Upon Their Knees

_al-Jāthiyah_

A late Makkansūrah, _al-Jāthiyah_ is believed to have been revealed immediately after Sūrah 44, _al-Dukhān_ (JJ). Although some maintain that the entire sūrah is from the Makkah period, others maintain that v. 14 is from the Madinan period (Āl, IJ, JJ, Q). The sūrah takes its name from v. 28, which states that on the Day of Judgment every community will be upon its knees (cf. 19:68). It is also known to some as _al-Sharīʿah_, because it is the only sūrah to employ the term _sharīʿah_, which later came to denote Islamic Law. Another name is _al-Dahr_ (“Time”), a reference to _al-dahr_ in v. 24, which can mean “time,” “fate,” or “the passage of time.” The initial reference to the revelation of the Book can be seen as being connected to the second to last verse of the previous sūrah: *We have only made this easy upon thy tongue, that haply they may remember* (44:58; Aj).

_al-Jāthiyah_ contains one of the most explicit and extended Quranic discussions of “the signs of God,” enjoining people to reflect upon them and describing the fate that will befall those who deny them. It begins with a discussion of the signs of God in revelation and in the created order and the fate of those who fail to believe in them and understand them (vv. 2–15). A brief mention of the Children of Israel (vv. 16–17) segues into an address to the Prophet Muhammad (vv. 18–19), which is followed by a reiteration of the fate that befalls those who deny God’s _insights_, or signs (vv. 20–21). The remainder of the sūrah continues the focus upon those who deny God’s signs and the Final Judgment (vv. 22–26) and upon the great peril that awaits
them on the Day of Judgment (vv. 27–37).

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

1 Ḥā. Mīm. 2 The revelation of the Book from God, the Mighty, the Wise. 3 Truly in the heavens and the earth are signs for believers. 4 And in your creation and in what He has scattered of animals are signs for a people who are certain. 5 And in the variation of the night and the day, and in that which God sends down from the sky as provision whereby He revives the earth after its death, and in the shifting of the winds are signs for a people who understand. 6 These are the signs of God that We recite unto thee in truth. So in what discourse after God and His signs do they believe? 7 Woe unto every sinful liar! 8 He hears the signs of God recited unto him, then persists arrogantly as if he did not hear it. So give him glad tidings of a painful punishment. 9 And when he comes to know aught of Our signs, he takes them in mockery. For them there shall be a humiliating punishment. 10 Beyond them lies Hell. That which they have earned will avail them naught, nor that which they have taken apart from God as protectors; and theirs shall be a great punishment. 11 This is guidance; and those who disbelieve in the signs of their Lord, theirs shall be a painful punishment of torment. 12 God it is Who made the sea subservient unto you, that the ships may sail upon it by His Command, that you may seek His Bounty, and that haply you may give thanks. 13 He made subservient unto you whatsoever is in the heavens
and whatsoever is on the earth—all together. Truly in that are signs for a people who reflect. Tell those who believe to forgive those who hope not for the days of God, that He may requite a people for that which they used to earn. Whosoever works righteousness, it is for his own soul. And whosoever commits evil, it is to the detriment thereof. Then unto your Lord shall you be returned. And indeed We gave the Children of Israel the Book, judgment, and prophethood, and We provided them with good things, and We favored them above the worlds. And We gave them clear proofs from the Command. And they differed not till after knowledge had come unto them, out of envy among themselves. Thy Lord will surely judge between them on the Day of Resurrection regarding that wherein they used to differ. Then We placed thee upon a clear path from the Command; so follow it, and follow not the caprices of those who know not. Truly they will avail you naught against God. And surely the wrongdoers are the protectors of one another, while God is the Protector of the reverent. These are insights for mankind, and guidance and mercy for a people who are certain. Or do those who commit evil deeds suppose that We shall treat them like those who believe and perform righteous deeds equally in their life and in their death? Evil indeed is the judgment they make! God created the heavens and the earth in truth, and so that every soul may be recompensed for that which it has earned; and they shall not be wronged. Hast thou considered one who takes his caprice as his god, God having led him astray knowingly, and sealed his hearing...
and his heart and placed a cover upon his sight? Who, then, will guide him after God? Will you not, then, remember?

They say, “There is naught but our life in this world. We die and we live, and none destroys us save time.” But they have no knowledge thereof. They do naught but conjecture. And when Our signs are recited unto them as clear proofs, their argument is naught but to say, “Bring us our fathers, if you are truthful.” Say, “God gives you life; then causes you to die; then He gathers you together on the Day of Resurrection in which there is no doubt. But most of mankind know not.” Unto God belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth. And the Day when the Hour is come—on that Day those who make false claims will have lost, and thou wilt see every community upon its knees. Every community is called to its book: “Today you will be recompensed for that which you used to do. This Our Book speaks against you with truth. Truly We were recording all that you used to do.” As for those who believed and performed righteous deeds, their Lord causes them to enter into His Mercy. That is the manifest triumph. And as for those who disbelieve, were not My signs recited unto you? But you waxed arrogant and were a guilty people. When it was said, “Surely God’s Promise is true, and there is no doubt in the Hour,” you said, “We do not know what the Hour is. We do naught but conjecture, and we are not certain.” The evils of that which they had done will become manifest unto them, and that which they used to mock will beset them. And it will be said, “Today We forget you just as you forgot the
meeting with this your Day; your refuge is the Fire and you have no helpers. That is because you took the signs of God in mockery and the life of this world has deluded you.” So today they will not be removed from it; nor can they make amends. Unto God be praise, Lord of the heavens and Lord of the earth, Lord of the worlds. His is the Grandeur in the heavens and the earth, and He is the Mighty, the Wise.

Commentary

1 Ḥā. Mīm.

1 This sūrah is the sixth in a series of seven sūras that open with the Arabic letters ḥāʾ and mīm and are referred to collectively as the Hawāmīm. The Arabic letters ḥāʾ and mīm are among the separated letters (al-muqatṭaʿ āt) that are found at the beginning of twenty-nine sūras (see 2:1c) and whose meaning is considered by most commentators to be known only to God. For some possible meanings of the letters ḥāʾ and mīm, see 40:1c.

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2 The revelation of the Book from God, the Mighty, the Wise.

2 Cf. 39:1; 40:2; 46:2. For the meaning of this verse, see 39:1c; for other possible readings, see 40:2c. That the Quran has come from the Mighty alludes to its being inimitable (muʿjaz), overcoming all and not able to be overcome, while its coming from the Wise alludes to its comprising conclusive wisdom (ḥikmah bālīghāh; 54:5) as well as to its being definitive (muhkam; Aj).

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3 Truly in the heavens and the earth are signs for
This is one of many verses that call human beings to reflect upon God’s signs in the created order, since they are seen as indications of His Oneness (Aj). Signs translates āyāt, which refers to the verses of the Quran, the natural phenomena in the heavens and on the earth, and the signs within the human soul. The heavens and the earth are filled with signs for believers (cf. 6:99; 15:77; 16:79; 27:86; 29:24, 44; 30:37; 39:52), for a people who reflect (13:3; 30:21; 39:42; 45:13; cf. 10:24), for a people who hear (10:67; 16:65; 30:23), for those who know (30:22), for a people who understand (2:164; 13:4; 16:12, 67; 30:24; 45:5), for a people who are reverent (10:6), for those possessed of intellect (20:54, 128), for the possessors of intellect (3:190), for those who possess insight (3:13) and for a people who are certain (45:4; cf. 51:20).

Signs (āyāt) occurs twelve times in this short sūrah, especially in the first section (vv. 3–8), where it is used interchangeably as a reference to the wonders of the created order (vv. 3–5) and the verses of the Quran (vv. 6–8), suggesting a subtle connection between revelation and the created order. This connection has led many Islamic philosophers and mystics to view the created order as “the cosmic Quran” (al-Qur’ān al-takwīnī) as distinguished from “the written Quran” (al-Qur’ān al-tadwīnī). When understood by those with certainty in their hearts, the signs of the created order are said to guide, by their very being (kawn), to the One who brought them into being (al-Mukawwin; ST). In this vein, al-Ghazzali writes that for those who are masters of their hearts, God makes “every atom in the heavens and the earth speak to them . . . until they hear their celebration and glorification of God . . . speaking without letters and without voices” (Iḥyā’ ʿulūm al-dīn, K. al-Tawḥīd wa ’l-tawakkul).

And in your creation and in what He has scattered of animals are signs for a people who are certain.

Signs in your creation refers to all phases of human life, from gestation to growth to the waning of life (IK); for the Quranic discussion of the phases of life, see 16:70c; 22:5–6c; 23:13–14; 30:54; 40:67. In your creation can also be understood as an allusion to the manner in which God has honored human beings by endowing them with knowledge and understanding, subordinating the rest of creation to them (Aj) and making them vicegerents upon the earth (see 6:165; 35:39; cf. 2:30). For other references to the signs within human beings, see 41:53c;
And in the variation of the night and the day, and in that which God sends down from the sky as provision whereby He revives the earth after its death, and in the shifting of the winds are signs for a people who understand.

The variation of the night and the day (cf. 2:164; 3:190; 10:6; 23:80; 24:44) points to the regularity and rhythm in human life and the impermanent nature of life in this world, which is characterized by finitude. In other verses, the alternation of night and day is presented as a direct reflection of God’s Omnipotence, since God makes the night pass into the day and makes the day pass into the night (22:61; 31:29; 35:13; 57:6; cf. 3:27; 39:5); see 31:29c. Night and day are also invoked as Divine blessings and mercies for human beings, as in 27:86: Have they not considered that We made the night that they might rest therein, and the day by which to see? Truly in that are signs for a people who believe (cf. 6:96–97c; 10:67; 25:47; 40:61).

The shifting of the winds alludes to the role of the winds in carrying ships across the sea and in pollinating vegetation (Aj). In the Quran, winds (pl.) is employed to convey Divine Mercy, as in 7:57 and 25:48: He it is Who sends the winds as glad tidings ahead of His Mercy (see also 25:48; 27:63; 30:46; 35:9). In contrast, wind (sing.) is used in the Quran to express God’s Wrath and Punishment (see 3:117; 10:22; 17:69; 22:31; 30:51; 33:9; 41:16; 46:24).

These are the signs of God that We recite unto thee in truth. So in what discourse after God and His signs do they believe?

In the context of this sūrah, the signs that God “recites” refers to the verses of the revealed Book and to the signs of God in the created order (Aj), both of which are said to come in truth, or “through truth”; see 45:22c. In this sense, this verse can be understood to mean, “In what discourse other than the most beautiful discourse [see 39:23c] and the most evident signs will they believe?” (Aj). Or it can be understood to mean, “How could they believe in any other discourse after
hearing this discourse?” According to another canonical reading, do they believe (yuʾminūn) could be read “do you believe” (tuʾminūn; Q, Z). Both readings imply that if people cannot believe in these signs, they will not believe in anything of a religious nature.

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7 Woe unto every sinful liar!

7 Regarding woe unto, see 2:79c. Liar translates affāk, which indicates those who turn away from the truth and lie to themselves because they are perverted in intellect and judgment; see 29:61c. Sinner translates athīm, which is an intensive form indicating an inveterate sinner.

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8 He hears the signs of God recited unto him, then persists arrogantly as if he did not hear it. So give him glad tidings of a painful punishment.

8 This verse is reported to have been revealed regarding Naḍr ibn al-Ḥārith, who would transmit foreign stories, or “discourses,” and use them to distract the people from listening to the Quran (Aj, Q, R). Nonetheless, it is understood as a general reference to all who turn away from God’s signs when they hear them (Aj). Although such people hear the Quran, it is as if they do not hear, because they are spiritually deaf and thus do not understand, as in 6:25: Among them are those who listen to thee, but We have placed coverings over their hearts, such that they do not understand, and a deafness in their ears (cf. 2:171; 5:71; 6:25, 39; 8:22; 10:42; 17:46; 18:57; 21:46; 31:7; 41:5, 44; 47:23); see 6:25c. Although glad tidings usually indicates the good news of the means to salvation that prophets bring, here as elsewhere (see 3:21; 4:138; 9:3, 34; 31:7; 84:24), it is used with a sense of irony indicating that the hypocrites and disbelievers will receive the painful punishment that they seem to “desire.”

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9 And when he comes to know aught of Our signs, he takes them in mockery. For them there shall be a
humiliating punishment.

9 Given the use of signs in connection with both the created order and the verses of revelation, this verse can be understood as a reference to those who mock the signs in creation by failing to acknowledge their Divine Origin and their disclosure of God’s Reality, failing to be grateful for them, and those who mock the revealed signs by denying revelation. That they come to know some of the signs of God refers to memorizing something of the Quran (IK) or to obtaining a surface knowledge of the Quran or the created world without being able to connect the signs in either of them to their Source. Arrogance toward God’s signs implies a personal refusal to believe in them, but mocking them can be seen as a more severe manifestation of disbelief, since it implies actively repudiating God’s signs in the presence of other people.

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10 Beyond them lies Hell. That which they have earned will avail them naught, nor that which they have taken apart from God as protectors; and theirs shall be a great punishment.

10 Beyond them translates min warāʾihim, which can refer to something that lies in front of or behind them (Aj, Q, R, Z). In this sense it can mean that Hell lies before the disbelievers because they are headed toward it, or that it lies behind them because they have turned away from it and ignore its reality (Aj). In either interpretation, that which they have earned, meaning wealth and children (Aj, IK, Q, T), cannot help them avoid God’s Punishment, as in 3:10: As for those who disbelieve, neither their wealth nor their children will avail them aught against God. And it is they who shall be fuel for the Fire (cf. 3:116; 58:17). Protectors is understood by most to be a reference to the idols and gods that the idolaters worshipped, but who cannot protect them from the great punishment, since, as they are warned in 21:98: You and that which you worship apart from God shall be fuel for Hell. Unto it you shall come. The term protectors can also be understood as a broader reference to everything upon which they rely that is other than God; see 18:102c.

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This is guidance; and those who disbelieve in the signs of their Lord, theirs shall be a painful punishment of torment.

11 This Quran (IK, Q, Ṭ, Z), or everything with which the Prophet came (Q), represents complete and perfect guidance (Aj, Z). Although most understand signs of their Lord as a direct reference to the verses of the Quran (Ṭ, Z), in the context of this surah it can also be understood as a reference to God’s signs in the created order. Regarding a painful punishment of torment, see 34:5c.

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God it is Who made the sea subservient unto you, that the ships may sail upon it by His Command, that you may seek His Bounty, and that haply you may give thanks.

12 This is one of several verses to refer to seafaring as a blessing from God; see also 2:164; 14:32; 17:66; 22:65; 30:46; 31:31; 35:12; 40:80; 42:32–34c. Seek His Bounty refers to the advantages of travel by sea and to the food and precious jewels that can be obtained from the sea (Z).

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He made subservient unto you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth—all together. Truly in that are signs for a people who reflect.

13 God has made all things subservient to humanity (cf. 14:33; 22:65; 31:20) insofar as He has made human beings His vicegerents upon the earth (6:165; 35:39; cf. 2:30); see also 43:12–13c. From a spiritual perspective, when one’s heart finds tranquility in God, its Master, one becomes a true servant and everything is made subservient to Him (ST). Seen in this light, this verse serves as an admonition to human beings not to become preoccupied or engrossed with the things of this world to the extent that they forget God, since they would then serve what was created to serve them rather than serving their true Master. In this vein, a well-known saying sometimes said to be a ḥadīth qudsī states, “God says, ‘O Son of Adam! I created the things [of this world] for you. And I created you for Me. Sc
let not that which I created for you distract you from that for which I created you,”
meaning do not let serving creation distract you from serving the Creator (Aj).
Regarding the reference to aspects of creation as signs for a people who reflect,
see 13:3; 30:21; 39:42; elsewhere God is said to expound the signs for a people
who reflect (10:24).

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14 Tell those who believe to forgive those who hope not for the days of God, that He may requite a people for that which they used to earn.

14 Those who hope not for the days of God refers to the disbelievers and hypocrites who neither hope for the reward of the Hereafter nor fear God’s Punishment (Q, R). According to some commentators, those who hope not for the days of God was revealed on an expedition to the Arab tribe of Banu’l-Muṣṭaliq. The Muslims stopped by a well and ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy, the leader of the hypocrites, sent his slave to get some water. When he came back, he asked him, “What has delayed you?” His slave replied, “The slave of ʿUmar stood at the opening of the well and did not let anyone draw water until he filled up the water skins of the Prophet, Abū Bakr, and his own master.” ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy exclaimed, “Our example and the example of these people is as the saying goes: fatten your dog, and he will eat you.” By this statement, he was implying that the Prophet, who had come to Madinah as a powerless guest, was cared for by the Madinan population, and had now turned against them to bring them harm; see 9:74c. When ʿUmar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb heard this, he seized his sword, intending to kill ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy, but then God revealed this verse (IJ, Q, R, W). This verse may, however, have already been revealed when this incident occurred, and the Prophet simply recited it to ʿUmar at this time to calm him and maintain the peace.

According to another account, when the verse Who is it that will lend unto God a goodly loan? (57:11; cf. 2:245) was revealed, a Jewish man in Madinah by the name of Finhas said, “Muhammad’s Lord is in need!” When ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb heard this utterance, he grabbed his sword and went looking for him. So Gabriel went to the Messenger of God and said to him, “Your Lord says to you, ‘Tell those who believe to forgive those who hope not for the days of God.’” The Prophet replied, “No doubt. By Him Who has sent thee with the truth, anger will not show upon my face!” (Q, W). Some maintain that this verse was abrogated, but al-Qurṭubī notes that, if the verse is from the Madinan period, such abrogation is unlikely.

The command to forgive and be gentle with disbelievers and hypocrites can be

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understood as following from the allusion to the *signs in your creation* (v. 4), since if one reflects upon the signs of God, one will recognize the honor due to all human beings. As al-Rāzī observes, discussions of the nature of the created order in the Quran are often followed by discussions of virtuous conduct. In this sense, the admonition to *forgive those who hope not for the days of God* can be understood to mean that when one acts in accord with the nature of things, one will forgive others, remembering that one’s own faith and understanding are blessings from God, as in 7:43, where the believers are reported to say, *Praise be to God, Who guided us unto this. We would not have been rightly guided, had God not guided us.* In the context of the previous verses, to forgive others is also part of recognizing that the subservience of creation to human beings and the position of being God’s vicegerent is a blessing from God, as when the believers are enjoined to say, *Glory be to God, Who made this subservient unto us, though we were not equal to it. Truly unto our Lord do we turn* (43:13–14).

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15 Whosoever works righteousness, it is for his own soul. And whosoever commits evil, it is to the detriment thereof. Then unto your Lord shall you be returned.

15 For the first two sentences, see 41:46c. In relation to v. 14, the reminder that ultimately everyone will bear the consequences of his or her own actions serves to explain why it is best for the believers to forgive the disbelievers.

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16 And indeed We gave the Children of Israel the Book, judgment, and prophethood, and We provided them with good things, and We favored them above the worlds.

16 Here *the Book* refers to the Torah, while *judgment* refers to the Israelites’ understanding of the Torah (Q), thus to knowledge and wisdom (R). *Good things* refers to the blessings given to the Israelites in this world, such as the wealth of the Egyptians, which they inherited (see 7:137c; 26:59c; 28:5; 44:28), and the manna and quails through which they were sustained in the desert (see 2:57; 7:160; 20:80; R). They are mentioned after *the Book, judgment, and prophethood* to illustrate the superiority of spiritual benefits over those that pertain only to this world (R).
God favored the Israelites above the worlds (cf. 2:47, 122; 7:140) refers to the blessings mentioned above and is understood as a reference to their being chosen above the other people of their own time (IK, Q, T); see also 5:20c.

And We gave them clear proofs from the Command. And they differed not till after knowledge had come unto them, out of envy among themselves. Thy Lord will surely judge between them on the Day of Resurrection regarding that wherein they used to differ.

Clear proofs from the Command refers generally to unequivocal proofs (IK) and more specifically to clear delineations between what is forbidden and what is permissible (Q) or to the miracles that God gave to Moses as proof of his prophethood (R). Viewed in light of the preceding verse, this phrase most likely refers to Moses and the Children of Israel. But when viewed in light of the subsequent verse, some understand clear proofs to mean the indications that God gave the Prophet Muhammad that he would migrate to Madinah and that he would receive help from its people (Q, R). According to this interpretation, that they differed not till after knowledge had come unto them (cf. 10:93) refers to the Jews of Madinah who rejected Muhammad’s prophethood, and out of envy among themselves refers to their being jealous of the Prophet (Q). Their differing after being given knowledge is also interpreted as a more general reference to the manner in which religious communities fracture out of envy among themselves (Q); see 2:213; 3:19, 105; 10:93; 23:53; 42:14; 43:63–65; 98:4c. In such instances, it is not knowledge itself that leads them to differ, but the manner in which some seek leadership and advancement through such knowledge and thus to the envy that arises from it (R). Regarding the nature of envy, see 113:5c. Regarding the manner in which religious difference leads to envy, see commentary on 23:53, which speaks of different religious factions, each party exulting in what it had. For God judging between them regarding that wherein they used to differ, see 2:113; 10:93; 16:124c; 32:25; 39:3.

Then We placed thee upon a clear path from the Command; so follow it, and follow not the caprices of
those who know not.

18 After giving the Israelites gifts (v. 16), God placed the Prophet Muhammad upon a clear path like those upon which He had placed the messengers before him (T). In this context, clear path translates sharīʿah, which later became the technical term for Islamic Law, though it occurs only this one time in the Quran. Linguistically, sharīʿah means a straight, smooth path that leads to water, which in the deserts of Arabia would also have meant a path to salvation from death. In this context it thus appears to indicate a clear path by which God leads people to the truth (Q). The manner in which sharīʿah is juxtaposed to caprices (ahwāʾ; sing. hawāʾ) indicates the moral and spiritual implications associated with the term. This is one of several verses to enjoin the Prophet not to acquiesce to the caprices of the People of the Book (see 2:120, 145; 5:48–49; 13:37; 42:15), while elsewhere he is told not to follow the caprices of the disbelievers (cf. 6:56, 150). Regarding the nature of caprice, see 45:23c. According to some commentators, this verse was revealed after some of the leaders of the Quraysh called upon the Prophet to return to the religion of his forefathers, maintaining that the forefathers were preferable to him (R).

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19 Truly they will avail you naught against God. And surely the wrongdoers are the protectors of one another, while God is the Protector of the reverent.

19 Following upon v. 18, this verse enjoins the Muslims to make no pacts that would compromise the integrity of the Quranic message, as in 68:8–9: Obey not the deniers. They wish that thou wouldst compromise, so that they would compromise. Abandoning the potential benefits of protection from other tribes constituted a great risk for the small Muslim community. Nonetheless, 5:51 maintains that whosoever takes them as protectors, surely he is of them. The Muslims are thus enjoined to take one another as protectors, as in 9:71: But the believing men and believing women are protectors of one another, enjoining right and forbidding wrong, performing the prayer, giving the alms, and obeying God and His Messenger. They are those upon whom God will have mercy. See commentary on 8:72–73.

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These are insights for mankind, and guidance and mercy for a people who are certain.

20 The beginning of this verse is literally, “This is insights,” meaning that the Quran is a means by which people gain insight into the truth, are able to distinguish truth from falsehood, and know the path to right guidance (Ṭ), because the Quran provides evidence that suffices for the insight of the heart (R); see commentary on 7:203, where the Prophet is told to say, I only follow that which is revealed unto me from my Lord. These are insights from your Lord, and a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe. According to some, these are insights means “these are signs” (Q, Z). A people who are certain refers to those who are certain that the message of the Quran is true (Ṭ) or more broadly to those who have belief and certitude in the Unseen (Aj).

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Or do those who commit evil deeds suppose that We shall treat them like those who believe and perform righteous deeds equally in their life and in their death? Evil indeed is the judgment they make!

21 This verse presents a rebuke posed as a question to the disbelievers. As with most such rhetorical questions in the Quran, it is answered elsewhere, since the Quran maintains throughout that the good and the wicked are not equal (5:100); see 32:18–19c. Here equally renders sawāʾun, understood as an adverb modifying the verb “treat.” In other canonical readings, the term is read sawāʾun (Q, R, T), in which case the last phrase would be rendered, “equal their life and their death” or “their life and their death being equal” (Q, Z), meaning, “Are the life and death of those who commit evil deeds equal with, or on the same footing as, the life and death of those who believe and perform righteous deeds?” (Q). In this sense, the verse alludes to the difference between their states in the Hereafter (Z). It could also be understood to mean that the believer and the disbeliever will not be on equal footing in the Hereafter as they appeared to be in this world, since the true difference between them will become manifest in the Hereafter (R).

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God created the heavens and the earth in truth, and so
that every soul may be recompensed for that which it has earned; and they shall not be wronged.

22 That God created the heavens and the earth in truth (cf. 6:73; 16:3; 29:44; 39:5; 64:3) is reiterated in various ways in the Quran (see 10:5; 14:19; 15:85; 30:8; 46:3); see 29:44c; 44:38–39c. In relation to the previous verse, it indicates why the life and death of the believers and those of the disbelievers are not equal. Since all things are balanced in truth, every soul will be recompensed in accord with the good or evil it has done (Q, Ṭs; cf. 3:161; 40:17; 74:38) and shall not be wronged (cf. 2:181; 3:25, 161; 16:111; 39:69; 46:19); see 36:54c.

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23 Hast thou considered one who takes his caprice as his god, God having led him astray knowingly, and sealed his hearing and his heart and placed a cover upon his sight? Who, then, will guide him after God? Will you not, then, remember?

23 The caprice that people are said to take as their god is defined as the inclination of the soul to passion and lust (shahwah). The verb from which caprice derives, hawā/yahwī, means both “to blow” and “to fall or tumble,” and when combined with the preposition bi means “to overthrow.” Caprice can thus be said to be something that blows the soul one way and another and overthrows the soul through the calamities of this world, making it tumble into an abyss (al-hāwiyah, from the same root, h-w-y; 101:9) in the Hereafter (Iṣ). The word hawāʾ, meaning vacant, from the same root, is also used to describe the vacuity of the hearts of disbelievers on the Day of Judgment (see 14:43). In this vein, the Prophet is reported to have said, “The intelligent person is one who takes his soul to account and works for that which follows death. The inept person is one who allows his soul to follow his caprice, yet hopes for God” (Aj). References to God’s misleading or causing to go astray (cf. 13:27; 14:4, 27; 16:93; 22:4; 35:8; 40:34, 74:31) can be understood in light of 2:26, And He misleads none but the iniquitous, to mean that going astray is a result of one’s own iniquities and not the outcome of arbitrary predestination. Those who are led astray are thus those whose hearts, according to several verses, are “veiled,” “covered,” or “sealed” so as to prevent spiritual comprehension (see 2:7c; 6:25, 46; 7:100–101; 9:87, 93; 10:74; 16:108; 17:46; 18:57, 101; 30:59; 47:16c; 63:3; 83:14–15).
Regarding the question, *Who, then, will guide him after God?* see commentary on 7:186: *Whomsoever God leads astray, no guide has he. And He leaves them to wander confused in their rebellion.* The rhetorical question *Will you not, then, remember?* is one of the Quran’s many invitations to reflect upon its parables and proofs or God’s signs in order to facilitate spiritual understanding (see, e.g., 11:24, 30; 16:17; 30:8; 37:155; 56:62; 3:191c).

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They say, “There is naught but our life in this world. We die and we live, and none destroys us save time.” But they have no knowledge thereof. They do naught but conjecture.

24 Cf. 23:37. *There is naught but our life in this world* refers to the disbelievers’ rejection of Resurrection. *We die and we live* refers to the idea that there is only one life and one death with no afterlife; or it means, “Some of us die and some of us live,” or “We die and our children live” (Q, R). In pre-Islamic Arabia when hardship befell someone, it was common to say, “Curse the passage of time (*al-dahr*)” (IK). The Prophet enjoined his followers not to do so, saying “God says, ‘The son of Adam vexes Me when he curses time, for I am Time (*Dahr*). In My Hands lies the affair, and it is I Who alternate the day and the night’” (IK, Q). This is understood to mean that the alternation of life followed by eventual death, which were attributed to the mere passage of time, are in fact caused by God (Q, R), so when one curses time for one’s sufferings, one is in fact cursing God, since He is the Agent behind all that transpires (Q).

The disbelievers’ failure to understand the manner in which the passage of time attests to the Omnipotence of God and the meeting with Him is yet another consequence of failing to reflect upon the signs of God. Thus *they have no knowledge thereof* (cf. 43:20). That *they do naught but conjecture* then means that what they do say regarding what follows the life of this world has no foundation, as in 53:28: *Yet they have no knowledge thereof. They follow naught but conjecture; and surely conjecture avails naught against the Truth;* see also 49:12c.

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25 And when Our signs are recited unto them as clear proofs, their argument is naught but to say, “Bring us our
fathers, if you are truthful.”

25 Our signs here are signs regarding the Resurrection and the recompense that awaits the disbelievers (Q, T). Since many verses of the Quran attest to the Resurrection and the signs of the created order are often cited as signs of God’s ability to resurrect, this verse can be read as a reference to both revelation and creation. That they can only respond by saying, Bring us our fathers, if you are truthful (cf. 44:36) illustrates their misunderstanding of Resurrection, since they seek to define it in terms of this world, and supports the contention that they do naught but conjecture (v. 24).

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26 Say, “God gives you life; then causes you to die; then He gathers you together on the Day of Resurrection in which there is no doubt. But most of mankind know not.”

That God gives life and causes death (cf. 2:258; 3:156; 7:158; 9:116; 10:56; 22:6; 23:80; 40:68; 44:8; 53:44; 57:2; 67:2) serves as an answer to the contention that it is only time that destroys (v. 24; Aj), since such claims serve to deny both God and the Resurrection (R). It also answers the disbelievers’ challenge to bring forth their fathers (v. 25) by stating that only God has power over their coming and going (Q). Most of mankind, meaning humanity in general or the disbelievers in particular, know not (cf. 7:187; 16:75, 101; 21:24; 27:61; 30:30; 31:25; 34:36; 39:29; 40:57) about God’s ability to resurrect and the wisdom in delaying resurrection, due to their opposition to reflection (Aj).

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27 Unto God belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth. And the Day when the Hour is come—on that Day those who make false claims will have lost,

Unto God belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth (3:189; 5:17, 18; 24:42; 48:14) indicates that He created and rules over all things (Q). Those who make false claims (al-mubīlūn) comes from the verb abṣala/yubṭilu, “to make a false [or vain] claim,” “to try to disprove the truth of something,” “to try to reduce something to nothing,” or “to prove something to be null and void,
and thou wilt see every community upon its knees. Every community is called to its book: “Today you will be recompensed for that which you used to do.

This Our Book speaks against you with truth. Truly We were recording all that you used to do.”

On the Day of Judgment, each religious community will be gathered in ranks (see 18:48c) with its members upon their knees for the Reckoning before God (T) due to the shame of that day (Q, T). Some say that this fate is particular to the disbelievers (Q); others say it applies to believers and disbelievers alike when they are awaiting the Reckoning before God (Q). According to another canonical reading, this verse could be rendered, “Thou wilt see every community upon its knees, every community called to its book” (Q). In either reading, book is used in the singular to indicate the individual books in which each person’s deeds are recorded by the angels upon God’s Command (see 86:4; commentary on 43:80; 82:10–12; Aj, Q, R, Z) or the Preserved Tablet (85:22; Q), upon which all of God’s Commands and Decrees are said to have been written.

The address is spoken by the angels who were tasked with recording the deeds of human beings (R, Z) or by God (Q). That the book speaks against human beings means that it testifies to their deeds (Q, R). When the book speaks or testifies, thou wilt see the guilty fearful of what is in it. And they will say, “Oh, woe unto us! What a book this is! It leaves out nothing, small or great, save that it has taken account thereof.” And they find present [therein] whatsoever they did (18:49). In relation to a famous saying of the Prophet, “The Quran is a proof, either for you or against you,” this verse could also be understood as a reference to the Quran.
is the manifest triumph.

30 Here God’s Mercy is understood as a reference to the Garden (Q, Z), the attainment of which is also referred to as the manifest triumph in over a dozen verses; for the blessings of Paradise, see commentary on 5:119; 44:51–57.

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31 And as for those who disbelieve, were not My signs recited unto you? But you waxed arrogant and were a guilty people.

31 Were not My signs recited unto you is a rebuke that pertains to witnessing the signs both in the created order (see commentary on 45:3–6) and in revelation. With regard to the latter, it recalls 39:71, where the keepers of Hell say to the disbelievers, Did not messengers from among you come to you, reciting unto you the signs of your Lord and warning you of the meeting with this your Day? (cf. 40:50).

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32 When it was said, “Surely God’s Promise is true, and there is no doubt in the Hour,” you said, “We do not know what the Hour is. We do naught but conjecture, and we are not certain.”

32 That God’s Promise is true (cf. 4:122; 10:4, 55; 18:21; 28:13; 31:33; 35:5; 40:55, 77; 46:17) pertains to the end of time, here referred to as the Hour; to the return to God, and to the Promise of both Heaven and Hell, all of which the disbelievers deny. The reply of the disbelievers, We do not know what the Hour is, is understood to mean, “We do not know if it is true or not” (Q), or simply, “We do not know if it is coming” (T), implying that they see no need to prepare for it. Regarding the nature of conjecture, see 49:12c; 53:28c.

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33 The evils of that which they had done will become
manifest unto them, and that which they used to mock will beset them.

33 And that which they used to mock will beset them, or “close in upon them” (cf. 6:10; 11:8; 16:34; 21:41; 39:48; 40:83; 46:26) indicates that the punishment the disbelievers receive is a direct result of their own iniquity, since God does not wrong human beings in the least, but rather human beings wrong themselves (10:44).

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34 And it will be said, “Today We forget you just as you forgot the meeting with this your Day; your refuge is the Fire and you have no helpers.

34 This is one of several verses that speak of the disbelievers being forgotten (see 7:51; 9:67; 20:126; 32:14; 59:19), which is understood to mean that they have been abandoned by God (Q). That they forgot the meeting with God means both that they did not think of it and that they did not prepare for it (Q). For the consequence of forgetting God and the meeting with Him, see commentary on 7:51 and 59:19: And be not like those who forget God, such that He makes them forget their souls.

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35 That is because you took the signs of God in mockery and the life of this world has deluded you.” So today they will not be removed from it; nor can they make amends.

35 When the signs of revelation and the signs in creation are not understood, the life of this world is naught but the enjoyment of delusion (3:185; 57:20; cf. 6:70, 130; 31:33; 35:5), yet the enjoyment of the life of this world, compared with the Hereafter, is but a little (9:38; cf. 4:77; 13:26; 40:39). As the disbelievers had ample opportunity to remember God in this world, once they have been shown the truth of the signs that they used to mock and the reality of their evil deeds in the Hereafter, they will no longer have any opportunity to make amends, since their conduct has demonstrated that even if they were sent back, they would return to
the very thing they had been forbidden (6:28); see 6:27–28c; 23:100; 32:12c; 35:37.

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36 Unto God be praise, Lord of the heavens and Lord of the earth, Lord of the worlds.

37 His is the Grandeur in the heavens and the earth, and He is the Mighty, the Wise.

According to another canonical reading, v. 36 could be rendered, “Unto God be praise. He is the Lord of the heavens . . .” (Q). In either reading, unto God be praise is understood as an injunction to praise God (Aj), while His is the Grandeur or “unto Him is the Grandeur” is an injunction to magnify God, since the effects of His Grandeur and Greatness are manifest in all things (Aj). In this sense the mention of God’s Grandeur harkens back to the call to reflect upon God’s signs in the heavens and the earth in vv. 3–6.

While the reference to God as the Mighty, the Wise in v. 2 refers to God’s Reality in relation to revelation, here it refers to God’s Reality in relation to creation, thus alluding to the manner in which both kinds of signs are said to come from Him in truth, or “for the truth” (for verses regarding revelation in truth, see 2:176, 213, 252; 3:3, 108; 4:105; 5:48; 6:114; 17:105; for those regarding creation in truth, see 6:73; 10:5; 14:19; 15:85; 16:3; 29:44c; 30:8; 39:5; 44:38–39c, 45:22; 46:3; 64:3). The bracketing of this sūrah with these two references thus highlights the discussion of God’s signs in revelation and creation that runs throughout this sūrah.