Ṣād is a Makkansūrah believed to have been revealed directly after Sūrah 54, al-Qamar (JJ). It takes its name from the opening letter, ṣād, one of the separated letters with which twenty-nine sūrahss begin. It also is known to some as Dāʾūd, or “David” (Aj), since it provides the most extensive account of the Prophet David in the Quran.

From one perspective, the opening verses are a response to the claim of the disbelievers in 37:168–69: *If only we had a reminder from those of old, then we would indeed be God’s sincere servants (Aj, Āl)*. V. 1 alludes to the fact that the Quran contains what they claim to desire, but v. 2 explains that they will not accept it, because of their disposition toward vainglory and schism. From another perspective, this sūrah follows upon the promise that God’s host will surely be victorious (37:173) in that it begins by denouncing the Quraysh as a mere host among the parties yonder routed (v. 11), refers to other tribes that were routed for their defiance (vv. 12–16), and then shows the ways in which different prophets triumphed over the trials sent to them by God (Bq).

Ṣād begins by denouncing the Quraysh for their disbelief in the Prophet Muhammad and questioning the internal logic of their beliefs (vv. 1–11). A general recounting of the fate that befell the parties who had denied previous prophets (vv. 12–16) then leads into accounts of the trials that confronted the prophets David (vv. 17–26), Solomon (vv. 30–40), and Job (vv. 41–44). A brief mention of other prophets (vv. 45–48) then segues into a
discussion of the blessings of Paradise (vv. 49–54), the punishments of Hell (vv. 55–61), and the way the denizens of Hell wonder why those whom they had thought to be astray are not in Hell with them (vv. 62–64). A brief affirmation of God’s Omnipotence and the Prophet’s inability to produce anything more than what God has revealed to him (vv. 65–70) introduces the last section (vv. 71–85), which discusses the creation of Adam, God’s commanding the angels to prostrate to him, and the refusal of Iblīs, or Satan, to do so. The sūrah closes with a final address in which the Prophet is instructed to promise the Quraysh that they will eventually know the truth of the revelation (vv. 86–88).

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

1 Ṣād. By the Quran possessed of remembrance. 2 Nay, but those who disbelieve are in vainglory and schism. 3 How many a generation before them have We destroyed? And they called out when the time for escape had passed. 4 Now they marvel that a warner from among themselves has come unto them, and the disbelievers say, “This is a lying sorcerer. 5 Has he made the gods one God? Truly this is an astounding thing!” 6 And the notables among them set out, [saying], “Go! Be steadfast to your gods. Truly this is a thing desired. 7 We did not hear of this in the creed of latter days. This is naught but an invention. 8 Has the Reminder been sent down upon him among all of us?” Nay, but they are in doubt regarding My Reminder! Nay, they have not yet tasted My Punishment! 9 Or have they the treasuries of thy Lord’s Mercy, the Mighty, the Bestower? 10 Or have they sovereignty over the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them? Then let
them ascend by some means; a host among the parties yonder routed. The people of Noah denied before them, as did Ād and Pharaoh of the tent poles, Thamūd, the people of Lot, and the inhabitants of the thicket; they are the parties. Each of them did naught but deny the messengers; so My Retribution came due. They await naught but a single cry for which there is no delay. And they say, “Our Lord, hasten our share unto us before the Day of Reckoning.” Bear patiently that which they say, and remember Our servant David, possessed of might; truly he turned oft [unto God]. Truly We compelled the mountains to join him in glorifying at eventide and at the break of day. And the birds gathered, each turning oft unto Him. And We strengthened his sovereignty and gave him wisdom and decisive speech. Has the report of the dispute come unto thee, when they scaled the sanctuary? When they entered upon David, he was frightened of them. They said, “Fear not! We are two disputants: one of us has transgressed against the other; so judge between us with truth. Be not unjust, and guide us unto the right path. Behold, this, my brother, has ninety-nine ewes, and I have one ewe. Yet he has said, ‘Place her under my care,’ and has overpowered me in speech.” He said, “He has indeed wronged you in asking that your ewe be added to his ewes. Truly many associates transgress against one another, save those who believe and perform righteous deeds. Yet how few are they!” And David understood that We had tried him; so he sought forgiveness from his Lord, fell down kneeling, and repented. Thus
did We forgive him that. Truly nearness unto Us shall be his, and a beautiful return. 

O David! Truly We have appointed thee as a vicegerent upon the earth; so judge among the people with truth and follow not caprice, lest it lead thee astray from the way of God. Truly those who stray from the way of God, theirs shall be a severe punishment for having forgotten the Day of Reckoning. 

And We did not create Heaven and earth and whatsoever is between them in vain; that is the conjecture of those who disbelieve. So woe unto those who disbelieve in the Fire! 

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? 

A blessed Book that We have sent down upon thee, that they may contemplate His signs and that those possessed of intellect may reflect. 

And We bestowed Solomon upon David; how excellent a servant! Truly he turned oft [unto God]. 

When at eventide noble steeds swift of foot were displayed before him, he said, “I have loved the love of good things over the remembrance of my Lord, until [the sun] was taken behind the veil. Bring them back unto me!” Then he began to stroke their legs and necks. And We did indeed try Solomon, and We cast a corpse upon his throne. He then repented, saying, “My Lord, forgive me and bestow a kingdom upon me such as shall not befit anyone after me. Truly Thou art the Bestower.” 

So We made the wind subservient unto him, coursing gently by his command whither he wished, as well as the satans, every builder and diver, and others, bound together in fetters:
“This is Our Gift; so bestow graciously or withhold without reckoning.” Truly nearness unto Us shall be his, and a beautiful return. And remember Our servant Job, when he called upon his Lord, “Truly Satan has afflicted me with weariness and punishment.” “Strike with thy foot; this is cool water wherewith to wash and to drink.” And We bestowed upon him his family and their like along with them as a mercy from Us and a reminder for possessors of intellect. And, “Take with thy hand a bundle of rushes and strike therewith, and break not thine oath.” Truly We found him to be steadfast. What an excellent servant! Truly he turned oft [unto God]. And remember Our servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, possessed of strength and sight. Truly We purified them with that which is pure—remembrance of the Abode. And truly in Our Sight they are among the chosen, the elect. And remember Ishmael, Elisha, and Dhu’l-Kifl; each is among the excellent. This is a reminder. And for the reverent there will surely be a beautiful return, Gardens of Eden, the gates whereof are open unto them, reclining therein, they call therein for abundant fruit and drink. And theirs shall be maidens of modest gaze, of like age. This is that which you are promised for the Day of Reckoning. This indeed is Our provision which shall never be spent. This it shall be! Yet for the rebellious there will surely be a most evil return, Hell, wherein they will burn. What an evil resting place! This it shall be! So let them taste it, a boiling liquid and a cold, murky fluid, coupled with other [punishments] similar.
This troop rushing in with you—no greeting for them! They will surely burn in the Fire. They will say, “Nay, but no greeting for you! You have sent it forth for us. What an evil dwelling place!” They will say, “O Lord! Whosoever has sent this forth for us, increase him twofold in punishment in the Fire.” And they will say, “How is that we do not see men here whom we had counted among the evil? Did we take them in mockery? Or have our eyes swerved away from them?” Surely that is true: the disputing of the people of the Fire. Say, “I am only a warner, and there is no god but God, the One, the Paramount, Lord of the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them, the Mighty, the Forgiving.” Say, “It is a great tiding from which you turn away. I have no knowledge of the Highest Assembly, when they dispute. Naught is revealed unto me but that I am only a clear warner.” [Remember] when thy Lord said unto the angels, “Behold! I am creating a human being from clay. When I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit, fall down before him prostrating.” Then the angels prostrated, all of them together. Not so Iblīs. He waxed arrogant, and was among the disbelievers. [God] said, “O Iblīs! What has prevented thee from prostrating unto that which I created with My two Hands? Dost thou wax arrogant, or art thou among the exalted?” He said, “I am better than him. Thou hast created me from fire, while Thou hast created him from clay.” He said, “Go forth from it! Surely thou art outcast! And surely My Curse shall be upon thee till the Day of Judgment.”
said, “My Lord! Grant me respite till the Day they are resurrected.”

He said, “Then verily thou art among those granted respite till the Day of the Moment Known.”

He said, “Then, by Thy Might, I shall cause them to err all together, save Thy sincere servants among them.”

He said, “This is the truth, and the truth I speak, ‘I shall surely fill Hell with thee and with such of them as follow thee, all together.’”

Say, “I ask not of you any reward for it, nor am I among the pretenders. It is naught but a reminder for the worlds, and you will certainly know its tiding after a time.”

Commentary

1 Ṣād. By the Quran possessed of remembrance.

The Arabic letter ṣād is among the separated letters (al-muqatta‘āt), which are found at the beginning of twenty-nine sūrah{s} and whose meaning is considered by most commentators to be known only to God; see 2:1c. Ṣād is given several possible meanings. It may be an allusion to the Names of God beginning with the letter ṣād (IJ, Ṭs), such as al-Ṣamad, “the Eternally Sufficient unto Himself;” al-Ṣāni‘, “the Maker,” and al-Ṣādiq, “the Truthful” (R); an abbreviation for a phrase, such as ṣadaqa Allāh, “God has spoken the truth,” or al-Ṣādiq Allāh, “the Truthful One is God,” or ṣadaqa Muḥammad, “Muhammad has spoken the truth” (R); one of the names of the Quran (IJ, Ṭs); or a name for this sūrah (IJ, R, Ṭs). Remembrance translates dhikr, which in this context is understood to mean “honor” or “renown” (sharaf; IJ, IK, Ṭ), as it is also understood in 43:44 and 94:4 (R, Ṭs), or clarification (bayān; IJ, R), because the verse mentions those things that, when reflected upon, lead one to the truth (Ṭs). Dhikr is also employed in several verses as a name for the Quran, in which case it is rendered “the Reminder,” as in 21:10: We have indeed sent down unto you a Book wherein is your Reminder; see also 36:69c. This verse can thus be understood as an oath invoking the Quran, which is possessed of remembrance, because it possesses those things that remind one of God, His Oneness, His Names and Attributes, His prophets, stories of previous communities, the Resurrection, and the Divine Decree, as alluded to in 6:38: We
Nay, but those who disbelieve are in vainglory and schism.

2 Vainglory renders ʿizzah, which, when used to describe a human attitude, connotes the belief that one is exempt from following anyone other than oneself, as in 2:206: And when it is said to him, “Reverence God,” vainglory seizes him sinfully (R). Schism renders shiqāq (cf. 2:137, 176; 22:53; 41:52), which conveys a sense of fracture or separation and connotes an attitude of enmity, disobedience, opposition, and defiance (Ṭs), because one deems oneself equal or superior to someone whom one opposes (R), in this case the Prophet.

How many a generation before them have We destroyed? And they called out when the time for escape had passed.

3 God then warns the disbelievers of the destruction that befell those before them who had an attitude of vainglory and schism toward the prophets God had sent them. This is one of several verses to refer to towns (6:6; 7:4; 21:11; 22:45, 48; 47:13) and whole generations (17:17; 19:74; 20:128; 36:31; 38:3; 50:36) that were destroyed for their iniquities and their refusal to accept the messengers God sent. That they called out when the time for escape had passed means that only when the punishment came upon them did they actually believe, but as God had already given them warning and a reprieve so that they could heed the warning, there was no more opportunity for them to achieve salvation; see also 21:12–13; 23:63–65; commentary on 40:83–85; as well as the story of Pharaoh in 10:90–91.

Now they marvel that a warner from among themselves has come unto them, and the disbelievers say, “This is a lying sorcerer.
4 Here and in the almost identical 50:2, the incredulity of the idolaters is directed toward God for having chosen as a prophet either someone who did not formerly have high social standing among them, as in v. 8, or a human being rather than an angel, as in 25:7, where the disbelievers ask, What ails this Messenger, who eats food and walks in the markets? Why is there not an angel sent down unto him to be a warner with him? (see also 6:8–9; 11:12; 14:10; 17:94; 23:33; 36:15; 41:14; 54:24; 64:6c). For other verses that speak of their marveling at this phenomenon, see 7:69; 10:2. In deriding the Prophet, the disbelievers labeled him a sorcerer (see also 10:2; 51:52), a charge also leveled against Moses (7:109; 26:34; 51:39) and Jesus (5:110; 61:6).

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5 Has he made the gods one God? Truly this is an astounding thing!”

Rather than heeding the Prophet or considering what he said, the leaders of the Quraysh hardened their opposition to him, agreeing to be steadfast to their gods and firm in their own religion. This was in part because they believed that if they abandoned the worship of their idols, they would be afflicted with famine and distress (Ţs). Their reasoning was that if they had not heard this message from their predecessors, then it must be something false (R). Thus to their minds the Quran must have been an invention or a fabrication by Muhammad (see 21:5; 25:4; 32:3; 34:8, 43; 42:24; 46:8), a charge also brought against Noah by the leaders among his people (23:38) and against Moses by Pharaoh and his hosts (28:36). For responses to this charge, see 10:37–38; 11:13, 35; 12:11; 46:8. Regarding the tendency of leaders and notables to reject revelation, see 34:34c.

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6 And the notables among them set out, [saying], “Go! Be steadfast to your gods. Truly this is a thing desired.

7 We did not hear of this in the creed of latter days. This is naught but an invention.

5–7 These verses reportedly repeat the words expressed by some of the leaders among the Quraysh. They had gone with the Prophet to his uncle and
protector, Abū Ṭālib, to complain about the Prophet’s preaching. When asked by his uncle, “What do you want from your people?” the Prophet responded, “O my uncle! I only want from them a single declaration, which if they say it, the Arabs will follow them and the non-Arabs will pay tribute to them.” The leaders of the Quraysh said, “One declaration! By thy father! We will say ten! What is it?” And Abū Ṭālib asked, “What is the declaration, O son of my brother?” And the Prophet responded, “There is no god but God.” At which the leaders stood up and scoffed, Has he made the gods one God? Truly this is an astounding thing! (IK, Q, R, Ṭ). According to other accounts, this event occasioned the revelation of vv. 1–7 (IJ).

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8 Has the Reminder been sent down upon him among all of us?” Nay, but they are in doubt regarding My Reminder! Nay, they have not yet tasted My Punishment!

V. 4 reflects the disbelievers’ astonishment that a human being rather than an angel was sent to them with a revelation, and this verse shows their reticence to accept the fact that, if God were to choose a human being, He would have chosen an orphan with little wealth or political power. Their reaction is similar to the idolaters’ question in 43:31: Why was this Quran not sent down to a great man from one of the two towns (i.e., Makkah and Ṭā’if)? In this sense, while v. 4 expresses their amazement, this verse and 43:31 reveal their jealousy. They doubt God’s Reminder, meaning the Quran. The last sentence can be understood to mean that they continue to doubt, because they have not yet tasted God’s Punishment, but that, were they to taste it, they would know (R). Nay translates the emphatic particle bal, which can either negate or affirm. If understood as affirming, the verse would be rendered, “Indeed, they are in doubt regarding My Reminder! Indeed, they will taste My Punishment!”

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9 Or have they the treasuries of thy Lord’s Mercy, the Mighty, the Bestower?

This verse asks whether the disbelievers have the keys to prophecy, so that they can have it come upon whomever they will (IJ, Ṭs). It can also be understood more broadly as a reference to all of the mercies bestowed by God, as in 43:32: Is it they who apportion the Mercy of thy Lord? We have apportioned for them their
livelihood in the life of this world and have raised some of them above others in rank, that some of them may take others into service. And the Mercy of thy Lord is better than that which they amass. Elsewhere, the Prophet is told to say to the disbelievers, Were you to possess the treasuries of my Lord's Mercy, you would surely withhold them, out of fear of spending. Man is ever miserly! (17:100).

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10 Or have they sovereignty over the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them? Then let them ascend by some means;

10 This rhetorical question, posed as both rebuke and derision, is similar to questions posed in 4:53–55; 42:21; 43:79. If the disbelievers do indeed possess such power, then let them ascend through the doors of Heaven by their own machinations (IJ), then send the revelation down upon those whom they choose (R, Z). This verse also evokes imagery similar to that found in 22:15: Whosoever thinks that God will not help him in this world and the Hereafter, let him stretch out a rope to Heaven.

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11 a host among the parties yonder routed.

11 This verse serves as a segue into the discussion of earlier peoples who were destroyed for denying the messengers sent to them and promises that those who oppose the Prophet will face the same fate. Yonder is thus understood as an allusion to a point in the future when the disbelievers will be defeated or vanquished or to a place at a distance. Some say that it refers to the Battle of Badr (IJ, Ṭs), which would take place some years later in 2/624, while others consider it to be a reference to the Battle of the Trench in the year 5/627 (Ṭs).

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12 The people of Noah denied before them, as did Ād and Pharaoh of the tent poles,

12 For the Quranic account of Noah, see 7:59–64; 10:71–73; 11:25–48;
21:76–77; 23:23–30; 26:105–21; 37:75–82; 54:9–15, and Sūrah 71. Ēd was a pre-Islamic Arabian tribe who rejected the prophet Hūd; see 7:65–72; 11:50–60. The precise meaning of awtād (cf. 89:10), here translated tent poles, is debated. Ibn ʿAbbās says that awtād refers to the large army that served to establish Pharaoh’s rule, as many tent poles bespeak a large army (IJ). Awtād is also said to refer to Pharaoh’s alleged practice of using four stakes (awtād) to impale his victims and then leaving them for dead (IJ, Ṭs). Awtād can also mean “pillars,” thus evoking an Arabic expression for someone who is always severe or firm, “He has firm pillars” (IJ).

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13 Thamūd, the people of Lot, and the inhabitants of the thicket; they are the parties.

14 Each of them did naught but deny the messengers; so My Retribution came due.

13–14 Like the tribe of Ēd, with whom it is often mentioned, the tribe of Thamūd was a pre-Islamic Arabian tribe who rejected the prophet sent to them; see 7:73–79; 11:61–68. For Lot’s rejection by his people, see 15:57–77; 26:160–73. For the inhabitants of the thicket, who are said to have rejected the prophet Shuʿayb, see 26:176–89. In this context, that they are the parties is meant to convey that the Quraysh constitute another of these parties (IJ, R, Ṭs), all of whom share the same fate of being punished for having denied the messengers sent to them, though in different ways. This last phrase could also be understood to mean, “They were the parties,” alluding to the fact that the people of these previous tribes were wealthier and mightier than the Quraysh, but were defeated nonetheless (IK, R).

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15 They await naught but a single cry for which there is no delay.

15 Here they refers either to the Quraysh or to all of the groups mentioned in the previous verses. When taken as a reference to the Quraysh, a single cry (cf. 36:29, 49; 37:19; 79:13) refers to the first blast of Seraphiel’s trumpet, which will
level all that is on the earth. When taken as a reference to all of the groups, a single cry refers to the second blast, which heralds the Resurrection. For the relation between the two blasts or cries, see 39:68c.

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16 And they say, “Our Lord, hasten our share unto us before the Day of Reckoning.”

16 This verse is understood to be one of many verses in which the disbelievers mockingly seek to hasten their punishment (see 10:50–51; 13:6; 22:47; 26:204; 27:46, 72; 29:53; 37:176; 51:14). It may also refer to their asking for the rewards of the Garden when the Prophet described them (IJ, IK), thus alluding to their belief that they are in fact good and will receive reward rather than punishment when their account is taken, as in 2:11: And when it is said unto them, “Do not work corruption upon the earth,” they say, “We are only working righteousness.” Here our share renders qiṭanā, which is also understood to mean “our book on which the record of our deeds is inscribed,” “our account,” or “our decree” (IJ).

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17 Bear patiently that which they say, and remember Our servant David, possessed of might; truly he turned oft [unto God].

17 The injunction to bear patiently in the face of insults from the disbelievers (cf. 20:130; 50:39; 73:10) is addressed to the Prophet (IJ, Q), but can also be understood as counsel for all believers. It can also be understood to convey an attitude of tolerance and forbearance that should prevail whenever circumstances permit, though many claim it is abrogated by 9:5 (IJ, Q). The combination of injunctions, to be patient and to tell the stories of David and other prophets, implies that conveying these stories may serve to persuade the disbelievers of the reality of Muhammad’s prophethood (Q) or to console the Prophet to know of the trials that other prophets faced and their ability to overcome them. That David is possessed of might means that he had strength in both obeying and serving God (IK, Q, Sy) or in both prophethood and kingship, as he was given great strength in both domains (Aj). That he turned oft [unto God] (cf. 38:30, 44) means either that he repented, in the same way that the Prophet would regularly ask forgiveness of God a hundred
times every day (Q), that he turned to God in all of his affairs (Aj, IK, R), or that he lived in a state of perpetual servanthood (Futūḥāt II 227.11). The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said of David, “The prayer most loved by God is the prayer of David, and the fast most loved by God is the fast of David. He would sleep half the night, stand in prayer one-third of the night, and then sleep for its sixth part. And he would fast one day and break fast another day” (IJ, IK).

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18 Truly We compelled the mountains to join him in glorifying at eventide and at the break of day.

18 It is already in the nature of the mountains and the birds to glorify God, since whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth glorify God (59:1; 61:1; 62:1; 64:1; cf. 57:1; 59:24). That they are compelled to glorify God with David (cf. 21:79; 34:10) thus alludes to his properly fulfilling the function of God’s vicegerent upon the earth (v. 26; cf. 6:165), in whose prayer all of creation takes part. At eventide and at the break of day may be understood to mean at the two ends of the day or at all times. David’s prayer at the break of day is understood by many commentators to mean in the early morning after the time of the obligatory fajr prayer. It is thus taken as an allusion to the supererogatory prayer after sunrise but before noon, al-ḍuḥā (Aj, IJ, IK, Q).

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19 And the birds gathered, each turning oft unto Him.

19 The birds would gather, many say, because of the beauty of David’s voice when he sang his prayers and would turn to God with their own praise. The pronoun in unto Him could also be rendered “him” if understood as a reference to David, meaning that the birds followed his commands (Aj, IK) and glorified God with him (Q).

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20 And We strengthened his sovereignty and gave him wisdom and decisive speech.
In the Islamic tradition, David’s kingdom was considered to have been the most powerful in the world (IK), but its strength and power derived from Divine Aid (R). *Wisdom* is understood here as a reference to prophethood (IJ, IK, Q) or to understanding and sound reasoning (IJ, Q). This verse could also be understood to mean that his kingdom was strengthened through the gift of virtuous and truthful ministers to assist him (ST). *Decisive speech* means clarity and truth of speech, the knowledge of giving decrees and administering justice (IJ), or the ability to make clear and decisive judgments between a plaintiff and a defendant (IJ), and thus denotes sound reasoning or sage judgment. From another perspective, *decisive speech* is related to the gift of revelation, in which case it refers to God’s Speech. *Decisive* renders *faṣl*, which means “division” or “separation.” Here it connotes speech that makes a clear division between right and wrong or truth and falsehood. *Faṣl* is also related to *faṣṣala*, meaning “to expound,” which is used to describe the Quran as *a Book whose signs have been expounded as an Arabic Quran for a people who know* (41:3; cf. 7:52; 11:1). The wisdom given to David and other prophets thus includes the ability to “differentiate” (*faṣṣala*) between different aspects of reality and to “expound” them for others in a decisive and clear manner, just as God expounded them for the prophets.

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20 Has the report of the dispute come unto thee, when they scaled the sanctuary?

21 When they entered upon David, he was frightened of them. They said, “Fear not! We are two disputants: one of us has transgressed against the other; so judge between us with truth. Be not unjust, and guide us unto the right path.

22 Behold, this, my brother, has ninety-nine ewes, and I have one ewe. Yet he has said, ‘Place her under my care,’ and has overpowered me in speech.”

23 He said, “He has indeed wronged you in asking that your ewe be added to his ewes. Truly many associates transgress against one another, save those who believe and
perform righteous deeds. Yet how few are they!” And David understood that We had tried him; so he sought forgiveness from his Lord, fell down kneeling, and repented.

21–24 The plain sense of this story provides an example of David’s judging equitably between two parties. Many commentators, however, connect it to the Biblical account in which David fell in love with Bathsheba (transliterated as Bathshabāʿ or translated as Bint al-Qasam, “Daughter of the Oath”) and then sent her husband, Uriah the Hittite, to the front lines of the battlefield, where he would be killed, so that David would be free to marry her (Q, Ṭ; see 2 Samuel 11). But the idea that David had adulterous relations with Bathsheba before Uriah’s death, found in 2 Samuel 11:4–5, is considered by Muslims to be an abomination that could not have been committed by a prophet. Hence this detail is not found in most Islamic accounts.

The basis for relating these verses to the Biblical account of Bathsheba is interpreting the case of the one ewe being taken into the flock of ninety-nine ewes as a metaphor for David’s actions—David, who had many wives, took Bathsheba, Uriah’s only wife (IJ, Q, Ṭ)—and their similarity to the challenge that Nathan puts to David in 2 Samuel 12. This interpretation is supported by David’s passing judgment after hearing the words of the plaintiff, representing Uriah’s position, without having heard the argument of the defendant, representing David’s position. Thus David realized that this was a metaphor for his own misdeeds, and his words in v. 24 are a condemnation of his own actions. He then sought forgiveness, fell prostrate, and repented. According to this interpretation, the two visitors were angels sent by God in the form of human beings (Āl, IJ, Q, Ṭ). God’s trial of David (that We had tried him) would then refer to the entire story, from David’s desiring Bathsheba to his moment of self-reckoning. It is said that God sent this trial because David had asked to be raised to the station of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; God responded by sending him a trial similar to those he had sent upon them (Ṭ).

Other commentators maintain that such details do not in and of themselves merit a connection with the story of Bathsheba, especially as such an interpretation must extrapolate beyond the plain sense of the text. Furthermore, there is little in the Quranic text to substantiate this connection and, as Ibn Kathīr observes, the basis for relating these verses to the story of Bathsheba are not grounded in sound accounts. Al-Rāzī also maintains that even the sanitized version of the story, in which there is no adultery, runs counter to the qualities attributed to David here and in other sūrahs. It also appears to be as a result of the effort to connect this verse to the story of Bathsheba that the disputants are said to be angels in the form of human
beings, since it would then constitute a message coming directly from God.

David was most likely frightened when the disputants entered upon him, because his sanctuary was difficult to access and he had ordered that no one be allowed to enter (IK); he initially thought they sought to harm him (Āl, R). This, my brother means that they are either brothers in religion (Āl, T) or brothers by blood (Āl). That the one brother overpowered the other in speech means that he overcame him with his arguments (Āl), because his speech was clearer and more eloquent (T).

24 Yet how few are they is one of many places where the Quran laments the paucity of true believers, similar to 2:243 and 40:61: But most of mankind does not give thanks (cf. 10:60; 12:38; 27:73) and 11:17: But most of mankind believe not (cf. 12:103–6; 13:1; 17:89; 26:8, 67, 103, 121, 139, 158, 174, 190; 40:59). Those who interpret the disputants to be angels say that David knew he was being tested when one of the angels looked to the other and smiled and they then ascended into the sky (Āl, IJ, Q, T). But it can also be understood to mean that David simply understood that the dispute was put before him by God to test his wisdom and justice. That David sought forgiveness from his Lord appears to be the main message of the text that leads many to link this pericope to the story of Bathsheba. But al-Rāzī argues that David more likely asked forgiveness because he initially suspected the disputants of entering upon him with ill intent and was thus frightened of them, when in fact they only sought his counsel (R). It may also be on account of his having passed judgment in favor of the plaintiff before hearing the testimony of the accused (R), an interpretation supported by the command to judge among the people with truth and follow not caprice (v. 26). It could also be understood to mean that David sought forgiveness for the disputants (R), in which case repented would be rendered “turned,” and the first sentence of v. 25 would be rendered, “And we forgave that [sin] for him.”

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25 Thus did We forgive him that. Truly nearness unto Us shall be his, and a beautiful return.

25 Cf. v. 40. That one shall have nearness unto Us implies being among those brought nigh to God (56:11, 88; 83:21, 28), a term taken by some as a reference to the highest spiritual rank among human beings. It is said to result from obedient and virtuous acts (9:99; 34:37), while elsewhere those who seek to achieve nearness by other means, such as through the intercession of false deities, are rebuked (39:3; 46:28).

This is one of fifteen passages after which one should prostrate when reciting
the Quran; see 19:58c. Whereas most other prostrations are considered obligatory, this prostration is considered one of gratitude (IK). The Prophet himself is said to have usually prostrated after the recitation of this verse, but to have told the people that it was not obligatory (IK).

***

26 O David! Truly We have appointed thee as a vicegerent upon the earth; so judge among the people with truth and follow not caprice, lest it lead thee astray from the way of God. Truly those who stray from the way of God, theirs shall be a severe punishment for having forgotten the Day of Reckoning.

26 Regarding the meaning of vicegerent upon the earth, see 6:165c. Here caprice is understood by Ibn ʿArabī to mean everything that a person loves; thus he interprets this verse to mean, “Follow not that which you love, but follow that which I love” (Futūḥāt II 336.7). Lest it lead thee astray from the way of God then means, “Lest caprice confound you, ruin you, and make you blind to the way that I have laid down as Law for you and upon which I have asked you to walk” (Futūḥāt II 336.8). Those who have forgotten the Day of Reckoning refers to those who deny it, those who have forgotten the reality of the human condition (see 7:172c; 3:30c), and those who are heedless and have thus neglected to do what they must to prepare for the Day of Judgment (IK). The phrase can also be rendered “for that which they have forgotten on the Day of Reckoning,” in which case it can refer to their having forgotten the acts of obedience that were enjoined upon them (Ṭs), a part of that whereof they were reminded (5:13–14), the remembrance of God (58:19), or even their own creation (36:78). It can also be understood to mean that they have forgotten their very selves, as alluded to in 59:19: And be not like those who forget God, such that He makes them forget their souls (cf. 20:126; 45:34).

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27 And We did not create Heaven and earth and whatsoever is between them in vain; that is the conjecture of those who disbelieve. So woe unto those who disbelieve in the Fire!
A similar verse is 44:38: And We did not create the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them in play (cf. 21:16); see 44:38–39c. In this same vein, other verses state, We did not create the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them, save in truth (15:85; 46:3). That is the conjecture of those who disbelieve refers to their refusal to believe in a resurrection and a final abode to which human beings return (IK), as when they say, There is naught but our life in this world: we die and we live, and we will not be resurrected (23:37; cf. 45:24).

***

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?

Here, those who work corruption are placed in direct opposition to those who believe and perform righteous deeds, though in the Quran the opposite of working corruption (ifsād) is usually islāh, “setting things aright” or “making amends.” For the Quranic understanding of corruption (fasād), see 30:41c. For more on the prohibition against working corruption upon the earth, see 7:56c. This verse is similar to 68:35: Are We then to treat the submitters like the guilty? The rhetorical questions posed in both verses are similar to the one posed and answered in 32:18: Is one who believes like one who is iniquitous? They are not equal. From this perspective, this verse can be read as a continuation of the counsel given in v. 17 (R), meaning bear patiently, since the disbelievers will surely receive their due.

***

A blessed Book that We have sent down upon thee, that they may contemplate His signs and that those possessed of intellect may reflect.

This verse can be read with an implied “This is” at the beginning (IJ, Q) From an Islamic perspective, all scriptures are revealed so that people will contemplate and act in accord with them (Aj). That the Quran is a blessed Book is understood to mean that it contains good things and blessings pertaining to both religious and worldly affairs (Aj), for both ordinary believers and the spiritual
elite (Ṭb). According to some commentators, when the people contemplate it, they are guided by it, while when those possessed of intellect (2:179, 197, 269; 3:7, 190; 5:100; 12:111; 13:19; 14:52; 38:43; 39:9, 18, 21; 40:54; 65:10) reflect upon it, they are guided to the truth by its proofs and by its capacity to make things clear (Ṭb), as they are literally “those who possess the kernel,” meaning those who possess true knowledge of the inner essence of things; see 5:100c; 39:9c. From one perspective, it is only through the presence of the heart (ḥudūr al-qalb), understood to be the seat of the intellect, that one can contemplate and reflect, because the Quran is a reminder for whosoever has a heart (50:37). Thus 47:24 asks, Do they not contemplate the Quran? Or do hearts have their locks upon them?

***

And We bestowed Solomon upon David; how excellent a servant! Truly he turned oft [unto God].

30 Solomon was one of David’s many sons, but among them Solomon inherited from David (27:16), meaning that he inherited the gift of prophethood and earthly sovereignty. Both David and Solomon were given judgment and knowledge (21:79; cf. 27:15). Regarding he turned oft [unto God] (cf. vv. 17, 44), see 38:17c.

***

When at eventide noble steeds swift of foot were displayed before him,

32 he said, “I have loved the love of good things over the remembrance of my Lord, until [the sun] was taken behind the veil.

33 Bring them back unto me!” Then he began to stroke their legs and necks.

31–33 It is reported that Solomon’s horses, which he had inherited from David or which he was assembling for a campaign, were displayed before him and that he was so engrossed with them that the sun had set and the time for performing
the prescribed prayers had passed (IK, JJ, Ṭ, Ṭs). Until [the sun] was taken behind the veil could also be read, “until they were taken behind the veil,” meaning that Solomon was engrossed with the horses until they left his sight (Ṭs). Bring them back unto me takes the pronoun as a reference to the horses, but some understand the pronoun them (which can also mean “it”) as a reference to the sun, meaning that Solomon asked that the sun be brought back so that he could say his prayers during the proper time (Ṭs). Stroke translates masaḥa, which can also mean “rub.” In the interpretation preferred by most commentators, masaḥa stands for the idiomatic expression “he stroked them with his sword,” meaning that, to atone for having been distracted from the remembrance of God, Solomon sacrificed the horses (IJ, IK, JJ, Ṭ, Ṭs) and then offered the meat to the poor as alms (IJ, JJ). Others understand it to mean that he stroked them with his hand out of love for them (IJ, Ṭ), as it would seem unjust for Solomon to slay the horses for his own slip (Ṭ). The most reasonable interpretation, though rarely cited, is that he branded their legs and necks and committed them to God (IJ).

The interpretations given above reflect those found in almost all commentaries, with slight variations. But al-Rāzī gives this story a different interpretation. He begins by understanding I have loved the love of good things over the remembrance of my Lord to mean, “I have loved the love of good things on account of the remembrance of my Lord”; that is, his love of anything in this world is by the Command of God. He then understands the horses to be what were taken behind the veil, meaning that they passed by him until they were out of his sight. Then he ordered that they be returned and rubbed them to honor them and to be sure that they were fit for battle. Although such an interpretation may arise from al-Rāzī’s zealous defense of the infallibility of prophets, it also leads to a more internally consistent interpretation that is not based on accounts whose reliability is questionable.

***

34 And We did indeed try Solomon, and We cast a corpse upon his throne. He then repented,

34 The trial faced by Solomon is difficult to discern. It most likely refers to some manner in which his sovereignty was stolen by the jinn when a satan—referring to an evil jinn—was placed upon his throne (IJ). Most commentaries propose various ways in which the jinn took the ring to which the power of Solomon’s rule was attached and explain that the corpse was that of a jinn who was punished for his rebelliousness. Many even go so far as to propose different names for the jinn (IJ, Q). Others propose that the corpse was that of Solomon’s son, whom he had tried to conceal from the jinn (IJ, Ṭs). According to
another interpretation, a corpse refers to Solomon’s own body, which was like a corpse due to the severity of an illness with which God had tried him (Ṭs). But these various accounts are mutually contradictory, and as al-Rāzī observes, they are fanciful interpretations that rely upon unsubstantiated sources. He then repented can also be read as “then he returned,” meaning that Solomon returned to health after the trial from God (Ṭs) or that he returned to his throne (IJ, T). Some of the accounts of how he returned to his throne indicate that he repented and as a result returned to his throne (T). Seen in this light, the story could be understood as an allegory foretelling what would beset the kingdom, were the king to succumb to his desires.

***

So We made the wind subservient unto him, coursing gently by his command whither he wished,

36 Those who interpret vv. 31–33 as describing Solomon’s distraction from the remembrance of God by the love of the world say that, when Solomon gave up his love for the things of this world and atoned for his sins, God compensated him with command over the wind (cf. 21:81), something better and swifter than the
horses that some say he had sacrificed (IK, JJ), though this interpretation does not depend on his actually having slaughtered the horses.

***

37 as well as the satans, every builder and diver,

38 and others, bound together in fetters:

37–38 Solomon was also granted power over the satans, that is, the evil jinn, as in 27:17: And gathered for Solomon were his hosts of jinn and men and birds, and they were marshaled [in ordered ranks]. Here, every builder and diver means that the jinn would do whatever Solomon willed by way of building on the earth and extracting riches from the sea (T). When combined with his control over the wind, Solomon had sovereignty over air, land, and sea. Other jinn were bound together in fetters due to their recalcitrance (T, Ts).

***

39 “This is Our Gift; so bestow graciously or withhold without reckoning.”

39 This is understood as a reference to the kingdom or sovereignty that God gave Solomon (T, Ts), the power over the jinn (T), or all of the powers given to him (T). Solomon is then given permission to bestow or withhold these gifts as he deems best (T).

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40 Truly nearness unto Us shall be his, and a beautiful return.

40 See 38:25c.

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41 And remember Our servant Job, when he called upon his
Lord, “Truly Satan has afflicted me with weariness and punishment.”

41 Vv. 41–44 provide the longest account of Job in the Quran; see also 4:163; 6:84; 21:83–84. In 6:84 he is listed with other Old Testament prophets among those whom God guided aforetime, and in 4:163 he is included among those to whom God gave revelation. As in the Bible and 21:83–84, Job provides an example of patience and forbearance. But unlike the Bible, the Quranic accounts do not comprise a didactic meditation on the problem of evil. The weariness and punishment with which Satan afflicts Job are understood to be the loss of property and family and incurring a painful disease (Ṭ); he is said to have been afflicted for seven years and seven months (Ṭ).

***

42 “Strike with thy foot; this is cool water wherewith to wash and to drink.”

42 Cf. 21:84. Job is commanded to strike the ground in order to bring forth a spring whose water would heal the disease that afflicted him (Ṭ). Most commentators understand this verse as a reference to two separate springs; he washed with water from one and it healed his exterior ailments, and he drank water from the other and it healed his internal ailments (IJ, IK, R,Ṭ, Z). Sayings attributed to the Prophet report that God sent rain upon Job’s fields until they were full (IK, Ṭ), and that “when the Prophet Job was taking a bath naked, golden locusts began to fall upon him. Job started collecting them in his clothes. Then his Lord addressed him, ‘O Job! Have I not made thee rich enough that thou art not in need of what you see?’ Job replied, ‘Yes, O Lord! But I am not without need of Thy blessings’” (IK).

***

43 And We bestowed upon him his family and their like along with them as a mercy from Us and a reminder for possessors of intellect.

43 That God bestowed upon him his family is understood to mean that he brought them back to life (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs), that they too were healed, or that they were
returned to him after having been absent for some time (R). *Their like along with them* means that he also received an increase in family members (T); see 21:83–84c. This presents an interesting contrast to the Biblical account, in which Job’s livestock is doubled, but the number of his sons and daughters remains the same (see Job 42:12–16). *Possessors of intellect* (2:179, 197, 269; 3:7, 190; 5:100; 12:111; 13:19; 14:52; 38:29; 39:9, 18, 21; 40:54; 65:10) indicates those who possess true knowledge of the inner essence and meaning of things; see 38:29c; 5:100c; 39:9c.

***

44 And, “Take with thy hand a bundle of rushes and strike therewith, and break not thine oath.” Truly We found him to be steadfast. What an excellent servant! Truly he turned oft [unto God].

44 To explain this verse, commentators report that Job’s wife listened to Satan’s promptings to urge Job to “say a single word” (which remains unmentioned) or perform some other act by which he would be healed and his property and family would be returned to him (IJ, R, Ṭ, Z), though there is no support for this story in the Quran or the Ḥadīth. Knowing that she had listened to “the enemy of God,” Job rebuked her and vowed to punish her. God then told him to strike her with a sprig of leaves, so that he could fulfill his vow without harming her unjustly (IK, R, Ṭ, Z). As there is no support for this widespread interpretation in the Quranic text itself, it seems more consistent to read the *bundle of rushes* as a reference to herbs or leaves that were part of Job’s treatment, and *break not thine oath* as a general injunction or an assurance that in using the herbs he was not breaking the oaths he had made to God. Regarding *he turned oft [unto God]* (cf. vv. 17, 30), see 38:17c.

***

45 And remember Our servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, possessed of strength and sight.

46 Truly We purified them with that which is pure—remembrance of the Abode.
And truly in Our Sight they are among the chosen, the elect.

45–47 Possessed of strength and sight refers to the three prophets’ having strength in performing acts of worship and insight into religious matters (IK, Ṭ), and thus into truth, as their vision was that of the heart (Ṭ). That God purified them, or “chose them,” through remembrance of the Abode means that God removed the love of this world from their hearts and made them always mindful of the Hereafter (IK). Al-Tustarī is reported to have said of this phrase, “God purified them for remembrance of God for God alone, not for attaining recompense. . . . They remembered Him through Him and for Him” (ST).

***

And remember Ishmael, Elisha, and Dhu’l-Kifl; each is among the excellent.

48 Cf. 21:85, which, like this verse, immediately follows the only other account of Job’s story in the Quran and says that Ishmael, Idrīs, and Dhu’l-Kif were among the patient. For the Quranic story of Ishmael, see 2:125–28. Elisha (al-Yasaʿ) is only mentioned here and in 6:86, where he is listed with Ishmael, Jonah, and Lot among those whom God favored above the worlds. Most understand him to be the same Elisha whose account is given in 2 Kings, a disciple of Elijah who took his place as a prophet in Israel (2 Kings 2:13–15) after Elijah ascended to Heaven (2:11).

Dhu’l-Kifl, here transcribed as a proper name, literally means “the possessor of kifl,” that is, of the “portion” or “share,” as in 57:28: He will give you a twofold portion (kiflayn) of His Mercy. Thus he is said to be a prophet who had a twofold share of the work and reward of prophets (Q, R, Z on 21:85). Askifl derives from the same root, k-f-l, as the verb takaffala, meaning “to assume responsibility” or “to pledge,” it is interpreted by some to indicate a prophet, or a righteous king or man, who “pledged himself to a prophet” (takaffala li nabī; R, Ṭ on 21:85) or who pledged to fast every day, stand in prayer every night, and judge between the people without succumbing to anger (JJ, Q, R, Ṭ on 21:85). As he is mentioned among other prophets here and in 21:85, commentators have endeavored to identify Dhu’l-Kifl with various prophets, such as Elias (Elijah), Joshua, or Zachariah (R, Z on 21:85). The basis for this last may be 3:37, where God is said to place Mary under the care of Zachariah; the Arabic for “place under the care” is kaffala, from the same root as kifl. Nonetheless, the majority maintain that he is not a prophet (Q
on 21:85). Some translators link Dhu’l-Kifl to Ezekiel, which may derive from attempts to relate the idea of *kifl* and *takaffala*, “assuming responsibility,” to Ezekiel 4:4, where God lays “the punishment of the house of Israel” upon Ezekiel. But such a link does not seem justified.

***

49 This is a reminder. And for the reverent there will surely be a beautiful return,

49 The Quran *is a reminder* (IK), or these stories recounted above are a beautiful reminder (Q, R). Here the reverent are promised the same reward that is promised to David in v. 25.

***

50 Gardens of Eden, the gates whereof are open unto them,

50 Paradise is said to have Gardens of many varieties. *Gardens of Eden* (cf. 9:72; 13:23; 16:31; 18:31; 19:61; 20:76; 35:33; 40:8) are understood to refer to an especially exalted or blessed place within Paradise; see 9:72c. According to a ḥadīth, “Heaven has eight gates. [Four are:] Whosoever was among the people of prayer shall be called from the gate of prayer. Whosoever was among the people of fasting shall be called from the gate of fasting. Whosoever was among the people of charity (ṣadaqah) shall be called from the gate of charity. Whosoever was among the people of striving (jihād) shall be called from the gate of striving.” See also 39:73: *Those who reverence their Lord will be driven to the Garden in throngs, till when they reach it, its gates will be opened and its keepers will say unto them, “Peace be upon you; you have done well; so enter it, to abide [therein].”* Elsewhere it is said, *Angels shall enter upon them from every gate. “Peace be upon you because you were patient.” How excellent is the Ultimate Abode!* (13:23–24).

***

51 reclining therein, they call therein for abundant fruit and drink.
51 Those in Paradise recline upon couches arrayed (52:20), facing one another (37:44; 56:16), in the shade with their spouses (36:56), and are given fruits and meat as they desire (52:22) and partake of every fruit (47:15), while they pass a cup to one another wherein is no idle talk, nor incitement to sin (52:23).

***

And theirs shall be maidens of modest gaze, of like age.  

52 Of modest gaze indicates that the maidens look upon none but their own spouses (Aj, Q). For other references to the maidens who await the righteous in Paradise, see 44:54c; 52:20; 55:56, 72; 56:22; 78:33; and the essay “Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran.”

***

This is that which you are promised for the Day of Reckoning.

This indeed is Our provision which shall never be spent.

53–54 The food and drink that God promises the reverent is a provision that, unlike the provisions of this world, will never run out, as in 16:96: That which is with you comes to an end, but that which is with God subsists; also see 13:35.

***

This it shall be! Yet for the rebellious there will surely be a most evil return,

Hell, wherein they will burn. What an evil resting place!

This it shall be! So let them taste it, a boiling liquid and a cold, murky fluid,
coupled with other [punishments] similar in kind.

55–58 After mentioning some provisions of the beautiful return in vv. 49–54, the Quran turns in these verses to the torturous provisions of the evil return. The rebellious are those who disobey God and oppose God’s messengers (IK). The boiling liquid that they are here made to drink (cf. 6:70; 10:4; 37:67; 40:72; 44:46; 47:15; 56:42, 54; 78:24–25; 88:5) indicates something that has reached its maximum temperature and causes extreme pain. In 22:19 the boiling liquid is poured over their heads (cf. 44:48). Cold, murky fluid translates ghassāq (cf. 78:25), which means something so frigid that one cannot bear it. The two drinks show that Hell is a place of extremes; every time one escapes from one type of torture, one is cast into another that is its opposite. This is the meaning of punishments being coupled with other [punishments] similar in kind (IK).

***

59 This troop rushing in with you—no greeting for them! They will surely burn in the Fire.

60 They will say, “Nay, but no greeting for you! You have sent it forth for us. What an evil dwelling place!”

59–60 Whereas the believers enter the gates of Heaven, the disbelievers burn in the Fire. And whereas the believers are greeted with the greeting of “Peace” by the angels (see 10:10; 16:32; 19:62; 33:44; 36:58; 39:73; 56:25–26c), in Hell every time a community enters, it curses its sister (7:38).

***

61 They will say, “O Lord! Whosoever has sent this forth for us, increase him twofold in punishment in the Fire.”

61 Those in Hell are asking for a twofold punishment upon those who led them into disbelief, as in 7:38, where the disbelievers who followed those before them say, “Our Lord, it was they who led us astray; so give them a double punishment in the Fire.” He will say, “For each of you it shall be doubled, but you know not” (cf. 33:67–68), meaning let them receive one punishment for having
been astray and another punishment for leading others astray. In this vein 29:13 says of those who sought to lead others astray, *Surely they will bear their own burdens, and others’ burdens along with their own*. Nonetheless, the punishment of those whom they led astray will not be lessened; see 7:38–39c.

***

62 And they will say, “How is that we do not see men here whom we had counted among the evil?

63 Did we take them in mockery? Or have our eyes swerved away from them?”

62–63 The denizens of Hell will be surprised to see that those whom they thought to be misguided are not in Hell. Thus in 7:49, as they see the believers being told to enter the Garden, they are asked, *Are these the ones concerning whom you swore that God would not extend any mercy?* That they continue to ask such questions implies that, despite having received the punishment, they still do not fully understand. Alternatively, the first sentence of v. 63 can be read, “We took them in mockery” (Q, R).

***

64 Surely that is true: the disputing of the people of the Fire.

64 The people of the Fire dispute with one another regarding what has led them to their final outcome, and with God. Though they do not dispute with the people of the Garden, in other passages they do speak with them (see commentary on 7:44–51; 57:13–15), asking for their light (57:13), some water, or some of what God has provided for them (7:50), though the inhabitants of the Garden cannot share these blessings, as such blessings are forbidden to the denizens of Hell.

***

65 Say, “I am only a warner, and there is no god but God, the One, the Paramount,
Lord of the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them, the Mighty, the Forgiving.”

65–66 That the Prophet is only a warner or, as expressed elsewhere, naught but a warner (11:12; 13:7; 27:92; 34:46; 35:23; 46:9; 79:45) means that his function is only to deliver the message; he does not have knowledge of the Unseen, save as is given to him by God, as indicated in vv. 69–70. The Divine Name the Paramount (al-Qahhār) derives from the same root as the Dominant (al-Qāhir) and always occurs in the phrase the One, the Paramount (12:39; 13:16; 14:48; 39:4; 40:16). The combination of the Divine Names the Mighty and the Forgiving (cf. 39:5; 40:42; 67:2) refers to God’s threat to the disbelievers and God’s promise to the believers (Aj), similar to the more frequent combination of the Names the Mighty and the Merciful (26:9, 68, 104, 122, 140, 159, 175, 191, 217; 30:5; 32:6; 36:5; 44:42).

***

Say, “It is a great tiding from which you turn away.

67–68 A great tiding refers to the Quran (Aj, Q, T) or, as in 78:1, to the Day of Resurrection (Aj, Q). It could also mean that the message the Prophet brings, that of God’s Oneness, is a great tiding issuing directly from God, and only the heedless would turn from it (Aj).

***

I have no knowledge of the Highest Assembly, when they dispute.

69–70 The Highest Assembly refers to the assembly of angels (IK, Q, T). The dispute mentioned here is understood by most to be that regarding the creation of Adam (Q, T), as in 2:30, when they say to God, Wilt Thou place therein one who
will work corruption therein, and shed blood, while we hymn Thy praise and call Thee Holy? (IJ). In this sense, these verses instruct the Prophet to say that he could have no knowledge of the discussion that transpired between God, the angels, and Satan, were it not for the revelation from God (IJ, IK,Ṭ). The nature of the angels’ disputation may also be the one conveyed in a saying of the Prophet: “My Lord came to me at night in the most beautiful form. He said, ‘O Muhammad!’ I replied, ‘Here I am, my Lord, at Thy service.’ He said, ‘What is the Highest Assembly disputing about?’ I replied, ‘I know not, my Lord.’ He said that two or three times. Then He placed His palm between my shoulders. I felt its coolness between my breasts, and everything in the heavens and on the earth was disclosed to me. . . . Then He said, ‘O Muhammad! What is the Highest Assembly disputing about?’ I replied, ‘About expiations.’ And He asked, ‘What are expiations?’ I said, ‘Going on foot to gatherings, sitting in the mosque after the prayers, and performing the ablutions completely in difficult circumstances. He who does that lives well and dies well. His offenses are like the day his mother bore him’” (Q). In another version, the Prophet was then told that he could make supplication for anything, and he responded, “O God! I ask Thee that I may perform good deeds and shun bad deeds, and that I may love the poor, and that Thou shouldst forgive me and have mercy upon me, and that when Thou decidest to put a people to trial, take me away without a trial. And I ask Thee for Thy Love, for the love of those who love Thee and for the love of deeds that bring one near to Thy Love.”

70 See 38:65–66c.

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71 [Remember] when thy Lord said unto the angels, “Behold! I am creating a human being from clay.

71–85 This is the last account of the creation of Adam in the textual order of the Quran, but most likely the first in the chronological order of revelation. The other accounts are found in 2:30–39; 7:11–25; 17:61–65; 20:115–24; see also 15:28–43.

71 I am creating a human being is an abbreviated version of what God says to the angels in 15:28: Behold! I am creating a human being from dried clay, made of molded mud; and in 2:30 God tells the angels, I am placing a vicegerent upon the earth.

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72 When I have proportioned him and breathed into him of
My Spirit, fall down before him prostrating.”

72 Cf. 15:29. Also see 32:9, where what is here God’s statement to the angels is phrased in the third person. Insisting upon God’s complete transcendence and the createdness of anything outside of God, most commentators seek to read I breathed into him of My Spirit figuratively. Some gloss My Spirit as “My Power” (T) or say that this is not God’s Spirit, but that God refers to it as such as a means of honoring Adam (IK, JJ), or that My Spirit means “the Spirit that I possess and no one else possesses” (Q, Sh), while others make little comment on it (Bḍ). Al-Rāzī notes that the breathing of the Spirit into Adam indicates that the creation of the human being is only completed through both the formation of the physical body and the breathing of the Spirit into it, which he understands to mean that human beings have both a body and a soul. He then takes My Spirit to mean that the soul is a noble, heavenly (ʿulwī), and holy (qudsī) substance. He, nonetheless, maintains that it is a created, though subtle and luminous, substance. In this interpretation, he would appear to understand the soul as what arises to form the bridge between the body and the spirit. Some Sufi commentators also maintain that what is “breathed into Adam” is a created substance (Qu). But others understand this to mean that the spirit within the human being is of a supernal nature and this explains how it is that the angels could be commanded to prostrate before Adam (2:34; 7:11; 18:50; 20:116). Rūzbihān al-Baqlī thus glosses this passage: “I am creating a human being out of clay, that is, out of incapacity and weakness, whom I will clothe in the lights of My Greatness and Magnificence. Then when I have perfected him, distinguished him with My Attributes, illuminated him with the Light of My Essence, and breathed into him of My Spirit, that is, given him life through My Life and My Spirit, which came forth from the disclosure of Magnificence and Beauty, prostrate unto him.”

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73 Then the angels prostrated, all of them together.

74 Not so Iblīs. He waxed arrogant, and was among the disbelievers.

73–74 Regarding the prostration of the angels before Adam and Iblīs’s refusal to follow God’s Command to do so, key elements in all accounts of Adam’s creation, see 2:34; 15:29–33; 17:61; 18:50; 20:116; commentary on 7:11–12. In the present sūrah, Iblīs waxes arrogant, but in 7:13 he is told by God, It is not for thee
to wax arrogant here. So go forth! Thou art surely among those who are humbled.

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[God] said, “O Iblīs! What has prevented thee from prostrating unto that which I created with My two Hands? Dost thou wax arrogant, or art thou among the exalted?”

In 7:12, God asks, What prevented thee from prostrating when I commanded thee? That God created the human being with His two Hands is understood in a symbolic manner, since God’s Command when He desires a thing is only to say to it, “Be!” and it is (36:82; cf. 2:117; 3:47; 6:73; 16:40; 19:35; 40:68). Thus some take the creation of the human being with God’s two Hands as an allusion to the greatness of the human being (Q) or as an allusion to two of God’s Attributes (Q), God’s Majesty and Beauty, God’s Dominance and Gentleness (qahr wa lutf), or all of the Divine Names that fall under the two categories of Dominance and Love (K), which would then allude to the human being as the locus in which such attributes become manifest. The rhetorical question posed by God to Iblīs would then mean, “Are you truly a creation more exalted than this creation?”

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He said, “I am better than him. Thou hast created me from fire, while Thou hast created him from clay.”

In 7:12, Iblīs makes this same explicit argument. In 15:33, he does so implicitly in his dismissive remarks about Adam’s being created from dried clay, made of molded mud; and in 17:61, he asks, Shall I prostrate before one whom Thou hast created of clay? See 7:12c; 15:32–33c; 17:61c.

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He said, “Go forth from it! Surely thou art outcast!

And surely My Curse shall be upon thee till the Day of
Judgment.”

77–78 See commentary on the identical verses, 15:34–35. Elsewhere God says to Satan, Go forth from it, disgraced and banished! (7:18).

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79 He said, “My Lord! Grant me respite till the Day they are resurrected.”

80 He said, “Then verily thou art among those granted respite till the Day of the Moment Known.”

81 He said, “Then, by Thy Might, I shall cause them to err all together,

82 save Thy sincere servants among them.”

79–83 Despite Iblīs’s banishment, here he requests and is granted respite from God, so that he will neither die nor be punished (Bd), till the Day they are resurrected (7:14), referring to the Day of universal Resurrection and Judgment (cf. 7:14–15; 15:36–38; 17:62), which is the Moment Known to God. Vv. 80–81 are repeated verbatim in 15:37–38. While the accounts of the creation of Adam and Satan’s refusal to prostrate in 2:30–34 and 7:14–18 are followed by accounts of the manner in which Satan causes Adam and Eve to fall from the Garden, the accounts here and in 15:25–33 are followed by more general discussions of the manner in which Satan vows to make things seem fair unto them on earth and to cause them to err all together (15:39). Making things seem fair to human beings is the way in which his misleading them is most often described (see 6:43; 8:48; 16:63; 27:24; 29:38). He is also referred to as the stealthy whisperer (114:4) and the Deluder (31:33; 35:5; 57:14), who enjoins indecency (2:268; 24:21) and makes false promises (4:120; 14:22; 17:64). From one perspective, while Satan is misleading people, he is in fact doing the work of God by bringing those whom God has already destined for Hell toward the end that God has decreed for them.
Perhaps it is in this vein that God says to him, *So incite whomsoever thou canst among them with thy voice, and bear down upon them with thy cavalry and thy infantry, and be their partner in wealth and children, and make them promises* (17:64).

Although God has permitted Satan to tempt people and lead those who disbelieve astray, he has no authority over God’s servants (cf. 17:65). Thus when those who followed Satan receive their punishment and turn to him on the Day of Judgment, he will say, *Verily God made you the promise of truth; and I made you a promise, but I failed you. And I had no authority over you, save that I callea you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me, but blame yourselves. I cannot respond to your cries for help; nor can you respond to my cries for help* (14:22).

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84 He said, “This is the truth, and the truth I speak,

84 This enigmatic verse, which literally reads, “The truth, and I speak the truth,” can be understood as a continuation of God’s Words to Satan (Ṭ), in which case it is interpreted to mean, “I am the Truth, and I speak the truth” (IK, Ṭ) or “The truth is from Me, and I speak the truth” (IK,Ṭ). It may also mean, “I establish the truth, and the truth that is spoken” (JJ), referring to what is said in v. 85, thus giving the meaning, “It is true that I shall surely fill Hell with thee and with such of them as follow thee, all together, and I speak the truth” (Ṭ). It could also be understood to mean, “God is the Truth, and I speak the truth” (Ṭ) or “To God belongs the truth, and I speak the truth” (Ṭ).

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85 ‘I shall surely fill Hell with thee and with such of them as follow thee, all together.’”

85 Similar threats to fill Hell with (wrongdoing) men, women, and jinn (which here includes Satan) are made in 11:119 and 32:13. Here and in 7:18 the promise is made directly to Satan; see 7:18c; 32:13c.

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86 Say, “I ask not of you any reward for it, nor am I among
the pretenders.

86 I ask not of you any reward for it (cf. 6:90; 25:57; 42:23) is also said by the prophets Noah, Hūd, Šāliḥ, Lot, and Shuʻayb in 26:109, 127, 145, 164, 180, respectively. It is understood as a reference to delivering the revelation (IJ, IK, JJ). A mark of true prophethood is that those claiming it ask for no reward from the people. They only ask that the people follow the message with which they have been sent. As Noah says, in 10:72, And if you turn your backs, I have not asked of you any reward. My reward lies only with God, and I am commanded to be among those who submit (see also 36:21c).

The Prophet’s statement that he is not from among the pretenders, or mutakallifūn, which can also mean “imposters,” is addressed to the Quraysh, reminding them that he had never feigned or sought a position that was not his right or sought to claim something that was not his (Z). According to a saying attributed to the Prophet, but not in canonical collections, “The pretender has three characteristics: he contends with those above him; he claims [for himself] what has not been conferred [upon him]; and he speaks about that of which he knows not” (Q, Sy, Z). The phrase could also mean, “nor am I among those who impose [themselves].”

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87 It is naught but a reminder for the worlds,

87 Cf. 6:90; 12:104; 68:52; 81:27. The Quran is only sent to remind people of God and the Hereafter and is naught but a revelation revealed (53:4).

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88 and you will certainly know its tiding after a time.”

88 People will come to see that what the Quran says is true after they die, after the Resurrection (IK, Q, T, Z), or after the victory and spread of Islam (Z).