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YOUR
JOURN

THE STUDY QURAN

A New Translation and Commentary

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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The Cow

al-Baqarah

Al-Baqarah is from the Madinan period. It is named *al-Baqarah*, or "The Cow," because of the cow mentioned in v. 67. It is the longest *sūrah* of the Quran, comprising one-twelfth of the entire text. In most illuminated manuscripts and printed editions of the Quran, the first seven verses of *al-Baqarah* appear on an illuminated page opposite another illuminated page containing the seven verses of the *Fātiḥah*, or "Opening," the first chapter of the Quran. These two pages together form for most readers the first visual experience of the Quran as a physical book.

Few subjects discussed in the Quran do not find some mention in *al-Baqarah*; topics include matters of theology, law, sacred history, metaphysics, cosmology, and the spiritual life. The *sūrah* opens with a general description of belief in the seen and Unseen, the multiplicity of prophets, and the imperative to give from what we possess, whether spiritual or material. After a section addressing the hypocrisy of the protestations and claims of those who disbelieve in God, the *sūrah* turns to an account of the creation of Adam and the fall from the Garden, including the status of the angels in relation to human beings and the role of Satan in Adam's fall.

The history of the Children of Israel figures prominently in this *sūrah*. Stressed are the blessings of God upon the Israelites throughout their history, beginning with one of the several accounts provided by the Quran describing the encounter between Moses and Pharaoh as well as the events at Mt. Sinai and the parable of the sacrificial cow (*baqarah*), to which the *sūrah* owes its name. This history is interwoven with theological questions debated between Jews and Muslims, such as the duration of one's stay in Hell, the status of the Archangel Gabriel, and other accusations and challenges exchanged between the two communities.

Al-Baqarah is one of the most important *sūrahs* as far as the question of the status of other religions is concerned, addressing this matter from a theological and legal perspective and also as a question of sacred history. Abraham is discussed as

a prophet who predated Judaism and Christianity, who established the Ka'bah as a temple of worship, and who was a *ḥanīf*, or primordial monotheist.

Important rituals and acts of worship are legislated in this *sūrah*, including the pilgrimage, the required fast during the month of Ramādan, and other matters such as the direction (*qiblah*) one should face while reciting the canonical prayers. Other legal matters discussed are economic contracts, usury, marriage and divorce, the status of orphans, the causes and conduct of war, inheritance, alcohol consumption and gambling, and punishment for capital crimes. Some of the Quran's most famous and most recited verses are found in this *sūrah*, including v. 255, called the Pedestal Verse (*Āyat al-Kursī*), and the final two verses, which are important in Muslim devotional life.

Concerning this *sūrah* the Prophet is reported to have said, "Everything has a zenith, and the zenith of the Quran is *Sūrat al-Baqarah*, and it has a verse which is the lord of the verses of the Quran, the Pedestal Verse [v. 255]; "Truly Satan leaves a house when he hears *Sūrat al-Baqarah* recited in it," and "Learn *al-Baqarah*. Holding to it is a blessing, leaving it is an affliction, and falsehood has no power over it."

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

① *Alif. Lam. Mim.* ② This is the Book in which there is no doubt, a guidance for the reverent, ③ who believe in the Unseen and perform the prayer and spend from that which We have provided them, ④ and who believe in what

① Of the 114 *sūrahs* of the Quran, 29 begin with individual letters of the Arabic alphabet. In this translation these letters are transliterated as recited (e.g., *alif* is the name of the first letter of the Arabic alphabet), although in other translations the corresponding Latin letters are used (e.g., A, L, M, which correspond phonetically to *alif*, *lām*, *mīm*). In recitation the names of the letters are used, not their sounds. Also, some letter names have two forms, e.g., *rā* and *rāʾ*. The Quran uses the former; the commentary, the latter.

The individual letters are one of the most enigmatic features of the Quran and have been a subject of debate and speculation among Muslims since the revelation of the Quran. It is reported by many Quran commentators that Abū Bakr, the first Caliph, said, "Every book has a mystery (*sirr*), and the mystery of the Quran is the beginnings of the *sūrahs*." ② Alī, the fourth Caliph, is reported to

have said, "Every book has a quintessence (*ṣafwāh*), and the quintessence of this Book is the spelled-out letters." Al-Rāzī discusses the metaphor of a great sea, which leads to a river, which leads to streams, which lead to rivulets; if the rivulet was made to carry all the water of the stream or the riverbed the entire contents of the sea, it would be overwhelmed and destroyed. He mentions the verse: *He sends down water from the sky, so that the riverbeds flow according to their measure* (13:17). He further reports the saying: "The learned have a secret; the vicegerents (*khulafāʾ*) have a secret; the prophets have a secret; the angels have a secret; and beyond all of that God has a secret. If the ignorant came to know the secret of the learned, they would destroy them. If the learned came to know the secret of the vicegerents, they would break away from them. If the vicegerents came to know the secret of the prophets, they would

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

① O mankind! Reverence your Lord, Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate, and from the two has spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Reverence God, through Whom you demand your rights of one another, and family relations. Truly God is a Watcher over you. ② Give orphans their property, and exchange not the bad for the good, nor consume their

The fifth Shi'ite Imam, Muhammad al-Bāqir (d. ca. 114/732), reportedly said that Eve was created from the same superior clay as Adam (Ts). The statement regarding humanity's common origin from a single soul and its mate could also be meant to engender brotherly and sisterly love between all human beings and to discourage boasting about one's ancestral legacy, as all human beings are ultimately of common parentage (IK, R, T, Ts).
Reverence God, through Whom you demand your rights of one another, and family relations may be related to the pre-Islamic Arab practice of swearing upon God and family relations. However, most favor the view that this passage instructs men to reverence God through obedience to His commands and to reverence family relations by maintaining good relations with family members. Family relations translates *arḥām*; the singular is *rahim*, the primary meaning of which is "womb," derived from the same root as *rahmah*, meaning "mercy," and the Divine Name *al-Rahmān*, "the Compassionate." A *ḥadīth* states, "The Compassionate (Al-Rahmān) created the womb (al-rahim), and whoever maintains ties to it, God will maintain ties to him, and whoever cuts himself off from it, God cuts himself off from him." Elsewhere, the imperative to worship God is paired with commands to be good to family (4:36; 17:23; 47:22; R). The first part of this verse indicates the kinship of all human beings; as they are created from the same soul and mate, while the latter part commands reverence for one's relatives. Taken together, they suggest a Divine imperative to recognize one's responsibility to all human beings as one's "brothers and sisters." In the Qur'an and Islamic Law, orphans (*yatāmā*; sing. *yatīm*) refers to children who

سورة النساء

Women

al-Nisā'

Al-Nisā' was revealed in Madinah around the fourth year of the *hijrah* and after the crucial Battle of Uhud, which took place outside of Madinah between the Muslims and the still idolatrous Quraysh of Makkah. It takes its name from the fact that much of the *sūrah* deals with women and their rights along with various conditions of marriage, marital relations, and laws of inheritance. Most of the first part (vv. 1-36, 127-30, 176) is legislative in nature, as is the section dealing with war and peace and how Muslims should act in these situations. Altogether this *sūrah* is among the most important and fundamental for Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). The *sūrah* also deals with the status of the "hypocrites" (*munāfiqūn*) and those Jews who turned against the Islamic community in Madinah after the Battle of Uhud (3/625), in which the Muslims suffered defeat at the hands of the Quraysh. Moreover, there are many verses in this *sūrah* dealing with those Jews who denied both Christianity and Islam and the Christians who divinized Jesus (vv. 44-55, 153-73). The most sensitive verses from the point of view of relations between Christianity and Islam concern the Islamic view of the end of the earthly life of Jesus and the question of his crucifixion (vv. 157-59).

After a long discussion on such general religious issues, the *sūrah* ends with a verse again related to legislative matters. It seems that the Qur'an wants to emphasize at the termination of this long *sūrah* the inseparable relation between Islamic religious beliefs and the social behavior of Muslims based on revealed Law.

decreed, and surrender with full submission. 66 And had We prescribed for them, "Lay down your lives" or "Leave your homes," they would not have done so, save a few. And had they done what they were exhorted to do, it would have been better for them, and a stronger confirmation. 67 Then We would surely have granted them, from Our Presence, a great reward; 68 and We would surely have guided them unto a straight path. 69 Whosoever obeys God and the Messenger, they are with those whom God has blessed, the prophets, the truthful ones, the witnesses, and the righteous. What beautiful companions they are! 70 Such is the Bounty from God, and God suffices as

the one who guides. (T). One report connects this verse to the case of a dispute brought to the Prophet for judgment by the Prophet's early Companion and cousin al-Zubayr ibn al-ʿAwāmm (d. 36/656) and one of his neighbors concerning the use of a water channel. The neighbor was unhappy with the Prophet's ruling and suggested that he had favored al-Zubayr, because al-Zubayr was his cousin. This verse was revealed, chastising his critical attitude toward the Prophet's judgment (T; W). However, it seems more likely that the verse continues the discussion of the incident addressed in vv. 60–64, although it may also have been invoked in relation to the incident with al-Zubayr. (T). 66–68: *Lay down your lives* translates *uqultu anfusakum*, which could also be rendered "slay yourselves" or, metaphorically, "mortify yourselves" (in the sense of killing your vain desires), as it is in 2:54, which refers to God's command through Moses to the Israelites after the golden calf incident. Some see the present verse as addressing the Jews and as referencing the command in 2:54 as a way of suggesting that few of those in the Prophet's time would have fulfilled such a command (T). The verse suggests that they would also have been unwilling to follow a Divine command to *leave your homes*, a command that tested many earlier prophets and prophetic communities, as well as Muhammad's. It was, in part, the willingness of the Prophet's Makkan followers to leave their homes and families and migrate to Madinah that earned them the high religious status of "Emigrants" that they were afforded in the first Muslim community. And

in the Madinan period, prior to the conquest of Makkah, leaving one's home and family and migrating, or making *hijrah*, to Madinah was a requirement of full membership in the Muslim community (8:72). Some see the present verse as continuing to address specifically the two men who sought judgment from someone other than the Prophet referenced in vv. 60–65 (T), although it may speak in general to all those whose claims of belief were questionable, whether they were certain Jews, Madinan hypocrites, or others. Had they done as they were told (which, in context, likely means to consult God and the Prophet in their affairs; see v. 59), it would have been better for them, in this world and the next, and would have been a stronger confirmation of their faith. It would have better convinced others of their sincerity and given them greater resolution in their own beliefs and actions, since the resolution of the hypocrite is always weak (T). The great reward from Our Presence (*min ladunnā*), also mentioned in v. 40, has been understood as a spiritual reward received from God's very Presence that surpasses any physical reward or delight one can experience. It is sometimes associated with the vision of God or with being completely overwhelmed by love and knowledge of Him (R on 4:40). For *straight path*, see 1:6c. 69–70: Cf. 4:59, and commentary. Those who are obedient are among those whom God has blessed, that is, those who have been granted guidance and success in this life and Paradise in the next (T). Moreover, the verse indicates that they

Knower. 71 O you who believe! Take your precautions; then go forth in companies or go forth all together. 72 Among you indeed is one who would tarry; then, if misfortune should befall you, he would say, "God has blessed me, in that I did not accompany them." 73 But should a bounty come to you from God, he would surely say—as if there had been no affection between you and him—"Oh, would

shall have the company of the most excellent in Paradise, including the prophets. This verse was reportedly revealed when some of the Prophet's Companions expressed dismay at the thought that those who so enjoyed the Prophet's company on earth would be denied it in the Hereafter since, as a prophet, Muhammad would be exalted far above them. This verse made clear that the obedient shall have the company of their prophet after death (JJ, Ts, W, Z). According to several *ahādith*, the Prophet assured his followers that if they love God, the Prophet, and the righteous, although they may have fallen short in their own works, they shall be with those whom they love in the next life. The *truthful ones* (*ṣiddiqin*), which might also be translated "the sincere," are those who believe in and follow the prophets in complete sincerity (T) or the most morally excellent among their companions (JJ, Z); in later usage, *ṣiddiq* came to denote something that approximates "saint." The Prophet's close Companion and the first Caliph, Abū Bakr, was given the epithet *al-Ṣiddiq* (the Truthful One), in part because he affirmed the truthfulness of the Prophet's account of his miraculous Night Journey when many others doubted it, just as he believed in the first revelation. The *witnesses* (*shuhadāʾ*) could also be rendered "martyrs" and is sometimes glossed as meaning those who die in the way of God (T). However, limiting *witnesses* to those killed for the sake of religion does not seem consistent with the wider Qurānic usage, as the term is also mentioned in the context of bearing witness to Divine covenants as well as testifying to the truth in a legal, religious, or spiritual matter. Al-Rāzi argues that the word refers to all who bear witness to the truth of religion, whether they do so by proof and argument or with sword and shield (R). The *righteous* (*ṣālihin*) refers to those who do what is right both publicly and in secret (T). This

passage echoes 57:19, where those who obey God and the Messenger are themselves described as the *truthful* (*ṣiddiqūn*) and *witnesses* (*shuhadāʾ*), whereas in the present verse it is said that those who are obedient shall be with the *truthful* and the *witnesses*. According to a Shiite report, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq considered the *truthful ones* and the *witnesses* as references to the Imams, and the *righteous* as a reference to their followers (Ts). Al-Rāzi sees vv. 68–69 as forming a commentary on 1:6–7, in which the believers pray to be guided upon the *straight path* and placed among those whom *Thou hast blessed*; the answer to this prayer is that those who obey God and the Prophet shall be granted both (R). 71: *Take your precautions* instructs the Muslims to take up arms or otherwise prepare themselves against their enemies. The commentators are clear that preparing oneself in this way does not signify a lack of trust in God, and in connection with this verse they frequently cite a *ḥadith* in which the Prophet instructed a man, "Tether [your camel], then place your trust in God" (Aj Q; R). For al-Qushayrī, taking such precaution means fleeing from all that is other than God. To *go forth in companies* means to go out to the enemy as separate military units or raiding parties whereas *go forth all together* refers to the Muslim going to battle as a single army, under the leadership of the Prophet (T). 72–73: Among those who *would tarry* is said to be the Madinan hypocrite ʿAbdullāh ibn Ubayy, who held back from joining the Prophet's army at the Battle of Uhūd (3/625). He and other Madinan hypocrites lagged behind, so that they would not arrive in time to join the Prophet's army in battle. If misfortune should befall the Prophet's army, they would consider it providential that they were not with them (JJ). But should a bounty come from God—that is, should the Prophet's army win the battle—they would lament that

that I had been with them, so that I had attained a great triumph!" (74) Let them fight in the way of God, those who would sell the life of this world for the Hereafter. And whosoever fights in the way of God—whether he is slain or victorious—We shall grant him a great reward. (75) And what ails you that you fight not in the way of God, and for the weak and oppressed—men, women, and children—who cry out, "Our Lord! Bring us forth from this town whose people are oppressors, and appoint for us from Thee a protector, and appoint for

us a helper." (76) Those who believe fight in the way of God, and those who disbelieve fight in the way of false deities. Fight, therefore, against the allies of Satan. Surely the scheme of Satan is ever feeble. (77) Hast thou not seen those unto whom it was said, "Restrain your hands, and perform the prayer, and give the alms." But when fighting was prescribed for them, behold, a party of them feared men, even as they should have feared God, or with greater fear, and they said, "Our Lord! Why hast Thou prescribed fighting for us? If only Thou wouldst grant us reprieve for a term nigh." Say, "Scant is the enjoyment of this world, and the Hereafter is better for those who are reverent, and you shall not

they could not share in the honor and the spoils of the victory. Al-Rāzī notes that some commentators gloss *one who would tarry* (*yubattī'anna*) as: "one who would weigh down [the Muslim army] with hesitation and delay" and connect it with 9:38 (*O you who believe! What ails you, that when it is said unto you, 'Go forth in the way of God,' you sink down heavily to the earth?*), since to "slow down" or "weigh down" is a common meaning of *yubattī'anna*. Al-Rāzī, however, disagrees with this interpretation, since the verse suggests that the hypocrites simply lag behind so as to avoid the battle rather than to slow down the Muslim army. (74) *Fighting in the way of God* means fighting for His religion and His commands and calling others to it (T). Cf. 22:39–40, where the first command given to the Muslims to fight indicates that the right to fight is granted for the protection of all those who remember God. Selling the life of the world for the Hereafter is one of several mercantile metaphors used to describe the sacrifices one should make for God. Cf. 2:207; and also 9:21, where it is said of the believers who fight in the way of God that *God has purchased their souls and their wealth in exchange for the Garden being theirs*. By contrast, in 2:86, those Israelites who had broken the covenant are described as having *purchased the world at the price of the Hereafter*. Some commentators have interpreted the verb *sell* (*yashtrūna*) here as meaning, by contrast, "purchase" (usually *yashtrūna*), so that the verse would be translated, "Let them fight in the way of God; those who would purchase the life of this world for [the price of] the Hereafter" (R, Z). In the latter interpretation, the statement is addressed to the hypocrites and those *who would tarry* (v. 72), who prefer the life of this world over

that of the next, and who are admonished to *fight in the way of God*.

(75) This verse indicates that fighting to relieve the oppressed is a legitimate basis for religious warfare (Q; also see 2:191–93; 8:39; and the essay "Conquest and Conversion: War and Peace in the Quran"). However, this verse is widely reported to relate specifically to those Muslims residing in Makkah who were oppressed and mistreated by their relatives and prevented from migrating to Madinah and so tried out to be "brought forth," or delivered, *from this town*, that is, Makkah (IK, JJ, Q, R, T, Z). This verse urges the Muslims to fight to aid and liberate their suffering fellow Muslims in Makkah. *Weak and oppressed* collectively translates *mustaḍ'afūn*, which denotes both meanings. Cf. vv. 97–98, where certain wrongdoers seek to excuse their actions after death by claiming that they were *weak and oppressed* (*mustaḍ'afūn*) in the land. Their excuse is not accepted, but in v. 98 an exemption is given to those who were truly *weak and oppressed among the men, women, and children*. Ibn 'Abbās claimed that he and his mother were among the *women and children* who were *weak and oppressed* in Makkah and who were thus excused by v. 98 (IK, Q, Z). Children are mentioned among the oppressed to make clear the extent of the cruelty of the Makkan idolaters, who would reportedly torture children in an effort to make their parents desist from their Islamic faith (R, Z); *children* here might also be a metaphorical reference to Muslim slaves, who were likewise incapable of leaving Makkah to join the community in Madinah (Z).

The *weak and oppressed* Muslims of Makkah cry out for a *protector* (*walī*) and a *helper*; their prayer is answered when the Prophet and his

army take control of Makkah in 8/630. After the conquest of Makkah, the Prophet reportedly appointed 'Attab ibn Asid (or 'Usayd) to redress the injustices suffered by the Muslims in Makkah before its conquest (JJ, T, Z). This verse also highlights the importance and effectiveness of supplicating God for one's needs, for when the oppressed of Makkah cried out to God for relief, He answered them in full (Ts). Some say that when the oppressed of Makkah supplicated God for relief, they specifically mentioned the suffering of their children to call down more effectively God's Mercy upon them (Kā, Z). Ibn 'Ajibah reads this verse as encouraging all spiritual seekers to strive and fight against the baser human passions that oppress and weaken the true lights and mysteries of the spirit within. Like the oppressed of Makkah, these inner lights remain imprisoned in the carnal soul unless one fights to liberate them from the chains of base desire and spiritual heedlessness.

(76) To *fight in the way of God* here, as elsewhere, indicates to fight for the cause of justice and goodness, in obedience to God and in accordance with His Law (*Shari'ah*). The disbelievers, by contrast, fight for *false deities*, which translates *ṭaghūt* (see 4:51–52c). According to al-Rāzī, God does not ordain the means or tactics for fighting, but only the proper intention and aim: the fighting must be for God alone. Fighting for any other reason—such as pride or a desire for spoils—amounts to fighting for *false deities* (R, Ts). In this verse, *false deities* is widely glossed as Satan (T), given the following exhortation to fight the *allies of Satan* (i.e., his "protectors" or "friends,"

awliyā'). If the disbelievers are the allies (*awliyā'*) of Satan, the believers have God as their Protector or Ally (*Walī*; R). The feebleness of Satan's guile lies in the fact that his allies fight out of fear or jealousy of the believers, while the believers fight for God and with hope for Paradise, and if they neglect to fight, they do so in fear of Divine retribution. Moreover, the disbelievers fight in doubt and fear of death, as they have no hope of reward in the Hereafter, and this makes them weak (T, Ts). The *scheme* (*kayd*) of Satan, or elsewhere of the disbelievers, is both intrinsically weak and rendered feeble and ineffectual by God (cf. 3:120; 8:18; 52:46).

In the inward, spiritual fight against the base passions of the soul, true believers stand with God against the lower elements of their own souls, whereas disbelievers are allies of their own lower souls against God (ST). For Ibn 'Ajibah, fighting in the way of God means striving only to attain God's Presence; whereas striving in one's action for any worldly or otherworldly gain removes one from the ranks of the "allies" or "friends" (*awliyā'*) of God. Muslims who fight for the otherworldly reward of Paradise are still "believers," but the true *awliyā'* strive for God alone (A).

(77) *Those unto whom it was said, "Restrain your hands"* refers to a group of Muslims of Makkah who were told to refrain from fighting the disbelievers in Makkah while they (the Muslims) were still resident there (JJ) and to simply *perform the prayer, and give the alms*—the only two religious duties incumbent upon them at that time. Al-Rāzī asserts that the verse makes clear that prayer and alms, which demonstrate

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

① They question thee concerning the spoils. Say, "The spoils belong to God and the Messenger." So reverence God and set matters aright among yourselves. And obey God and His Messenger, if you are believers. ② Only they are believers whose hearts quake with fear when God is mentioned, and when His signs are recited unto them, they increase them in faith, and they trust in their Lord,

This *sūrah* discusses events of the Battle of Badr, but does not always treat them in their chronological order (see 8:5c for the background to the battle). It is reported that at the end of the Battle of Badr, a group of Companions pursued the enemy as they fled; a second group remained to guard the Prophet, and a third group watched over the prisoners and the spoils. When the group of pursuers returned, they laid claim to the spoils by virtue of their having fought and given chase to the enemy, but the group protecting the Prophet claimed more right to the spoils by virtue of protecting the Prophet (Q). In another account, the disagreement pertained to certain Muslims who for various reasons were not present at the battle (e.g., two were sent by the Prophet on a scouting mission), but who were given spoils by the Prophet, to which others objected (R). Though differing in the details, all these accounts point to disagreements over how the spoils should be apportioned among those with varying levels of participation and exposure to danger in the battle.

The word for *spoils* here is *anfal*, a word whose root generally means "excess" or "beyond what is necessary or required." Some have connected this word with the Islamic belief that, among all religious communities, only Muslims were allowed to take spoils of war (R), based upon a *hadīth* stating that this was one trait by which the Prophet was distinguished. Some commentators have made a distinction between *anfal* and *ghanā'im*, the latter being a more common and inclusive term for spoils of war in Islamic Law (Q; see 8:41c). Other jurists have stated that *anfal* refers to wealth received by means other than war (Q) or that it refers to the fifth of the spoils (*khumus*) mentioned

in v. 41 (Q). According to some, *anfal* does not refer to all spoils, but only to the spoils a warrior takes directly from his slain opponents, such as their armor and sword (R).

It is said that because of the disagreements regarding the *anfal*, the Prophet was asked about the matter and this verse was revealed (Q). Some say that it was abrogated by v. 41. And know that whatsoever you take as spoils, a fifth is for God and the Messenger, and kinsfolk, orphans, the indigent, and the traveler. However, no question of abrogation arises if this verse is interpreted to mean that God and the Prophet have control over the distribution of the spoils, and v. 41 is read as specifying how the spoils will then be distributed (Q, R).

The question of spoils is a complex issue in classical Islamic Law and addresses such matters as the authority of a political or military leader to designate the distribution of spoils (both in promising beforehand what can be taken and in managing the distribution afterward); the kinds and amounts of items that can be taken (e.g., horses and weapons would be treated differently than land); how they are to be distributed; and to whom they are given (see 8:41c).

Hearts that *quake with fear* are also mentioned in 22:35 and 23:60. The various ways in which the heart is described in the *Qur'an* is discussed in 2:76; see also the introduction to *Sūrah* 47. The reactions of believers in their soul and even their physical body to hearing about God or listening to the *Qur'an* are mentioned in verses such as 5:83, 39:23, and 48:4. The idea of being "increased" in faith or belief (*īmān*) also appears in 3:173 and 9:124; similarly, one can also be "increased" in humility (17:109) and guidance (47:17).

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

8

The Spoils

al-Anfāl

Al-Anfāl takes its name from the reference to *spoils* in v. 1. It is an early Madinan *sūrah*, though some maintain that v. 30 (Āl) is or vv. 30–36 (Āl, Q, Ts) are from the Makkan period, as they are understood by some to refer to the attempts made on the Prophet's life by the Quraysh before he migrated to Madinah. Some also maintain that v. 63 is Makkan, since it is reported to have been revealed when 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb embraced Islam (Āl).

A major theme of this *sūrah* is the Battle of Badr (2/624), fought a year after the *hijrah* (the migration from Makkah to Madinah), the first major military confrontation between the Muslim community and the Quraysh of Makkah, who had continued their hostility toward the Muslim community after it had moved to Madinah. It discusses also the matter of the spoils of war and their just distribution (vv. 1, 41), a topic that did not need to be addressed in the days when Muslims were an oppressed minority in Makkah. The spiritual dimensions of battle are also treated, including the assistance of angels (vv. 9, 12) and the Will of God in determining victory, as in the famous statement from v. 17, *You did not slay when you slew, but God slew them; and thou threwest not when thou threwest, but God threw.*

Al-Anfāl also describes the challenges and trials of battle (vv. 10–11, 43–46) and the triumph of the sincere believers over great odds (vv. 65–66) and provides important guidelines for dealing with captives (vv. 67–70) as well as the observation of treaties (vv. 56–59). The Battle of Badr was an important first victory for the young Muslim community and is cited in the commentary on many verses in the *Qur'an* as evidence of God's Favor upon it. The last part of the *sūrah* addresses the relationship between those Muslims who had already migrated from Makkah to Madinah and those who had not, outlining their responsibilities toward one another.

you may give thanks. ²⁷ O you who believe! Betray not God and the Messenger, and betray not your trusts knowingly. ²⁸ And know that your property and your children are only a trial, and that God—with Him is a great reward. ²⁹ O you who believe! If you reverence God, He will make for you a criterion, and absolve you of your evil deeds, and forgive you. And God is Possessed of Tremendous Bounty. ³⁰ And [remember] when those who disbelieve plotted against thee, to capture thee, or to slay thee, or to expel thee. They plotted, and God plotted. And God is the best of plotters. ³¹ And when Our signs are recited unto them they say, "We have heard already. Had we willed, we could have

where they were sheltered and strengthened, as evidenced by their success at the Battle of Badr (IK; Q). The significance of being faithful to one's trust is also mentioned in 2:183; 4:58; 23:8; 70:32. Some commentators try to link this Command to have trust with certain historical incidents related to later battles, but those would seem to be out of sequence in what is essentially a discussion of the Battle of Badr. ²⁷ This verse is similar in message to 64:14: *Among your spouses and your children there is indeed an enemy unto you; so be wary of them.* This verse would also reflect the general theme of this part of the *sūrah* that good things can also be trials, such as victory on the battlefield (v. 17) and the spoils of war (v. 1). ²⁸ *Criterion* renders *furqān*, a word that has different shades of meaning in the Qur'an and is itself a name for the Qur'an; see 3:3–4; 2:53; 18:5; 21:48; 25:1. *Furqān* comes from a root with the meaning of separation and division and can mean "discernment," or that by which things are distinguished. It can also refer to a faculty or light within one's heart by which one is able to separate truth from falsehood, as in 39:22, which speaks of one whose breast God has expanded for submission, such that he follows a light from his Lord. (IK; R). This latter verse sets up illumination or knowledge as a consequence of reverence or goodness, and al-Rāzī says, "When the heart becomes illuminated by obedience to God, darkness falls away from it, because the knowledge of God is a light,

and these faults are different kinds of darkness, and when light manifests itself it necessarily leads to the disappearance of darkness." ³⁰ This verse refers to the persecution that the Prophet personally suffered in Makkah, when, after losing the protection of his uncle Abū Tālib, he was often exposed to mortal danger and to sanctions that eventually resulted in the migration to Madinah, during which he was pursued by Makkans who wished to eliminate him. The final refrain of this verse is almost identical to 3:54, and a similar message about God's plotting overcoming the plots of human beings can be found in 10:21; 13:42; 14:46; 16:26; 27:50; it is also related to 68:45: *Truly My scheme is firm.* When used of God, "plotter" (*mākīn*) does not have the pejorative connotation usually connected with it. Rather, it means that God is a better "planner" than those who plot against Him. ³¹ The disbelievers' attempts to dismiss the Qur'an as being nothing more than fables of those of old is also mentioned in 6:25; 23:83; 25:5; 27:68; 46:17; 68:15. The disbelievers' claim that they could have said the like of this is also related to the question of the inimitability or miraculous nature of the Qur'an as a sacred book. See commentary on 2:23: *If you are in doubt concerning what We have sent down unto Our servant, then bring a *sūrah* like it, and call your witnesses apart from God if you are truthful,* and the essay "Obstacles Faced in the Translation of the Qur'an." Similar challenges to produce something like the Qur'an are made in 10:38; 11:13; 17:88.

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said the like of this. This is naught but fables of those of old. ³² And [remember] when they said, "O God, if this be the truth from Thee, rain down stones upon us from the sky, or bring us a painful punishment." ³³ But God will not punish them while thou art among them. And God will not punish them while they seek forgiveness. ³⁴ What have they to keep God from punishing them, while they turn [others] from the Sacred Mosque though they are not its protectors? Its protectors are none but the reverent, but most of them know not. ³⁵ Their prayer at the House is naught but whistling and clapping. So taste the punishment for having disbelieved! ³⁶ Truly those who disbelieve spend their wealth to turn [others] from the way of God. They will spend it, then it will be a source of regret for them, and then they will be overcome. And the disbelievers will be gathered unto Hell, ³⁷ that God may separate the bad from the good,

³² This verse contains an example of the type of cynical challenges made by those who deny the Prophet, to bring down a punishment upon them if he is telling the truth, as in 17:90–95; 22:47; 26:20–4; 29:55; 37:176; 42:18; 51:47. ³³ When read in connection with the previous verse, these verses evoke the message of 29:31–32, where the destruction of Lot's people takes place only after he and his family leave the city, as well as the account of Hūd in 11:88. In this case, on the one hand, the punishment is withheld by the presence of the Prophet or a sincere state of repentance among some of the people (*while they seek forgiveness*), but on the other, unjust control and restriction of the Ka'bah leave the Quraysh gravely liable to such punishment. *While they seek forgiveness* is interpreted to mean "if they seek forgiveness," that is, on the condition that they seek forgiveness (IK; T). Or it can refer to either the believers who were still in Makkah and had not migrated to Madinah (Q; T) or the meager amount of repentance or forgiveness sought by those idolaters who at least had some notion of God, since they would also pray for forgiveness when they made their circumambulations around the Ka'bah (Q). ³⁴ The idolaters kept the Muslims who had migrated to Madinah from visiting the Ka'bah to perform their rituals there. Being allowed to visit

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Makkah to perform the rites would later be made a condition of the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah (628); see 2:174; 2:198–94; and *Sūrah* 48: *Protectors*, which renders *awliyā'* (sing. *walī*), has here the sense of "custodians," specifically referring to the Ka'bah's rightful protectors and custodians. ³⁵ It is said that while the Prophet was still in Makkah and would pray near the Ka'bah, the idolaters would attempt to disrupt his prayer by whistling and clapping beside him (R). However, others said that the whistling and clapping was actually an established part of the pagan rituals performed at the Ka'bah in pre-Islamic times (R). ³⁶ The Makkans created and gave material support to the army that set out to fight the Prophet and his followers, since many had a stake in the caravan that was coming from Syria (Z; see 8:36). Some think that this verse refers (especially to Abū Sufyān who used his wealth to fight the Prophet (R)). ³⁷ Similar language is used in 3:179, which also speaks of God separating the bad from the good. The plain sense would seem to point to this separation taking place in the Hereafter, but some say it can also refer to good and bad being separated from each other in this world (IK), as when the fighting in the context of the Battle of Uhud (3:179) separated the sincere followers of the Prophet from the hypocrites.

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and place the bad one upon the other and heap them all together, and place them in Hell. It is they who are the losers. (38) Say to the disbelievers that, if they desist, what is past will be forgiven them, but if they relapse, then the wont of those of old has already passed. (39) And fight them until there is no strife, and religion is wholly for God. But if they desist, then truly God sees whatsoever they do. (40) And if they turn away, know that God is your Master—an excellent Master, an excellent Helper! (41) And know that whatsoever you take as spoils, a fifth is for God and the Messenger, and for kinsfolk, orphans, the indigent, and the traveler, if you believe in God and what We sent down upon Our servant on the Day of Discrimination, the day the two hosts met—and God is

38. According to some commentators, this verse means that the disbelievers should stop their enmity and hostility and embrace Islam (IK). The last clause refers to God's wont of destroying persistently corrupt and evil peoples (IK). *Wont* can also refer to both what people do and what they undergo. In a *hadith*, the Prophet said, "Submission (*islām*) cuts off what came before it," and repentance cuts off what came before it. However, this verse says nothing explicitly about the disbelievers becoming Muslims, and "forgiveness" can refer to the cessation of hostilities and the resolution of grievances. Cf. 2:192–93: *But if they desist, then truly God is Forgiving, Merciful. And fight them until there is no strife, and religion is for God. But if they desist, then there is no enmity save against the wrongdoers.* 38:39–40 For v. 39, see also the similar verse 2:193: *And fight them until there is no strife, and religion is for God. But if they desist, then there is no enmity save against the wrongdoers.* Al-Rāzī explains that *strife* (*fitnah*), which can also mean "trial" or "temptation," refers to the persecution the Muslims endured at the hands of the Makkah idolaters, both before and after the *hijrah*. Even after the *hijrah*, Muslims still residing in Makkah were treated badly and oppressed severely by the idolaters. This verse orders the believers to fight until this strife or trial (*fitnah*) is gone. In al-Rāzī's view, they must be fought until religion is wholly for God, but he understands it as pertaining only to the environs around Makkah and not extended to the whole world. According to

al-Rāzī, the reason for fighting is the cessation of *fitnah*, which is only possible with the disappearance of the forces of disbelief.

Some gloss *strife* as meaning idolatry or polytheism (*shirk*; IK; T). Others maintain that, in keeping with al-Rāzī's reasoning above, it means one should struggle until Muslims are not tried in their own religion (IK). On the question of fighting until there is no more *fitnah* or strife, see 2:216; and for a more general discussion of these topics, see the essay, "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Qurān." Here *take as spoils* renders the verbal form of *ghanimah*, which has the meaning of anything one acquires through exertion, but which has taken on the technical meaning in Sunni legal tradition of those things that are taken legitimately in war (Q). It is usually distinguished from *fi'ah*, which refers to anything that is taken through peaceful means, such as a property tax (*kharāj*) or the indemnity or tax on non-Muslims (*jizyah*). Others, however, consider the two terms to be synonymous (Q). This verse is usually discussed in relation to v. 71 (see 8:10); some jurists believe that one abrogates the other, though most see v. 41 as a specification of the ruling given in v. 71 (Q, R). Many maintain that the fifth that is for God and the Messenger is itself divided into five parts, the other four parts going to kinsfolk, orphans, the indigent, and the traveler, though a minority opinion states this fifth should be divided into six parts, with God and the Messenger receiving two individual sixths and the other four a sixth each

Powerful over all things— (42) when you were on the near slope and they were on the far slope, and the caravan was below you. And had you made a tryst with each other, you would have failed the tryst. But [it came to pass] so that God may conclude a matter that was to be done; so that whosoever should perish, perishes according to a clear proof, and whosoever should live, lives according to a clear proof. And truly God is Hearing, Knowing. (43) [Remember] when God showed them in thy dream as being few. And hadst thou seen them as being many, you would have surely faltered and quarreled over the matter. But

(R). Most Sunnis accept that after the Prophet the political leader of the community assumes responsibility for this fifth and for the distribution of the spoils more generally. The commentators note that there is disagreement regarding the identity of kinsfolk (*dhū'l-qurbā*); but insofar as it concerns the degree of closeness to the Prophet, some restrict it to his immediate clan, the Banū Hāshim, while other opinions extend it to the entire tribe of Quraysh (IK, R, T). Shiites have a much more expansive view of *ghanimah*, and thus the fifth is taken from sources that extend to income beyond spoils of war, including minerals extracted from the land or from the sea (which is also applied in a much more restricted way by Sunnis); surplus income from trade or work beyond a certain level; and found treasure; as well as spoils of war (Ts). The recipients of this fifth or *khumus*, include the descendants of the Prophet (*ahl-al-bayt*); after the period of the Prophet and the Imams, it is the Shiite scholars (or more exactly, the *mujtahids*, those who are qualified to independently interpret Islamic Law) who act as representatives of the Hidden Imam and who receive and distribute this wealth. The Day of Discrimination (*furqān*) refers to the Battle of Badr, meaning that it was a day when truth was separated from falsehood (Q); "separation" is one of the meanings of *furqān* (see 8:25c). The two hosts refer to the armies of the believers and the idolaters (R). Near slope . . . far slope . . . caravan below: the two armies were on two sides of a valley with the caravan of Abū Sufyān below them in the direction of the sea (R). You would have failed the

tryst means that the Muslims would not have agreed to go out to meet such a superior army in battle if they had prior knowledge of it (Q); for more detail on the events leading up to the battle, see 8:5c.

To live or perish according to a clear proof echoes the separation of the bad from the good in v. 37 and the idea that the Battle of Badr was a Day of Discrimination between one side and the other, in that the good and the bad, the true and the false, were put to the test and made manifest through the Battle of Badr. The battle is described as a matter that was to be done, meaning that it necessarily had to come to pass (R). A clear proof is interpreted by some to refer to the rain that came just before the battle and miraculously reversed the advantage: the Makkans had of being on firmer ground with the Muslims on softer ground (see 8:11c); others see it more broadly as the fact that the smaller and poorly equipped army of the Muslims defeated the well-armed contingent of Quraysh, which was three times its size (R). According to commentators, the Prophet had a dream before the battle in which he saw the opposing army as being relatively few in number, and he conveyed this message to the believers; a minority opinion states that this vision was not during sleep (usually denoted by the word used in this verse, *manām*), but occurred in a waking state (Q, R). The verse then switches from the second-person singular (*hadst thou seen*) to the second-person plural (*you would have*), denoting a shift from addressing the Prophet to addressing the believers as a whole, and repeats a message similar to that of v. 42, namely, that had they known what

see *family* (lit. "womb") relations as referring to the agnatic line (male inheritors through male relatives), while others viewed it as referring to female inheritors through female relations (Q). Still others believe that this verse was revealed to eliminate the practice among some people of the time of establishing inheritance relationships by declaration, where one party would agree to inherit from another party and vice versa (R).

Commentators such as al-Rāzī do not believe that there is any abrogation at all. He thus sees this verse as a way of making clear that the *walāyah* mentioned in the previous verses does not extend to inheritance, and that the rights of blood kinsfolk are to be respected. In this interpretation, the *Book of God* refers to the fact that these rules of inheritance are laid out explicitly in the *Qur'ān*. Thus

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Repentance

al-Tawbah

This Madinan *sūrah* contains some of the most important passages in the *Qur'an* concerning the conduct of war and political relations during peacetime, opening with a passage about how and why the believers should fight the idolatrous Arabs and also certain groups among the People of the Book (vv. 1-29), which is followed by a criticism of the corruption of religious leaders (vv. 29-32). A long passage describes the trials and disagreements that took place within the community over setting out on a military campaign and expands upon the dissension created by the hypocrites in Madinah who did not wish to go out to fight alongside the Prophet (vv. 38-106, 117-27). Loyalty and allegiance are major themes in the latter part of this *sūrah* and are applied to the attitudes of the nomadic Arabs (vv. 97-101), the efforts of some hypocrites to establish a competing mosque in Madinah (vv. 107-110), and the wavering and weakness of some Muslims in their commitment to following the Prophet into battle (vv. 117-18). The rules governing the *zakāh*, or alms, and the giving of charity also figure prominently in this *sūrah* (vv. 58-60, 103-4).

This is the only *sūrah* of the *Qur'an* that does not begin with the *basmalah*, the formula *In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*. It is reported that Ibn 'Abbās asked 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib why there was no *basmalah* at the start of this *sūrah*. He responded that the *basmalah* is a statement of security, and this *sūrah* begins with the severing of a covenant and a declaration of conflict, which indicate the opposite of a state of security. When it was pointed out to him that the Prophet sent letters beginning with the *basmalah* to call various hostile groups to embrace Islam, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib responded that this was

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precisely a call to God, not the rescinding of a pact; the former leads to peace, the latter to war. Commentators note that it was a custom, even in pre-Islamic times, to omit *In the Name of God* in a message breaking a treaty (Q).

One interpretation of the absence of the *basmalah* at the start of *al-Tawbah* is that it reinforces the connection between the final verse of the previous *sūrah*, which emphasizes the need to separate from the disbelievers—a message given in a different form at the start of this *sūrah* (R). One question that the absence of the *basmalah* has raised for some is whether *al-Anfāl* (Sūrah 8) and *al-Tawbah* (Sūrah 9) are two *sūrahs* or together make up a single *sūrah*, and it is recorded that there was disagreement among some of the Companions over this question. According to an account attributed to ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, throughout the period of revelation the Prophet would give specific instructions on the placement of *sūrahs* and verses. *Al-Tawbah* was one of the last *sūrahs* to be revealed, and because of its content some Companions believed that it belonged with the preceding *sūrah*. However, because they were unsure whether it was one *sūrah* or two, they placed them next to each other, but without the *basmalah* at the start of *al-Tawbah* (Q, R). In this way, some interpret the absence of the *basmalah* as preserving the difference of opinion between the Companions over the question of the arrangement of the *sūrahs*. Nevertheless, the traditional view accepted by consensus is that it was the Prophet himself who gave the order for the *sūrahs* in the Quran, including considering Sūrahs 8 and 9 separate *sūrahs*.

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One interpretation of the absence of the *basmalah* at the start of *al-Tawbah* is that it reinforces the connection between the final verse of the previous *sūrah*, which emphasizes the need to separate from the disbelievers—a message given in a different form at the start of this *sūrah* (R). One question that the absence of the *basmalah* has raised for some is whether *al-Anfāl* (Sūrah 8) and *al-Tawbah* (Sūrah 9) are two *sūrahs* or together make up a single *sūrah*, and it is recorded that there was disagreement among some of the Companions over this question. According to an account attributed to ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, throughout the period of revelation the Prophet would give specific instructions on the placement of *sūrahs* and verses. *Al-Tawbah* was one of the last *sūrahs* to be revealed, and because of its content some Companions believed that it belonged with the preceding *sūrah*. However, because they were unsure whether it was one *sūrah* or two, they placed them next to each other, but without the *basmalah* at the start of *al-Tawbah* (Q, R). In this way, some interpret the absence of the *basmalah* as preserving the difference of opinion between the Companions over the question of the arrangement of the *sūrahs*. Nevertheless, the traditional view accepted by consensus is that it was the Prophet himself who gave the order for the *sūrahs* in the Quran, including considering Sūrahs 8 and 9 separate *sūrahs*.

① A repudiation from God and His Messenger to those idolaters with whom you made a treaty. ② So travel freely throughout the land for four months, and know that you cannot thwart God, and that God shall disgrace the disbelievers.

③ And an announcement from God and His Messenger to the people on the day of the greater *hajj*: that God and His Messenger have repudiated the idolaters. So, if you repent, it would be better for you. And if you turn away, then know that you cannot thwart God. And give the disbelievers glad tidings of a painful punishment, ④ save for those idolaters with whom you have made a treaty, and who thereafter commit no breach against you, nor support anyone against you. So fulfill the treaty with them for its duration. Truly God loves the

first verse of this *sūrah* is an announcement of the annulment of a treaty between the Prophet and the idolaters. Repudiation (*barāʾah*) has the sense of being or becoming unal-

lied, being innocent of, or being dissociated from something. Here it means that the existing truce or treaty has come to an end. Regarding the circumstances and the interpretation of this verse there is what Ibn Kathīr calls "considerable disagreement." In one account, this verse is said to refer to the breaking of the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, a treaty contracted between the Prophet and the Quraysh that had established a ten-year truce (see Sūrah 48). This treaty not only included the Prophet and the Quraysh, but also their respective allies, among whom were the tribes of Banū Khuzāʾah on the side of the Prophet and Banū Bakr on the side of the Quraysh. Banū Bakr later launched an attack on the Banū Khuzāʾah, stemming from a vendetta that preexisted the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, and it was reported that the Quraysh assisted the Banū Bakr with arms and a small number of men (Q). The Prophet considered this act to be a breach of the treaty, thereby nullifying the need to observe the truce, and this ultimately led to the final conquest of Makkah by the Prophet and his followers. According to this account, the repudiation of the treaty is addressed to the Makkans.

According to the majority of commentators, however, this verse was revealed after the conquest of Makkah in 8/630, a year after the breach of the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah. There is considerable

difference of opinion as to which idolaters are addressed and the legal import of both the repudiation (v. 1) and the announcement (v. 3). One opinion is that if some idolaters had an existing treaty with the Prophet, a treaty whose term had more than four months remaining, it was reduced to four months, and if they had one that was to expire before four months, it would be extended to a period of four months. Others add to this latter group those with whom the Prophet had made no treaty, so that they would be automatically granted a four-month truce. Yet others interpreted this four-month period to apply only to those idolaters who had less than a four-month treaty or none at all, but would not reduce an already existing treaty that was being faithfully observed. And still others believed that this directive applied only to those who had no preexisting treaty at all, and that anyone else with a treaty in hand would be dealt with according to that treaty, regardless of its term (IJ, Q, T). For example, Ibn ʿAbbās notes that the Muslims had a treaty with Ḥayy ibn Kinānah that still had nine months left at the time of the announcement, and they continued to observe it (R). As for those who interpret this as the rescinding of a treaty with those who had a treaty before, this ruling was considered permissible under certain conditions as outlined in 8:56, namely, when there is a reasonable expectation that the other side will not fulfill the treaty terms or in cases where they have already in fact violated the treaty (R, T).

reverent. ⑤ Then, when the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters wheresoever you find them, capture them, besiege them, and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they repent, and perform the prayer and give the

There are also disagreements among commentators as to the precise timing of the *four months* mentioned in v. 2 and the end of the sacred months mentioned in v. 5. If the *announcement* of v. 3 was made on the *day of the greater hajj*—interpreted to be either the Day of Sacrifice or the Day of 'Arafah (T; see 2:196c)—it would leave fifty days until the ending of sacred months—that is, the remainder of the pilgrimage month of Dhu'l-Hijjah (the twelfth month of the calendar) followed by the entire month of Muharram (T). One view understands this passage to mean that v. 3 addresses the idolaters with whom the Prophet and his followers had no existing treaty, while the group with whom they did have a treaty was given the four months mentioned in vv. 1-2. According to another view, this *repudiation* and *announcement* were made to both groups at the same time, so that the treaty-holding idolaters had four months (until the middle of Rabi' al-Thani, which comes four months after Dhu'l-Hijjah) while the non-treaty group had until the end of the sacred months (fifty days from the day of the *announcement*) as mentioned above.

According to still another opinion, this *sūrah* was revealed at the start of Shawwāl (the tenth month of the calendar), thus making the end of the four-month period mentioned in v. 2 coincide with the end of the sacred months as described in v. 5. Yet another opinion is that the period of *four months* refers to those with whom the Muslims had a treaty that was set to expire earlier than four months, and the verse commanded that they grant them four months, while *for its duration* refers to those treaties stipulating a period of more than four months, which the Muslims were thus instructed to observe in full. According to this last opinion, the Prophet was commanded to repudiate the treaties only with those idolaters who had broken it already and to maintain all others. Al-Tabari makes it clear that this passage could not possibly mean that after the lapse of the sacred months the believers were free to kill any idolater; see the essay "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran."

It is important to remember that after the Muslims had conquered Makkah, there were still idolaters in the Arabian Peninsula, and other battles, such as Hunayn, remained to be fought (see v. 25). Some idolaters were still coming to the Ka'bah to perform the pilgrimage rites according to pre-Islamic practices (even though there were no longer any idols to worship). It is reported that, for the first *hajj* after the conquest of Makkah, the Prophet sent Abū Bakr to lead the *hajj*, and with him sent 'Alī to announce four matters to those who had assembled in Makkah: only a believing soul shall enter the Garden; no idolater shall approach the Ka'bah after that year; no one will circumambulate the Ka'bah naked ever again; and whosoever has a treaty will have that treaty observed according to its terms (T). Most commentators note that 'Alī was chosen to make the announcement of the repudiation, because Arab custom demanded that a treaty be broken either by the contracting party—in this case the Prophet himself—or a near kinsman, and the Prophet wanted the message to be understood unambiguously (Q).

There is disagreement over whether the *sacred months* in this verse were those four traditionally considered to be sacred by the Arabs (the seventh, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth) mentioned in v. 36, or whether the word translated here as *sacred*, *haram* (lit. "forbidden"), refers to the fact that the idolaters were given four months of free travel and the believers were forbidden from fighting them (IK).

This passage is significant for debates concerning the use of force. For some, v. 5 of this *sūrah* abrogates all previous treaties and obligations in relation to the idolaters. Other commentators and jurists interpret this to mean that the idolaters are fought by reason of their idolatry and polytheism (Q, R). However, since this passage itself explicitly affirms the validity and propriety of keeping treaties with those idolaters who uphold their side of the treaty in good faith, a more plausible reading of this passage would not see the very fact that certain persons were idolaters as a reason to fight them; on this question see also 2:256c.

alms; then let them go their way. Truly God is Forgiving, Merciful. ⑥ And if any of the idolaters seek asylum with thee, grant him asylum until he hears the Word of God. Then convey him to his place of safety. That is because they are a people who know not. ⑦ How can the idolaters have a treaty with God and with His Messenger, save for those with whom you made a treaty at the Sacred Mosque? If they remain true to you, remain true to them. Truly God loves the

From the perspective of the Muslim community, the years of conflict preceding this announcement created a political environment where the idolaters of Arabia could not be left in a position of power and political strength to menace the Muslim community in the future; treaties were indeed often made, but they were just as often broken by the idolaters and their allies. This concern regarding treaties is made explicit in v. 8, which states that if the idolaters were to come into a position of power over the believers, they would not observe *kinship or treaty*. Rather, the idolaters in Arabia would have continued to form a persistent political alliance against the Prophet and the believers. According to this understanding of the political context, the idolaters' conversion to Islam would not have been the purpose of fighting them, though this conversion (based on the plain sense of v. 5) would be the only way for them to ensure their physical security; that is, they could avoid a state of war by renouncing idolatry and disavowing their previous actions and alliances, but being non-Muslim was not their original crime. See also the essay "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran."

Moreover, v. 13 seems to provide the underlying rationale for why the idolaters were to be treated as hostile: *Will you not fight a people who broke their oaths, and intended to expel the Messenger, and opened [hostility] against you first?* The command of 8:58, establishing the conditions for rescinding a treaty, is some indication of how precarious such treaties could turn out to be, and most famously the Quraysh and their allied tribe of Banū Bakr violated the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah (mentioned in 9:1-4c), an act that eventually led to the conquest of Makkah by the Prophet and his followers.

6 This verse says that idolaters could come and hear the Quran and the teachings of Islam and then be taken to a place of safety (Q) until

they reached their own home (T). Commentators record some disagreement as to whether this verse was abrogated by other verses, such as 47:4, *Free them graciously or hold them for ransom, till war lays down its burdens*, which explicitly mentions the option of freeing or ransoming prisoners. The dominant opinion, however, is that neither 9:6 nor 47:4 was abrogated, and that the Prophet and the believers were given the authority to slay the enemy, take them prisoner, or release them from the very beginning of the years of war, beginning with the Battle of Badr in 2/624 (Q, T). There is some disagreement as to how much of the Quran this verse requires that such a person be made to hear, some saying it should be the entire Quran, others restricting it to this *sūrah*, since it contains the essence of what idolaters need to hear about their situation (R).

7 According to some, *those with whom you made a treaty* refers to certain members of Banū Bakr (who had been in alliance with the Quraysh according to the terms of the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah) who never violated their treaty with the Prophet even when others did so (R, Q, T, IK); see 9:1-4c. Other commentators believe that this verse refers to the Banū Khuzā'ah, who were allied with the Prophet, or even to the Quraysh (T). Al-Tabari believes that this verse could refer only to those members of Banū Bakr who did not violate the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, arguing that at the time these verses were revealed (after the conquest of Makkah) there were no remaining non-Muslim members of Khuzā'ah, and the Quraysh held no treaty, because they had violated it and rendered it null and void. Al-Tha'labi records an account that it also refers to certain members of the Quraysh who were given that period of four months: to either become Muslims or accept exile in a land of their choosing. Before the period of four months expired, they became Muslims. Al-Tha'labi also

wherewith you were punished. But if you are patient, then that is better for the patient. (127) So be patient, and thy patience is only with God. And grieve not on their account, nor be distressed by what they plot. (128) Truly God is with those who are reverent, and those who are virtuous.

This verse was then revealed, enjoining the Muslims to respond only with the like of what they suffered and, better yet, to forgo retaliation altogether (R, T, Z); the Prophet thereafter renounced his oath of vengeance (Z) and declared he would be patient (T). When the Quraysh eventually surrendered Makkah to the Prophet in 8/630, one of the Prophet's Companions said, as they prepared to enter the city, "Today is a day of vengeance!" But the Prophet responded, "No, today is a day of mercy." On this day, Hind, the woman who had mutilated Hamzah, was allowed to enter Islam under the general amnesty for the Quraysh, and Wahshi ibn Harb, the Abyssinian slave who had killed Hamzah, later sought and was granted the Prophet's pardon. *If you are patient, then that is better* means that it is better to forgo punishing those who have wronged you and to leave their reckoning to God (T).

Some have suggested that this verse was abrogated by 9:5, which commands Muslims, *Slay the idolaters wheresoever you find them*, although many major commentators disagree, considering the present verse to be general in its meaning, that is, applying to anyone at any time who has been wronged, and therefore not abrogated (Q, R, T).

(Ts). The Quran's intention to establish a limitation on retaliation so that it does not exceed the original wrong is also manifest in 2:190: *And fight in the way of God against those who fight against you, but do not transgress. Truly God loves not the transgressors*. Its preference for pardon over retaliation is also seen in 42:40: *The recompense of an evil is an evil like unto it. Yet whosoever pardons and sets matters aright, his reward is with God. Truly He loves not the wrongdoers*. See also the essay "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran."

127 This verse is addressed to the Prophet (T). That *patience is only with God* is interpreted to mean that one can only be patient with God's Help (R, T, Ts, Z). The Prophet is instructed, *Grieve not on their account*; that is, he should not be distressed by those who deny him and accuse him of sorcery or of being a poet (T) or by *what they plot* in order to try to turn others away from the path of God (T).

128 God is also said to be *with the reverent* in 2:194; 9:36, 123; and *with the virtuous* in 29:69. In other verses, He is said to love the reverent (3:76; 9:4, 7) and the virtuous (2:193; 3:134, 148; 5:13, 93).

سُبْحَانَكَ اللَّهُمَّ

The Night Journey

al-Isrā'

Al-Isrā' is a late Makkan *sūrah*, and most commentators consider the whole of it to have been revealed in Makkah (Āl, II). Some, however, consider vv. 73 and 76 to be Madinan, and others have suggested variously that vv. 60, 74–75, 80, and 107 may also have been revealed in Madinah (Āl, II, Q).

The *sūrah* takes its name from the elliptical reference in the first verse to the Night Journey (*isrā'*) of the Prophet from Makkah to Jerusalem from where the Nocturnal Ascent (*al-mi'rāj*) took place. This journey is likely to have taken place around the year 619, toward the end of the Prophet's time in Makkah and just after the death of his beloved wife Khadijah and his uncle Abū Ṭalib, who had long sheltered him from the idolaters. This Night Journey (*isrā'*) to Jerusalem and the Ascension (*mi'rāj*) of the Prophet from the site of the ancient Jewish Temple in that city through the seven heavens, where he encountered several Judeo-Christian prophets and finally came within *two bows' length* of God Himself or nearer (53:9; see commentary on 53:7–18), is one of the most significant spiritual events in the Prophet's life. From this time onward, the Islamic community saw itself as deeply connected to the Jewish and Christian prophetic heritage, and this is one of the reasons that Jerusalem was and is revered as a sacred city for Muslims, serving also as the direction of prayer for the Muslim community for several years thereafter, until 2/624. The Prophet was also reportedly given the final form of the Islamic canonical prayer (*ṣalāh*) during his Ascension. This *sūrah* is also sometimes referred to as the *Sūrat Bani Isrā'īl* (II), because vv. 2–8 discuss the Children of Israel and the historical destruction that came upon them and their Temple, or as *Subhān* ("Glory") after the opening word of the *sūrah* (Āl).

This *sūrah* contains several themes and elements common to later Makkan *sūrahs*, including references to God's Power over the natural world (vv. 66–70), repeated warnings to human beings about the coming of Divine Punishment either on earth or in the Hereafter (vv. 13–18; 58–59; 71–72), and criticism of the idolaters ascribing partners and daughters to God (vv. 39–41), their

imperviousness to Quranic guidance (vv. 45–47), their disingenuous requests for miracles as proof of Muhammad's prophethood (vv. 90–96), and their denial of the Resurrection and Final Judgment (vv. 49–52, 97–99). In vv. 70–76, the Prophet is said to have nearly succumbed to the idolaters' attempt to lead him away from the revelations that he had received, but that God made him firm. The *sūrah* also contains exhortations to the believers: in vv. 22–38, they are told to be virtuous and charitable and to avoid major sins, such as idolatry, murder, and adultery, as well as dishonesty, excessive curiosity, and pride; and in vv. 78–79, they are instructed to perform the mandatory prayers at different times of the day and night and the supererogatory night vigil. There are also some brief accounts of certain pre-Islamic prophets, including an account of Adam's creation and fall (vv. 61–65) as well as Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh and deliverance of the Israelites (vv. 101–4). Finally, the *sūrah* discusses various qualities of the Quran itself, including its benefits for humanity, its revelation by means of the Spirit, its use of parables, its division into sections, and its effects upon the believers (vv. 82–89; 105–9).

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

① Glory be to Him Who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque, whose precincts We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs. Truly He is the Hearer, the Seer. ② And We gave unto Moses the Book, and We made it a guidance for the Children of Israel—"Take no guardian apart from Me"—③ the progeny of those whom We carried with Noah. Truly he was a thankful servant. ④ And We decreed for the Children of Israel in the Book, "Surely you will work corruption upon the earth twice,

1 This verse refers to the Prophet's Night Journey (*al-isrā'*), considered by most to have taken place a year or two prior to the migration to Madinah (R, Z). The Prophet was reportedly taken upon a winged horse, named Buraq, and led by the Archangel Gabriel to Jerusalem; from there he ascended through the seven heavens and came before God Himself. The whole experience occurred outside the realm of ordinary time; because, despite the great distance between Makkah and Jerusalem, the Prophet is said to have made the journey and returned in a single night; according to some, the door of his house, through which he passed when he left on the journey, was still swinging on its hinges when he returned. This

event is foundational in the life of the Prophet Muhammad and for Islamic spirituality, and most of the Prophet's Companions agreed that this miraculous journey took place physically and not only spiritually, although a few maintained that it was an inner, purely spiritual journey. Mainstream Islamic tradition holds, however, that the Ascension (*mi'rāj*) was bodily as well as spiritual and considers it a special miracle granted to the Prophet, although spiritual ascension is believed by some Muslims; particularly Sufis, to be a possibility open to all Muslims, who follow a spiritual path in this life. Indeed, a well-known *ḥadīth* states, "The canonical prayer (*ṣalāh*) is the ascension (*mi'rāj*) of the believers."

Detailed accounts of the Night Journey exist in the *Ḥadīth*, and the event resonates throughout Islamic literature, especially in mystical works, where the journey is seen as the prototype for all spiritual journeying toward the encounter with God. This central spiritual event in the life of the Prophet has also been the subject of some of the greatest masterpieces of Islamic miniature painting and poetry. Elements of the account of the Prophet's Night Journey may have even influenced accounts of mystical journeying in other traditions, such as Dante's *Divine Comedy*, whose architecture of the heavens is similar to that described in accounts of the Prophet's ascension, some of which had reached the Latin West.

Jerusalem is considered the third most sacred site for Muslims primarily because of the Prophet's miraculous journey to the city and his heavenly ascension from the site of the ancient Jewish Temple located there. In fact, after the Prophet's return from the Night Journey and for several years thereafter, the Prophet and the Muslim community prayed in the direction of Jerusalem, making the city the first direction of prayer (*al-qiblat al-ūla*), which also contributes to its sacred status in Islam. The direction of prayer was changed from Jerusalem to Makkah in the year 2/624, after the revelation of 2:143–44, which instructed the Prophet and the Muslim community to turn in prayer toward the Sacred Mosque in Makkah; see commentary on these verses.

Despite the importance of the Prophet's Night Journey and Ascension, the Quran's mention of this event is brief and elliptical. The present verse is considered to refer to the first, "horizontal," part of the journey, from Makkah to Jerusalem (*isrā'*), while 53:1–18 contains allusions to the Prophet's experience during the "vertical" part of the journey, that is, his Ascension (*mi'rāj*) through the seven heavens to the Divine Throne and the encounter with God. In the present verse, then, *His servant* is a reference to Muhammad who was carried . . . by night from the Sacred Mosque in Makkah to the Farthest Mosque, referring to the site of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem, which today is the site of the Mosque of the Dome of the Rock, inside which is the rock from which the Prophet ascended to the Divine Throne. Carried . . . by night translates *asrā' . . . laylān*. The verb *asrā'* by itself means to travel at night, and thus the additional qualifier, *laylān*, by night or

"in a night," emphasizes that this journey from Makkah to Jerusalem and back again—a journey that would ordinarily have taken over a month at that time—was accomplished in a single night (R, Z). Although a few have identified the Sacred Mosque with the environs of Makkah generally (T, Z), the literal reading of the verse indicates that he left from the Sacred Mosque itself (Z). The literal interpretation is further supported by a *ḥadīth* describing how the Prophet was roused for the journey by the Archangel Gabriel as he lay between sleeping and waking in the sanctuary (*ḥaram*) that immediately surrounds the Ka'bah (IK, R, Z).

The Farthest Mosque translates *al-masjid al-aqṣā*, which is also the name given by Muslims to the mosque built in Jerusalem in the first/seventh century near the site of the ancient Jewish Temple, which had been destroyed centuries earlier by the Romans. The precincts of the Jerusalem Temple are referred to as the Farthest Mosque, according to some, because it was the farthest sacred place visited by the Prophet and the farthest place in which he prayed during his lifetime (T), although he had likely traveled farther, to Damascus, for trade before he became a prophet. The precincts We have blessed refers to Jerusalem and its environs, comprising the Biblical land of Canaan; see also 7:137; 21:71, 81. Some reports indicate that the blessedness of the land referred to its fertility and its abundant fruits and crops (T), although others indicate that it was blessed with both worldly and spiritual bounty, since many prophets had worshipped or received revelation there (R, Z). Our signs may include the miraculous journey itself as well as the visions and encounters with past prophets, angels, and God Himself that the Prophet reportedly experienced during its course.

2–3 The Book given to Moses is the Torah. The command to the Israelites, *Take no guardian apart from Me*, is similar to reminders throughout the Quran that one has no protector other than God (cf., e.g., 2:107, 257; 5:55; 6:14). The progeny of those whom We carried with Noah is an additional description of the Children of Israel in v. 2.

4 And We decreed for the Children of Israel in the Book is understood by most to mean that God informed the Israelites in the Torah of the events alluded to in this verse (IK, R, T, Z). Some, however, understand this to mean that God decreed these future events in the Preserved Tablet

mercy and say, "My Lord! Have mercy upon them, as they raised me when I was small." (25) Your Lord knows best that which is in your souls. If you are righteous, then verily He is Forgiving toward the penitent. (26) Give unto the kinsman his right, and unto the indigent and the traveler, but do not squander wastefully. (27) Truly the wasteful are the brethren of satans, and Satan is ungrateful to his Lord. (28) But if thou turnest away from them, seeking a mercy from thy Lord,

(Z). Moreover, even if one's parents are disbelievers, one should still pray for God's Mercy upon them, asking particularly that He give them guidance (Z). In connection with this verse, al-Zamakhshari cites the *hadith*: "The Contentment of God lies in the contentment of parents; and the Anger of God lies in the anger of parents." (25) That God knows what is in souls is also mentioned in 2:234 and 11:31. Similarly, He is said to know what lies within breasts (see, e.g., 3:154; 5:7; 11:5; 29:10) and in hearts (4:63; 33:51). (26–27) For a very similar verse, see 30:38; see also 2:83; 177; 215; 43:6; 8:43; 24:22. In 59:7, one is similarly enjoined to be charitable or kind to, among others, relatives, the indigent, and travelers. To *give unto the kinsman his right* may mean to maintain good relations with one's kin and to visit them often (T, Z), since maintaining kinship relations (*silat al-rahim*) is an important principle in Islamic ethics. A report attributed to 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin (d. 92/711), the pious great-grandson of the Prophet and the fourth Shiite Imam, understands *kinsman* here to refer specifically to the kin of the Prophet Muhammad, meaning that they should be given their specially allotted share of bounties and spoils (Q, T, Z), since they were forbidden from receiving other forms of charity. To *give unto the traveler* may mean to provide travelers with food or accommodation (T). But one should not squander such charity wastefully by being excessive in one's giving (Q, T, Z), perhaps in the interests of pride or enhancing one's reputation or by giving it to those who do not need it rather than to those who have a moral claim upon one's charity (Q, T), that is, relatives, the poor, and travelers, among other groups (such as orphans) mentioned elsewhere (see 2:177). Wastefulness or prodigality is to be avoided in charity as in all things (see, e.g., 7:31), for God loves not the prodigal (6:141). In charitable giving, then, one should

strike a balance between being "wasteful" and being "miserly" (see v. 29; 25:67). Those who are wasteful are the brethren of satans, meaning that they are their friends and supporters (T).

28 Vv. 28–30 are addressed to the Prophet, but the injunctions they contain apply to all believers. Here, the verse instructs the Prophet regarding situations in which he must "turn away" from someone seeking his charity, because he does not have the means to provide what is being requested. *Seeking a mercy from thy Lord* may be an expression referring to the state of temporary poverty that prevents the Prophet from fulfilling such a request (R). In this context, to call poverty a state of *seeking a mercy* from God suggests both the temporary nature of the Prophet's state of need and his hope and trust that God will eventually grant him the *mercy*, that is, the provision (T, Z) he needs—for the Prophet anticipates that this mercy will come.

It is reported that when the Prophet was asked for charity that he could not provide, he would remain silent while the provision was not available, preferring to await the necessary provision rather than refuse the request (Q). Instead of remaining silent, however, the Prophet is here instructed to *speak unto them*—that is, the petitioners—a *gentle word*, explaining that he cannot fulfill their need at the moment because of a lack of means (R), but encouraging and promising them that provision from God shall come (T). *Speak unto them a gentle word* may also be understood to mean "speak for them gentle words," indicating that the Prophet should supplicate God on their behalf to grant them the needed provision (Q). An alternate interpretation explains that this verse was revealed after the Prophet refused to grant the requested charity to a group of people whom he knew would use the funds to engage in corruption. In denying them, the Prophet

for which thou dost hope, then speak unto them a gentle word. (29) And let not thine hand be shackled to thy neck; nor let it be entirely open; lest thou shouldst sit condemned, destitute. (30) Truly thy Lord outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will. Verily of His servants He is Aware, Seeing. (31) And slay not your children for fear of poverty. We shall provide for them and for you. Surely their slaying is a great sin. (32) And approach not adultery; verily it is indecency and an evil way. (33) And slay not the soul that God has made inviolable,

was seeking a mercy from God for thwarting any corruption they had intended (Q).

29 That *thine hand be shackled to thy neck* is a metaphorical reference to miserliness, which is also condemned elsewhere in the Quran; see 47:38: *And whosoever is miserly is only miserly toward himself: God is the Rich, and you are the poor*; as well as 3:180; 4:37; 9:76; 57:24. But even in matters of charity, one's hand should also not be entirely open, referring to an excessive and thus irresponsible generosity, which may well leave one devoid of the means to provide for oneself. This is one of several Quranic passages that indicates the importance of moderation in all things and avoiding the extremes of miserliness and prodigality (see vv. 26–27); see also 25:67. Miserliness will render one condemned by those to whom one has refused charity (IK, T); while prodigality renders one liable to condemnation from oneself and others, as well as from God, for depleting one's wealth so quickly (T), rendering oneself destitute through foolish excess (Z). *Destitute* translates *mahsūr*, which can also mean "exhausted" or "depleted" (R, T, Z).

30 That God *outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will* (cf. 13:26; 28:82; 29:62; 30:37; 34:36; 39; 39:52; 42:12) indicates that God controls all earthly provision; an idea also found in a well-known *hadith* from the Prophet that includes earthly provision among the things decreed by God for each individual. *Outspreads* translates *yabṣuṭa*, and this action, attributed to God here and elsewhere, is derived from the same root as the Divine Name *al-Bāsīt*, the Open-Handed. Although the Name *al-Bāsīt* as such does not appear in the Quran, this quality of Divine Openhandedness is also reflected in 5:64: *The Jews say, "God's Hand is shackled."* Shackled are their

hands, and they are cursed for what they say. Nay, but His two Hands are outstretched (*mabṣūtātān*, derived from the same root as *al-Bāsīt*). (31–33) A similar list of injunctions against slaying one's children, committing adultery (or "indecent" in 6:151), and slaying innocent souls is found in 6:151; see 6:151–52. As for the slaying of one's children, it was reportedly a common practice in parts of pre-Islamic Arabia to kill infant girls immediately after birth for fear of the shame or liability they might bring to the family (cf. 8:18–9c). Here and in 6:151, the prohibition against slaying one's children out of fear of poverty is followed by the assurance of God's Provision. Warnings about the evil of and punishment for fornication or adultery (often referred to as "indecent") are also found in 4:15; 24–25; 6:151; 24:2–3; 25:68; 33:30. In 6:102, a promise not to slay one's children or commit adultery is part of a pledge taken by women seeking to join the Prophet's community at Madinah.

The warning against slaying souls that God has made inviolable—that is, innocent souls—is also found in 6:151 and 25:68; see also 4:29; 92–93; 5:32. The exception *save by right* refers to cases where the Quran warrants slaying as a punishment for a capital transgression, such as for murder or "waging war against God and His Messenger" (5:33). In the case of one who is slain unjustly, meaning without right or just cause, God has appointed authority (*sulṭān*) unto his heir (*walīhi*)—that is, to the relative close enough to the deceased to be responsible for claiming retribution for the death (Z)—to demand the execution of the murderer as retaliation, to pardon the murderer, or to accept the wergild (IK, Q, T). This verse was invoked by 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ (d. 43/664) at the arbitration (37/658) that took place after the Battle of Shiffin.

save by right. And whosoever is slain unjustly, We have appointed authority unto his heir. Then let him not be excessive in slaying. Verily he shall be helped. (34) And approach not the orphan's property, save in the most virtuous manner, till he reaches maturity. And fulfill the pact; surely the pact is called to account. (35) And give full measure when you measure, and weigh with the straight balance. That is better and more virtuous in the end. (36) And pursue not that

(37/657) as part of his argument that Mu'āwiyah ibn Abi Sufyān (then the governor of Syria) had the right to assume the caliphate. 'Amr's argument was that Mu'āwiyah, as the *wālī* (in the sense of a near male relative) of his "unjustly slain" cousin, the third Caliph, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, should be granted *sultān*, meaning political authority (IK).

Some commentators indicate that only a male heir (*wālī*) can exercise this authority, but others disagree. Here *heir* translates *wālī*, which can also mean "protector," and thus some cite 9:71, *But the believing men and believing women are protectors (awliyāʾ; sing. walī) of one another, as evidence that female heirs and next of kin might also be granted such authority (Q)*. The warning against being *excessive in slaying* is understood to mean that only the actual murderer is subject to the death penalty, and the retaliation must not extend beyond the perpetrator of the crime; this was meant to prevent the extended blood feuds that were often generated by such crimes in pre-Islamic Arabia (T); see 2:178c; 2:194; 5:45c. It is also understood to mean that the murderer should not be tortured, maimed, or mutilated before execution (Q). *Verily he shall be helped* most likely refers to the heir of the slain individual (Q, T), although some suggest it is the slain individual who is helped (T).

34 The injunction to "approach not the orphan's property . . . till he reaches maturity" means that the guardian of an orphan is not entitled to take the property belonging to the orphan through inheritance or otherwise. Moreover, the guardian is responsible for maintaining the orphan's property and returning it when the orphan reaches maturity. *Save in the most virtuous manner* may refer to certain exceptions made with regard to the guardian's use of an orphan's property. For example, in cases where the orphan's property

is in the form of land or riding animals, the guardian might temporarily use this property as long as it is maintained and not depleted thereby, and indigent guardians might use or borrow an orphan's property to the extent that it is absolutely needed. The orphan's property can also be used or exchanged by the guardian if it is done in order to improve or increase the value of the orphan's inheritance (see 6:151; see also commentary on 2:220; 4:2, 6, 10). The Quran repeatedly enjoins the fulfilling of pacts, covenants, and vows both to God and to others; see for example, 2:40; 3:76; 5:1; 6:152; 13:20; 16:91; 48:10; 33:15c. 35 To give full measure when you measure and to weigh with the straight balance mean to measure honestly, rather than cheating people when trading goods and currency by using a balance that falsely overstates or understates the weight of what has been placed upon it. It also means, in a general way, to barter or exchange goods fairly and honestly, so that what is given is equal to what is received. For similar injunctions, see 6:151–52c; 7:85; 11:84–85; 26:181–82; 55:8–9; 83:1–3c. 36 Pursue not that whereof you have no knowledge can mean that one should not speak of things about which one does not have proper knowledge or falsely claim to have knowledge about something that one does not in fact have (R, T). The verse can thus be understood as alluding to any type of false or unjust testimony (R, T, Z). One should not pursue, in the sense of investigating private matters in order to expose the faults of others. In this context in which a series of moral injunctions are given regarding the treatment of others, the verse may be interpreted to mean more specifically that one should not level accusations or charges against others concerning affairs about which one does not have sufficient knowledge, in effect slandering them (R, T); see, for example, 24:15, which criticizes those who pass along

whereof you have no knowledge. Truly hearing, and sight, and the heart—all of these will be called to account. (37) And walk not exultantly upon the earth; surely thou shalt not penetrate the earth, nor reach the mountains in height. (38) The evil of all this is loathsome unto thy Lord. (39) That is from the wisdom thy Lord has revealed unto thee. Do not set up another god along with God, lest

false rumors about the sexual transgressions of another. *When you accepted it with your tongues, and spoke with your mouths that whereof you had no knowledge, supposing it to be insignificant, though it is great in the Eyes of God.*

Pursue not can also be rendered simply "Follow not," indicating that one should not follow a path or a guide without knowing whether one will be led or misled; the verse can thus be read as supporting the traditional Islamic discouragement of *taqlīd* (Z), the blind imitation or following of another in matters of theology (although not in matters of law, which always requires some degree of following the *Sunnah* and, for those who are not jurists themselves, following the legal rulings of others). In fact, some suggested that this verse meant, with regard to legal rulings, that one should not make judgments based on speculation, even through the process of analogical reasoning (*qiyās*), though others argued that various legal determinations, such as estimating the direction of the *qiblah* or issuing a nonbinding legal opinion (*fatwā*), necessarily entail some level of speculation (R).

The human faculties of hearing, and sight, and the heart are frequently invoked in the Quran, as they are understood to be three means by which people are guided to truth; the heart is traditionally considered the seat of understanding as well as faith; see 2:7c. The three faculties are thus mentioned as gifts for which people should be grateful (see 16:78; 23:78; 32:9c; 67:23), but also as faculties that can be "removed," "sealed," or otherwise rendered ineffective by God as a punishment for wrongdoing or disbelief (2:7; 6:46; 16:108; 45:23; 46:26). Thus these three faculties will be called to account, meaning that one will be held accountable for their proper or improper use (R, Ts). The verse may also be read to mean that the faculties of hearing, sight, and the heart will themselves be questioned (R, Ts). This would be similar to other

verses where one's limbs and one's skin are said to testify about and even against one on the Day of Judgment (T; cf. 24:24; 41:20–22). 37 That one should walk exultantly upon the earth (cf. 31:18) means that one should be humble and moderate in one's demeanor (see 31:19c), rather than acting in a boastful or arrogant manner, for *God loves not one who is a vain-glorious boaster* (43:6; cf. 31:18; 57:23). This can also be understood as a moral guideline addressed to all human beings, instructing them not to act triumphantly toward other creatures. In contrast to those who would assume such an arrogant demeanor, *the servants of the Compassionate walk humbly upon the earth* (25:63). A famous report of the Prophet's appearance and demeanor, composed by 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, describes the Prophet as walking energetically, but never proudly (al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*). That neither the Prophet nor anyone else shall *penetrate the earth, nor reach the mountains in height* is meant symbolically to remind human beings of their own weakness and powerlessness, surrounded as they are by vast phenomena that demonstrate, by contrast, their own smallness. Human beings thus have no reason to assume their own greatness or behave arrogantly or boastfully (R). 38–39 The evil of all this in v. 38 refers to the series of sinful behaviors warned against in vv. 31–37. That in v. 39 refers more broadly to all of the moral injunctions and prohibitions mentioned in vv. 22–39 (R, Z), which are from the wisdom thy Lord has revealed unto thee; that is, Muhammad, through the Quran. V. 22 begins this section with an exhortation to *not set up another god along with God*, and v. 39 closes it with the identical admonition, because, according to al-Zamakhsharī, knowledge of the Oneness of God (*tawhīd*) is the beginning and foundation of all wisdom. The inherent virtue of the various moral guidelines set out in vv. 22–39 is self-evident to the intellect,

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22

The Pilgrimage

al-Hajj

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

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

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

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

① O mankind! Reverence your Lord. Truly the quaking of the Hour is a tremendous thing. ② On the day you see it, every nursing woman will forget what she nurses, and every pregnant woman will deliver her burden, and you will see mankind drunk, though drunk they will not be. Rather, the Punishment of God is severe. ③ And among mankind are those who dispute concerning God, without knowledge, and follow every defiant satan, ④ for whom it is decreed that, should anyone take him as a protector, he will cause him to go astray and guide him unto the punishment of the Blaze. ⑤ O mankind! If you are in doubt concerning the Resurrection, [remember] We created you from dust; then from a drop; then from a blood clot, then from a lump of flesh; formed and unformed, that We may make clear for you. And We cause what We will to remain in the wombs for a term appointed. Then We bring you forth as an infant, then that you may reach maturity. And some are taken in death, and some are consigned to the most abject life, so that, after having known they may know nothing. And thou seest the earth desiccated; but when We send down water upon it, it stirs and swells and produces every delightful kind. ⑥ That is because

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

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

³ Some commentators believe that this verse must refer to those who disputed the existence of the Hereafter or the resurrection of the dead (e.g., 37:16), while others think that it is a reference to

those people who called the Quran *fables of those of old* more generally (see 8:31c; R). A *satan* can refer to one of the forces of Satan as well as to a jinn or to a human being; see 2:14c. Some commentators argue that, although this verse deplors disputation about God when done in ignorance, there is implicit approval of those who discuss theological matters on the basis of true and reliable knowledge (Q:R).

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

⁵⁻⁶ That human beings are created from dust is an idea found in 3:59; 18:37; 30:20; 35:11 (which also mentions the *drop*); and 40:67 (which also

shall be at the Ancient House. (34) For every community We have appointed a rite, that they might mention the Name of God over the four-legged cattle He has provided them. Your God is one God; so submit unto Him, and give glad tidings to the humble; (35) whose hearts quiver when God is mentioned, and who bear patiently what befalls them, who perform the prayer, and who spend of that which We have provided them. (36) And We have placed the sacrificial camels for you among God's rituals. There is good for you in them. So mention the Name of God over them as they line up. Then when they have fallen upon their flanks, eat of them; and feed the needy who solicit and those who do not. Thus have We made them subservient unto you, that haply you may give thanks. (37) Neither their flesh nor their blood will reach God, but the reverence

where these idolatrous prohibitions against riding or eating the meat of certain animals considered sacred are mentioned and rejected. Jurists have pointed out that it is permissible to ride the sacrificial animals if this is necessary (Q). One has these benefits for a term appointed, meaning until the animals are sacrificed in the pilgrimage rites (IK; Q). Regarding Ancient House, see 2:29c.

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

35. Other verses also speak of the physical manifestations of knowledge and faith, as in 39:23: *Their skin and their hearts soften unto the remembrance of God*; and 3:83: *Their eyes overflow with tears because of the truth they recognize*.

Al-Qushayrī notes that the quivering of one's heart increases to the degree one is conscious of God's Self-Disclosure in the world.

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

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

37. It is reported that the idolaters used to smear the blood of the sacrificed animals on the

from you reaches Him. Thus has He made them subservient unto you, that you might magnify God for having guided you. And give glad tidings to the virtuous. (38) Truly God defends those who believe. Truly God loves not any ungrateful traitor. (39) Permission is granted to those who are fought, because they have been wronged—and truly God is able to help them—(40) who were expelled from their homes without right, only for saying, "Our Lord is God." Were it not for God's repelling people, some by means of others, monasteries, churches,

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

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

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

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

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

40. The expulsion of the believers from their homes in Makkah, mentioned also in 2:197, 27:246; 3:195; 8:30; 9:40; 8:30; 60:9, is one of the most often cited grievances of the Muslim community against the Quraysh. The believers were given permission to use force because of the wrongs committed against them: persecution and being forced to leave because of their faith, for saying, "Our Lord is God." The use of force is further contextualized by mentioning the protection of other houses of worship wherein *God's Name is mentioned much*. Muslims are permitted to use force because of a prior use of force, namely, the expulsion from their homes. Likewise, *God's repelling people, some by means of others* is also a justified use of force, because

those who contradict his command be wary, lest a trial befall them or a painful punishment befall them. ④ Behold! Unto God belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and on the earth. God certainly knows [the state] you are in. On the day they will be returned unto Him, He will inform them of that which they did. And God is Knower of all things.

ing prayer (IK); others see it as an attempt to plead an excuse to other Companions for having done so (R). *Contradict his command* can have the general meaning of "go against him" and can refer to spurning the Prophet's example and teachings and not following his way, the punishment for which can come in either this life or the Hereafter (R).

64 [The state] you are in renders a phrase that can also mean "what you do" or "what you follow." For many, the implication of this verse is that, in addition to knowing individuals' state and actions in life and informing them of them, God will also then give their just recompense (R).

T, Z). The shift from *you are in* (second person) to *they will be* (third person) can serve more than one purpose; and al-Zamakhsari offers the view that it could mean that the third person refers to the hypocrites specifically. The common idea of *the heavens and the earth* belonging to God is repeated in 2:284; 3:109, 129; 4:126, 131, 170; 53:31. That God will inform human beings of their every action on earth is a pervasive dimension of the Quran's message, stated explicitly in this and similar passages (see 6:60c) and also implicitly in those verses describing the Day of Judgment more generally.

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25

The Criterion

al-Furqān

Most commentators consider *al-Furqān* to be a Makkan *sūrah*, although some believe that vv. 68–70 are from the Madinan period, while a minority consider most of the *sūrah* to be from the Madinan period and vv. 68–70 to be from the Makkan period (Q). It takes its name from the mention of *the Criterion* (*al-Furqān*) in the first verse, a word that could also be rendered "the Divide," and which is also a name of the Quran.

Beginning with the disbelievers' accusation that the Quran was taught by a human being to the Prophet or that he was simply rehearsing old legends (vv. 4–5), this *sūrah* goes on to elaborate on one of its main themes; namely, the inability of the Quraysh to accept Muhammad as a prophet because of his humanity. It lists their objections: he walks in the market like any other human being, is given no great treasure, and is not accompanied by an angel (vv. 7–10, 20–21). Moreover, the Quraysh wonder why the Quran was not sent down all at once, rather than being revealed gradually over years (v. 32), and part of their denial is manifest in their aversion to the use of the Divine Name *al-Rahmān* (*the Compassionate*; vv. 59–60).

Several verses describe the horror of the disbelievers as they call out to be destroyed rather than suffer the punishment of the Fire and as they are rebuked and denied by the objects of their worship in this world (vv. 11–19, 22–29). Moses and Aaron, Noah, and the messengers sent to al-Rass are mentioned as previous examples of prophets who were rejected by their people (vv. 35–40). The latter part of the *sūrah* includes several verses that describe how the believers should conduct themselves in the face of vain talk and insults and addresses the true meaning of repentance and supplication to God (vv. 63–77).

cattle. Nay, they are further astray from the way. (45) Hast thou not considered thy Lord, how He spreads out the shade—and had He willed, He could have made it still—and then We make the sun an indicator of it; (46) then We withdraw it unto Ourselves, a gentle withdrawal. (47) And He it is Who made the night a garment for you, and made sleep repose, and made day a resurrection. (48) And He it is Who sends the winds as glad tidings ahead of His Mercy.

because cattle are not condemned for acting like this, but human beings are (Q). Also, cattle follow their natures, know how to obey their herders, and can hear and understand insofar as they are animals, but disbelievers disobey God and have neither eyes nor ears for the truth (IK, T). For some, this verse means that, although cattle do not possess knowledge, they are not guilty of the compound ignorance of both not knowing and not knowing that they do not know. Cattle, moreover, know what is good and bad for them, whereas some human beings do not understand how good God has been to them and that Satan is their enemy (Z), and thus they do not know how to seek the greater good of the Hereafter and avoid its punishments (Aj). Other verses that compare human beings to animals include 2:65; 7:176; 29:41; 31:19; 62:5; see 2:65 for the comparison.

45: Here the shade refers to the time from the break of dawn until sunrise (T), a state between total illumination and total darkness (R). According to this interpretation, *shade (zill)* could also be rendered "twilight." On *zill*, also see 56:30c, where *shade* is discussed in connection with the Garden. *He could have made it still* refers to the fact that God could cause the twilight to last without the sun overtaking it and causing it to disappear (IK). *We make the sun an indicator of it* is interpreted to mean that it is through opposites that things are known, and thus the shade is known and understood in contrast to the shining of the sun (IK, R). In a sense, it is through knowing the sun's shining state that one knows the twilight (Z). Just as the sun moves gradually through the sky, so too does the shade or twilight gradually change (Tb). (Q, T) Both of these verses are

46: It refers to the shade (*zill*) or twilight from the previous verse. The twilight is withdrawn as the sun rises and the light erases the shade (Tb).

Some interpret *gentle (yasir)* to mean "quickly" or "in a hidden way" (T), while others take it to mean that the withdrawal is gradual (Z). This verse also has connotations of the coming of the Hour (the end of the world and the Resurrection), which is spoken of as being *easy* (also *yasir*) for God to accomplish, as in 29:19 and 50:44 (R). As a spiritual allegory, vv. 45–46 are understood to mean that the human soul (and indeed every created thing) is a shadow cast from the Unseen; the sun of sacred knowledge points to its ultimate nature, and God draws it gradually to Himself until the soul is annihilated (*fanā'*) in Him (Aj).

47: In connection with waking as a resurrection (*nushūr*), some mention the proverb, "Sleep is the brother of death" (T). Sleep is also associated with death in 6:60: *He it is Who takes your souls by night*; and also 39:42: *God takes souls at the moment of their death, and those who die not during their sleep*; see commentary on these two verses. The *night, sleep, and day* are described using similar language in 78:9–11: *When they lie down, they sleep; when they wake, they rise; when they lie down, they sleep; when they wake, they rise*.

48: For *sends the winds as glad tidings ahead of His Mercy*, referring to the gathering of a rain storm before the water starts to fall; see 7:57c. *Winds* as signs of God and blessings are also mentioned in 21:64; 7:57; 15:22; 27:63; 30:46; 45:5. *Pure* can mean both something that is pure and something by which other things are purified; hence the phrase could also be rendered "purifying water" (IK, R), an idea found in 8:11: *He sent down upon you water from the sky to purify you thereby*. This latter verse is generally connected with an incident where an unexpected rain allowed the Muslims to perform their ritual ablutions with water before a battle, and several commentators use the present verse to discuss the details of the purifying properties of water and whether other substances share those properties.

And We send down from Heaven pure water, (49) that We may revive a dead land thereby and give drink to many cattle and men We created. (50) And indeed We have distributed it among them, that they may reflect. But most of mankind refuse to be aught but ungrateful. (51) And had We willed, We would have sent a warner to every town. (52) So obey not the disbelievers, but strive against them by means of it with a great striving. (53) And He it is Who mixed the two seas, one sweet, satisfying, the other salty, bitter, and set between them a divide and a

49: The revival of a *dead land* is also mentioned in 43:11 and 50:11.

50: *Distributed it* means that the rain does not always fall in the same place, coming down on different lands at different times (IK, R); even though rain falls every year, God chooses to bless certain lands with it some years and other lands with it in other years (Aj). As in many verses that mention water in its various forms, water also symbolizes spiritual blessings that provide life to the soul through knowledge and wisdom (Aj). The lack of gratitude in the face of beneficent rain is interpreted to refer specifically to human beings attributing blessings like rain to astrological events such as the setting of a star, rather than to the Mercy and Power of God (IK, Q).

51: This verse is understood as a magnification and praise of the Prophet Muhammad, implying that God singled him out and deemed him to be worthy to carry out the task of establishing God's final religion alone (IK, R). Al-Tabari reads it to mean that God is telling the Prophet that it may have been easier on him if more messengers were sent to other towns; but now Muhammad has to bear a greater burden himself, and this reminds him not to obey the desires of the disbelievers. According to al-Qurtubi, it implies that, unlike the rain that descends upon all lands (v. 50), the Prophet is sent to one land, and Ibn 'Ajibah notes that the Prophet was necessarily possessed of exceptional wisdom and insight to be able to convey a message that would give the different people of the world all that they needed. The plain sense of the verse also allows an interpretation that singles out the town of Makkah: *...and we have sent a warner to every town*.

52: *Strive against them by means of it* is understood to mean striving (*jihād*) with the help of

the Qur'an (IK, T) or of Islam (Q, T). Al-Qurtubi and others dismiss the opinion that this refers to the use of force, since this is a Makkian *sūrah* and the permission to use force had not been granted yet. See the essay "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Qur'an." (Q, T) *That God mixed the two seas* means that one flows into the other (T), though some understand the verb to mean "to allow to flow" (Q), so that the phrase would then be translated, "God caused the two seas to flow." By *sweet* is understood the water of rivers and streams, and by *salty* the water of the oceans (T), although these terms also have symbolic meanings. The idea of the *two seas* is also mentioned in 18:60; 27:61; 35:12; 55:19. For the range of interpretation of the *two seas*, see 35:12c; 55:19–20c. Symbolically, some interpret the sweet water to be a reference to the Law (*Shari'ah*), because it is easy to attain, while the salty water is ultimate truth (*haqiqah*), which can only come through spiritual effort and courage (Aj); alternately, in the heart of a believer there is both hope and fear of God, corresponding to the sweet and salty water, respectively, and neither should overpower the other in one's soul (Qu). (Q, T) *Barrier* renders *barāzakh*, which also appears in 23:100 and 55:20 and which connotes a barrier or an isthmus between two things as well as purgatory when considered eschatologically; see 3:169–71c and also the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Qur'an." Here it is coupled with *forbidden*, forming a phrase identical to the exclamation spoken by either the angels or the disbelievers in the Fire in v. 22 (*A barrier, forbidden!*), though in the present verse it is descriptive rather than imperative.

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

he should call them to the affirmation of the Oneness of God. It is said that this verse was revealed when the Quraysh were trying to induce the Prophet to praise or magnify their gods (Q), but some assert that the real audience for this verse is not the Prophet himself, but the community of believers as a whole (R).

88 *Face* renders *wajh*, a word with a rich range of meanings. For some it means God Himself (Q, Th), the Divine Essence or Self (*al-Dhāt*; Z), or Truth/Reality (*al-Haqq*; Th). Others emphasize the *Face* as what one faces, interpreting the verse to mean that all objects of aspiration other than God will come to nothing (M). Some say this verse means that all actions are empty except for those that lead one to God (Su) or that all things perish except those things by which one approaches God (IK, Q). This latter meaning echoes the opinion that *Face* refers to God's religion (Q, Tb). Others say that this verse means anything that lives will die, except God (Qu). Others interpret it to mean all things perish except God, the Garden, the Fire, and the Throne (Th). See also commentary on 55:26-27: *All upon it passes away. And there remains the Face of thy Lord*. Ibn Kathīr cites a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet: "The truest words spoken by a poet were those of [the pre-Islamic poet] Labid, 'All that is other than God is false (*bāṭil*)' (*bāṭil* can also mean 'vain' or 'void'); the poem continues, 'And every enjoyment will without doubt vanish.' *Wajh* can also be understood to mean that aspect of the Divine Reality that is turned toward His creation. For some, *perish* (*hālīk*) means to become nothing or to be annihilated (R); while for others it means to be removed, through death, from a state of being able to benefit from the Face of God; in this latter sense, perishing or being destroyed does not mean that a thing becomes literally nothing. 'Al-Rāzi uses the example of a garment, which, when it becomes tattered or ripped to the point of becoming unusable, is said to have perished or been destroyed, even though its constituent parts remain. He extends this imagery to the heavens and the earth, which will be destroyed, but whose parts will not become literally nothing, as suggested by 14:48: *On the Day the earth shall be changed into other than the earth, and the heavens [too]*. For others, "perishing" means that a thing is essentially or by its nature perishable and subject to destruction; that is, a "perishing" thing is ephemeral or contingent (R), which is the status of all created beings.

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

29

The Spider

al-Ankabūt

Most scholars maintain that *al-Ankabūt* is a Makkan *sūrah*, although many of those say the first ten verses were revealed in Madinah (Al, IJ, Q, Tb). A minority maintain that it is Madinan (IJ), but some say that the first ten verses were the last verses revealed in Makkah (Al, IJ). According to several sources, among them the Prophet's wife 'Ā'ishah, the Prophet would recite *Sūrah* 29 and 30 together in his prayers, sometimes followed by *Sūrah* 36. The *sūrah* takes its name from the use of the spider's house as a metaphor for the frailty of this world in v. 41: *The parable of those who take protectors apart from God is that of the spider that makes a house. Truly the frailest of houses is the spider's house; if they but knew*. This verse evokes the central theme of this *sūrah*; that human beings are not aware of the true nature of God and the Hereafter and that in taking protectors other than God, they take the frailest of positions and thus are not prepared for what will transpire after death.

Al-Ankabūt begins by challenging the believers who think that their faith or belief alone will save them from the trials of this life, reminding them of the difficulties of this life and that one must continue to strive in the way of God, since truth rarely prevails without great effort and sacrifice (vv. 1-13). It then provides examples of previous communities, such as those of the prophets Noah, Abraham, Hūd, and Ṣāliḥ, who disobeyed the messengers God had sent to them (vv. 14-43). After discussing the Quran and its purifying efficacy, while reaffirming its transcendent Source (vv. 44-51), the *sūrah* responds to the objections posed by the disbelievers and addresses the nature of their beliefs (vv. 52-63). It concludes with a meditation on the ephemerality of this world, assuring those who believe in God and the Hereafter that by remaining thankful and striving for God, they will be rightly guided (vv. 64-69).

How, then, are they perverted? 62 God outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will among His servants. Truly God is Knower of all things. 63 And wert thou to ask them, "Who sends down water from the sky and revives thereby the earth after its death?" They would surely say, "God." Say, "Praise be to God!" Nay, but most of them understand not. 64 The life of this world is naught but diversion and play. And surely the Abode of the Hereafter is life indeed, if they but knew. 65 And when they board a ship, they call upon God, devoting religion entirely to Him, but when He delivers them to land, behold, they ascribe partners [unto Him]. 66 So let them be ungrateful for that which We have given them, and let them enjoy themselves, for soon they will know! 67 Or have they

Creator of the heavens and the earth? (Z). In this sense, it relates to the prevalent Quranic theme that many believe in God, but do not act in accord with their belief; see 23:84-89.

62-63. *God outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will* (cf. 13:16; 17:30; 28:82; 30:37; 34:36, 39; 39:52; 42:12; see 34:39c) serves as a transition from the discussion of God as Creator to God as Sustainer. Here, that the disbelievers would surely say, "God" (cf. 10:33; 23:84-85; 29:61; 31:23; 39:38; 43:9; 87) indicates that just as they acknowledge a Supreme Creator, so too should they acknowledge that God provides for them. Nonetheless, they fail to draw the proper conclusion because most of them understand not (cf. 5:103; 49:4). God's Ability to revive barren land also stands as an argument for His Ability to resurrect (cf. 7:57; 16:65; 22:51; 30:19; 24:50; 35:9; 36:33; 41:31, 39; 43:11; 45:58; 50:9-11).

64. This world is also described as *naught but play and diversion* (6:32; cf. 47:36), indicating the rapidity with which it dissipates (A), and as *naught but the enjoyment of delusion* (3:185). In 57:20, the world is described more fully as *play, diversion, glitter, mutual boasting, and vying for increase in property and children—the likeness of a vain whose vegetation impresses the farmers; then it withers such that you see it turn yellow; then it becomes chaff*; see 57:20c. The *Abode of the Hereafter* (cf. 2:95; 6:32; 7:169; 12:109; 16:30; 28:77; 83:33; 29) refers to Paradise.

65. Cf. 10:22-23; 17:67; 31:32. A storm at sea can be seen as a parable for the afflictions that

beset one in life. *Devoting religion entirely to Him* (cf. 7:29; 10:22; 31:32; 40:14; 65; 98:5) refers to the singularity of people's devotion in the face of the severity of the afflictions that befall them (T). Yet when they are delivered to safety, they turn away and are *ungrateful* (17:67); return to their polytheism, and *behave tyrannically upon the earth without right* (10:23). In the context of the previous verse, this verse can be understood as an allusion to religious and spiritual hypocrisy, as many will pray, turning to God briefly in their state of dire need, but then when no longer in need turn away, forgetting God and devoting themselves to seeking the things of this world. In this sense, it is attachment to the life of this world that prevents many people from believing in God (R).

66. Cf. 16:55; 30:34. If people do not want God's Blessings, they may choose to reject them and disbelieve, as in 18:29, when the Prophet is enjoined to say, *So whosoever will, let him believe, and whosoever will, let him disbelieve*. The phrase *let them enjoy themselves* follows upon v. 64. Though they think the *diversion and play* of this world is good, as they are able to *enjoy a little* (7:46), in fact this respite that God has granted them lets them dig a deeper hole for themselves, as in 31:24. *We grant them enjoyment a little, then We compel them toward a grave punishment* (see also 3:178; 10:69-70; 13:36; 16:55; 26:25-7). Thus soon they will know how their attempt to direct their own affairs led to their destruction (A).

67. The *secure sanctuary* is Makkah. Traditionally, no fighting was to take place within its

not considered that We have made a secure sanctuary while people are snatched away all around them? Do they believe in that which is false? And are they ungrateful for God's Blessing? 68 Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God or denies the truth when it comes unto him? Is there not within Hell an abode for the disbelievers? 69 But as for those who strive for Us, We shall surely guide them in Our ways. Truly God is with the virtuous.

confines, and the Makkans were well protected from possible incursions by other tribes. This verse thus rebukes the Quraysh for not reflecting upon the security with which God has blessed them in contrast to other tribes (T, Z; see also commentary on 106:1-4). *Do they believe in that which is false?* is a rhetorical question rebuking them both for believing in the idols they worshipped and for believing themselves to be the source of their own security. *God's Blessing*, for which they are *ungrateful*, refers to both the security He provides and His having sent them a prophet (A). The *secure sanctuary* can also be read as a reference to any form of security or stability that God grants human beings in the face of the instability and uncertainty of the storms of life. On a spiritual level it refers to being preserved from the *diversion and play* (v. 64) of the world that ensnares those who believe in falsehood and are ungrateful for God's Blessings.

68. The condemnation of *one who fabricates a lie against God* is a recurring Quranic theme (see 3:94; 6:21-23, 93; 14:4; 7:37; 10:17; 11:18; 18:15; 61:7c). In the end, *they will surely be questioned concerning that which they used to fabricate* (29:13) and *that which they used to fabricate will forsake them* (10:30; 16:88; 28:75; see also 6:24; 7:33; 11:21). The truth that the creators of lies deny may refer to the Prophet, to the Quran (A), to the general message of Divine Unity and all that it entails (T), or to all of them. *Is there not within Hell an abode for the disbelievers?* (cf. 39:32), or elsewhere *an abode for the arrogant* (39:60), is a rhetorical question meaning that they are undoubtedly in Hell (T, Z).

69. *Those who strive for Us* refers to those who strive with their very souls against Satan, against

their own lower souls, and against the enemies of religion (A). That God will guide them in His ways indicates that they will be guided on the straight path (T) or on ways that lead to good and to Divine Succor (Z), and that they will be guided to God (A). This verse is subject to many interpretations, each reflecting the belief that striving to obtain one good will lead to another good. Among these, some say it means that those who strive to act upon what they know will be guided to greater knowledge that they did not have before (A, IK); those who strive to obtain knowledge will be guided to the ways of acting in accord with it; those who strive to do what is pleasing to God will be guided to the attainment of contentment; those who strive in repentance will be guided upon the paths of sincerity; or those who strive to serve God will be guided upon the path of intimate converse with God (A).

Although several verses speak of God's Love for the virtuous (2:195; 3:134, 148; 5:13, 93), this is the only verse to say that *God is with the virtuous*. Here, the *virtuous* translates *muhsinin*, which means those who do what is beautiful or who make things beautiful. It is related to *ihsān*, "making or doing what is beautiful," and is thus related to "virtue" or "goodness" and to *husn*, meaning both "good" and "beauty." Regarding *ihsān*, the Prophet said to his Companions, "God has ordained doing what is beautiful for all things." From this perspective, at the core of the Quran's message stands the idea that one must do all things with beauty and goodness (*husn*).

70. *Those who are given the book* refers to those who are given the Quran (A), to those who are given the book of knowledge (T), or to those who are given the book of life (Z).

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their performance of night vigil (Q, R), or their relief from the burdens and attachments of this world (R). The believers are *joyous* when they receive their reward from God (Q). Related to the event that is said to have occasioned the revelation of this *sūrah* (see the introduction to the *sūrah*), these verses can be seen as a reference to the state of Ibn Umm Maktūm, while vv. 46-42 refer to the state of *him who deems himself beyond need* (v. 5).

40-42. *Covered with dust* indicates complete and utter humiliation. According to some, the *disbelievers, the profligates* indicates the same group; disbelief defines their thoughts, and profligacy their actions (Al, Tb); the punishment for disbelief is *faces covered with dust*, and the punishment for profligacy is being *overspread with darkness* (Al); cf. 75:24.

سورة التكهوير

81

The Enfolding

al-Takwīr

An early Makkan *sūrah*, *al-Takwīr* is most likely the seventh in the chronological order of revelation. It takes its name from the first verse, which refers to the enfolding of the sun as one of the signs of the Hour, and is also known by the title "When the Sun Is Enfolded" (Al). Ibn 'Ajibah suggests that this *sūrah* is related to the previous one because it begins by describing the events that are related to the Last Day, the subject with which the previous *sūrah* ends. The *sūrah* can be viewed as having two sections, the first of which tells of the signs of the Hour and the Resurrection (vv. 1-14). These apocalyptic events are described in a manner that suggests an inversion of the apparent order of the created world. In this vein, a *ḥadīth* states, "Who-soever wishes to look at the Day of Judgment as if he is seeing it with his own eyes, let him read, *When the sun is enfolded, and when the stars fade away; when the mountains are set in motion, and when pregnant camels are abandoned*" (IK). The second section of the *sūrah* is a more elusive passage that discusses the revelation of the Quran through the Archangel Gabriel and its effect upon the human soul (vv. 15-29).

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

① When the sun is enfolded, ② and when the stars fade away; ③ when the mountains are set in motion, ④ and when pregnant camels are abandoned; ⑤ when the wild beasts are gathered, ⑥ and when the seas are made to swell over; ⑦ when the souls are coupled, ⑧ and when the female infant buried

1 *Enfolded* translates *kuwwirat*, which may be interpreted in various ways: it may mean that the sun is absorbed into the Divine Throne (Q), that the light of the sun is wiped out (IK, Q), or that one part of it will be folded into another and then it will be rolled up and thrown away (IK). In this vein a *ḥadīth* says, "The sun and the moon will be rolled up (*kuwwirat*) on the Day of Resurrection" (IK).

2 Cf. 77:8. *Fade away* translates *inkadarat*, which could also mean to spill out, as a container spills out when it is broken (IK, Q), or to fall upon the ground (Q).

3 Cf. 78:20. Elsewhere it is said that *mountains are scattered* (77:10), for the Day of Judgment is a day when *the mountains are as carded wool* (70:9; 101:5), or *like heaps of shifting sand* (73:14); see also 18:47; 19:90; 20:105-6; 27:88; 52:10; 56:5-6; 69:14.

4 *Pregnant camels* translates *ishān*, which is said to indicate the best type of camel when it has reached the tenth month of pregnancy (IK). Camels were central to Arabian livelihood, and a pregnant camel was doubly valuable. Abandoning a pregnant camel would thus have been a salient metaphor for the Arabs of the time, indicating that on the Day of Judgment people will be so preoccupied with their immediate state that they will have no concern for wealth, even their most precious property, or for the things of this world in general.

5 This verse is seen by most commentators as a reference to the gathering together of all created animals, other than jinn and human beings, after resurrection, even flies (IK, Q). It is said by many that God resurrects all of the animals and allows each of them to claim justice, so that those

who had been wronged may retaliate against the offenders; then they all become dust (JJ, Q). For the resurrection of animals, see 6:38c. This verse could also be seen as another example of an apocalyptic inversion of the created order, since *wild beasts (wuhush)* cannot be gathered in this world, but are gathered in the Hereafter.

6 Cf. 52:6. That the seas are made to swell over implies another apocalyptic inversion, in which the seas break the barrier which they transgress not (55:20), so that the sweet water mixes with the salty, becoming one (Q, R, T), and so that they burst forth (82:3), covering the earth or parts of it when the earth quakes. For the significance of the *two seas, one sweet, satisfying, the other salty, bitter* (25:53), see 25:53c; 35:12c; 55:19-20c. *Made to swell over* translates *sujjirat*, which could also mean "to be set on fire" and is treated in this way by several early commentators (IK, Q, T).

7 Some say that this verse means when the souls and bodies are joined together on the Day of Judgment (Q). Others maintain that it indicates that the souls of believers are coupled with wide-eyed maidens, as in 44:34 and 52:20, *And We shall wed them to wide-eyed maidens (coupled and wed translate the same verb, zawwaja)*, while the souls of disbelievers and hypocrites are joined to satans, as in 43:36, *We assign to him a satan who is then a companion unto him*. Others maintain that it indicates souls being joined with like souls, as this is the *Day of Division* (e.g., 37:12), on which God sorts the righteous from the evil and believers from disbelievers (Q), and they are no longer mixed together as they are in this world. The last interpretation seems to be the most consistent, as a famous *ḥadīth* says of this verse, "Every man will be joined to every person

alive is asked ⑨ for what sin she was slain; ⑩ when the pages are spread, ⑪ and when Heaven is laid bare; ⑫ when Hellfire is kindled, ⑬ and when the Garden is brought nigh; ⑭ each soul shall know what it has made ready. ⑮ So I swear by those receding; ⑯ those that move and set; ⑰ by the night as it approaches, ⑱ and by the morning as it breathes! ⑲ Truly it is the speech of

who did as he did" (ĀI, IK, Q). In making this connection several commentaries refer to *Sūrah* 36, which speaks of the division of human beings into three categories: *the companions of the left, the companions of the right, and the foremost*; see commentary on 56:7-10. Verses 8-9. These verses allude to the pre-Islamic Arabian practice of burying newly born females alive. Although the verses specifically reproach those who engaged in this practice, they can also be read as indicating that all who have been wronged in this world will have the opportunity to demand justice of their oppressors and be vindicated in this life or the next.

⑩ *When the pages are spread* refers to the opening of the book in which people's deeds are recorded. Upon witnessing this life review, they will say, "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), since on the Day of Judgment no deed can be hidden. For the book in which deeds are recorded, see 17:71c; 18:49c; 50:17-18; 69:19-29; 82:11-12. ⑪ *Laid bare* translates *kushīṭat*, which could also mean "scraped off"; others interpret it to mean "rolled up," similar to 21:104: *That Day We shall roll up the sky like the rolling of scrolls for writings* (Q).

⑫ *Hellfire will be kindled* by the Anger of God and the sins of human beings (Q, R). ⑬ Those to whom the *Garden is brought nigh* are the believers who reverence God, as in 26:90: *And the Garden will be brought nigh unto the reverent*.

⑭ Every soul will know the good and evil it has done, for the pages of its book will be spread open (v. 10), and people will no longer be able to hide their sins with lies and obfuscations, since

their ears, their eyes, and their skins will bear witness against them for that which they used to do (41:20), and they will say, "We bear witness against ourselves" (6:130). A well-known *ḥadīth* says, "There is none among you, but that God will inform him of that which is between him and his two translators [i.e., the two angels who record his deeds; see 50:17-18c] (Q). ⑮ *So I swear* (*lā uqsimu*) here; see 75:1-2c. *Those receding, those that move and set* is taken by most as a reference to the planets; some say all planets; others say Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and Mercury, which (along with the sun and the moon) are visible to the naked eye and thus appear to recede during the day and reappear at night (IK, Q, R). It could also be seen as a reference to the planets having both forward and retrograde motion. ⑯ *Approaches* translates *ʿasasa*, which is among a class of Arabic words that can mean either one thing or its very opposite. *ʿAsasa* thus means both "to approach" and "to leave" (ĀI, IK, R) and can refer to either the beginning or the end of the night (ĀI, IK, Q, R, T), the latter being similar in meaning to 74:33. It could also be seen as a reference to both the end and the beginning (ĀI). ⑰ The image of the *morning as it breathes* alludes to both the manner in which the morning appears to awaken from the night and the way its light expands and spreads like exhaled breath until it becomes day (ĀI). If v. 17 is taken as the approach of night, this verse is interpreted to mean "by the morning as it rises" (IK); alluding to the beginning of the morning. When v. 17 is taken as the receding of the night, this verse is understood to indicate either the rising of the morning or the gradual illumination of the day. ⑱ This verse is the response to the oath by which God swears in vv. 13-18. It is a reference to