of the disbelievers can mean to not let them make one restive regarding one’s own religion (IJ, Q). Thus although the address is in the second-person singular, which ordinarily signifies an address to the Prophet alone, it is understood as having been addressed to the Prophet’s community as a whole (Q). Disquiet translates yastakhiff, which can also mean to induce another to levity or to force another to do something in a hurry and so become unsteady. It is also understood to mean making another heedless or ignorant, so that the person then falls into error and transgression (Q).