

Yā Sīn

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There is consensus among all scholars that *Yā Sīn* is a Makkan *sūrah* from the early part of the middle Makkan period. Some maintain that the whole of the *sūrah* is Makkan, though many commentators believe that v. 12 is from the Madinan period. The *sūrah* takes its name from the mention of the Arabic letters *yā*’ and *sīn* in the opening verse. Some also refer to it as “The Heart of the Quran,” after a well-known *ḥadīth*: “Everything has a heart, and the heart of the Quran is *Yā Sīn*. Whosoever recites *Yā Sīn*, God records for him the recitation of the Quran ten times for his recitation of it” (Āl, Q).

Seen as the heart of the Quran, this *sūrah* plays a very important role in traditional Islamic piety. Many Muslims recite *Yā Sīn* regularly as part of their supererogatory devotions, and it is often the only *sūrah* longer than a page or so that Muslims have memorized in full. A famous *ḥadīth* says, “Recite *Yā Sīn* over your dead” (Q, Sy). It is thus recited for those who are close to death, those who have just died, and at the graves of loved ones. It is also recited for those who are sick, for another *ḥadīth* states, “Verily in the Quran there is a *sūrah* that intercedes through its recitation and forgives through its being heard—indeed, that is *Sūrat Yā Sīn*” (Āl, Q). *Yā Sīn* is also recited by many Muslims after the performance of the obligatory prayers in the morning and the evening. Regarding the latter, another report, sometimes recorded as a *ḥadīth*, states, “Whosoever recites *Sūrat Yā Sīn* at night, desiring the Face of God, is forgiven during that night” (IK, Q). Although many believe that the exhortation to recite *Yā Sīn* in

the morning is a *ḥadīth*, it most likely derives from a saying attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās: “Whosoever recites *Yā Sīn* when he awakens is given ease for his day until the evening comes. And whosoever reads it in the midst of the night is given ease for his night until he awakens” (Q).

Several scholars maintain that *Yā Sīn* is the heart of the Quran because it addresses its central teachings regarding God, prophethood, and the Hereafter. The *sūrah* begins with an address to the Prophet that clarifies both his mission and the nature of revelation (vv. 1–12) followed by a parable regarding those who reject prophets (vv. 13–30) that segues into a discussion of Resurrection and the signs of it in the natural world (vv. 31–44). Responses to various objections common to the disbelievers and the consequences of them (vv. 45–52) then lead into a discussion of the disparate ends of the disbelievers and the believers (vv. 53–68), which concludes with another reflection on the nature of Muhammad’s prophethood (vv. 69–70). The final section returns to a discussion of the signs in the created order that serve to inform one of God’s creative Power and ability to resurrect (vv. 71–81) and concludes with an affirmation of God’s Omnipotence (vv. 82–83).

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

① *Yā. Sīn.* ② By the Wise Quran, ③ truly thou art among the message bearers, ④ upon a straight path, ⑤ a revelation of the Mighty, the Merciful, ⑥ that thou mayest warn a people whose fathers were not warned; so they were heedless. ⑦ The Word has indeed come due for most of them, for they do not believe. ⑧ Truly We have put shackles upon their necks, and they are up to their chins, so that they are forced up. ⑨ And We placed a barrier before them and a barrier behind them and veiled them; so they see not. ⑩ It is the same for them whether thou warnest them or warnest them not; they do not believe. ⑪ Thou

only warnest whomsoever follows the Reminder and fears the Compassionate unseen. So give such a one glad tidings of forgiveness and a generous reward. ⑫ Truly We give life to the dead and record that which they have sent forth and that which they have left behind. And We have counted all things in a clear registry. ⑬ And set forth for them as a parable the people of the town, when the message bearers came unto it. ⑭ When We sent two unto them, they denied them. So We strengthened them with a third, and they said, “Verily, we have been sent unto you!” ⑮ They said, “You are but human beings like us, and the Compassionate has not sent down anything. You are but lying.” ⑯ They said, “Our Lord knows. Verily we have indeed been sent unto you!” ⑰ And naught is incumbent upon us save the clear proclamation.” ⑱ They said, “Truly we augur ill of you. If you cease not, we shall certainly stone you, and a painful punishment will certainly befall you from us.” ⑲ They said, “Your auguring ill is upon yourselves though you have been reminded? Nay, you are a prodigal people!” ⑳ And from the outskirts of the city, a man came running. He said, “O my people! Follow the message bearers! ㉑ Follow those who ask not of you any reward and who are guided. ㉒ Why should I not worship Him who originated me, and unto Whom you will be returned? ㉓ Shall I take gods apart from Him? If the Compassionate desired harm for me, their intercession would avail me naught, nor would they save me. ㉔ Truly would I then be in manifest error. ㉕ Truly I believe in your Lord, so listen to me.” ㉖ It was said unto him, “Enter the Garden!” He said, “Would that my

people knew ²⁷ how my Lord forgave me and placed me among the honored.” ²⁸ And after him We did not send down a host from Heaven against his people; nor would We send down. ²⁹ It was but a single cry. Then, behold, they were extinguished. ³⁰ Alas for the servants! Never did a messenger come unto them, but that they mocked him. ³¹ Have they not considered how many generations before them We destroyed, such that they return not unto them? ³² Each of them shall be a group arraigned before Us. ³³ A sign unto them is the dead earth: We revive it and bring forth grain therefrom, that they may eat thereof. ³⁴ And We place gardens of date palms and grapevines therein and make springs flow forth, ³⁵ that they may eat of its fruit and of that which their hands have worked. Will they not then give thanks? ³⁶ Glory be unto Him, Who has created the pairs, all of them, from what the earth makes grow, and from themselves, and from what they know not. ³⁷ And a sign unto them is the night: We strip the day therefrom, and behold, they are in darkness. ³⁸ And the sun runs to a dwelling place of its own. That is the decree of the Mighty, the Knowing. ³⁹ And for the moon, We have decreed mansions, till it returns like an old palm stalk. ⁴⁰ It befits not the sun to overtake the moon, nor the night to outstrip the day. Each glides in an orbit. ⁴¹ And a sign unto them is that We carried their progeny in the full-laden Ark. ⁴² And We created for them the like thereof upon which they ride. ⁴³ And if We will, We drown them, such that they would have none to call upon and would not be saved, ⁴⁴ save as a mercy from Us and an enjoyment for a while. ⁴⁵ And

when it is said unto them, “Be mindful of that which is before you and of that which is behind you, that haply you may receive mercy.” ⁴⁶ Never did a sign from among the signs of their Lord come unto them but that they turned away from it. ⁴⁷ And when it is said unto them, “Spend of that wherewith God has provided you,” those who disbelieve say to those who believe, “Are we to feed one whom, if God willed, He would feed him? You are in naught but manifest error.” ⁴⁸ And they say, “When will this promise come to pass, if you are truthful?” ⁴⁹ They await naught but a single cry that will seize them while they dispute among themselves, ⁵⁰ and then they can make no bequest, nor return to their people. ⁵¹ And the trumpet will be blown. Then, behold, they will rush forth from their graves unto their Lord. ⁵² They will say, “Oh, woe unto us! Who has raised us from our place of sleep?” “This is that which the Compassionate did promise; and the message bearers spoke true.” ⁵³ There shall be but a single cry. Then, behold, they will all be arraigned before Us! ⁵⁴ This day no soul will be wronged in any way, and you will not be recompensed, save for that which you used to do. ⁵⁵ Truly the inhabitants of the Garden on that Day will be busy rejoicing, ⁵⁶ they and their spouses reclining upon couches in the shade. ⁵⁷ Therein they have fruit and whatsoever they call for. ⁵⁸ “Peace!” a word from a Lord most Merciful. ⁵⁹ Stand apart this Day, O guilty ones! ⁶⁰ Did I not enjoin upon you, O Children of Adam, that you not worship Satan—truly he is a manifest enemy unto you— ⁶¹ and that you worship Me? This is a straight path.

62 For indeed he has led many among you astray. Did you
 not understand? 63 This is the Hell that you were
 promised. 64 Burn therein today for having disbelieved! 65
 On that Day We shall seal their mouths. Their hands will
 speak to Us, and their feet will bear witness to that which
 they used to earn. 66 And had We willed, We would have
 blotted out their eyes. Then they would race to the path; yet
 how would they see? 67 And had We willed, We would
 have transformed them in their places. Then they could
 neither advance nor go back. 68 And whomsoever We give
 long life, We cause him to regress in creation. Do they not
 understand? 69 And We have not taught him poetry; nor
 would it befit him. It is but a reminder and a clear Quran,
 70 to warn whomsoever is alive, and so that the Word may
 come due for the disbelievers. 71 Have they not considered
 that among that which Our Hands have wrought We created
 cattle for them, and that they are their masters, 72 and that
 We have subdued these for them, such that some are a
 mount for them and of some they eat? 73 And they have
 benefits and drinks therein. Will they not then give thanks?
 74 Yet they have taken gods other than God, that perhaps
 they might be helped. 75 They cannot help them, though
 they be a host made ready for them. 76 So let not their
 speech grieve thee. Truly We know what they hide and
 what they disclose. 77 Has not man seen that We created
 him from a drop, and behold, he is a manifest adversary. 78
 And he has set forth for Us a parable and forgotten his own
 creation, saying, "Who revives these bones, decayed as they
 are?" 79 Say, "He will revive them Who brought them forth

the first time, and He knows every creation, 80 Who made for you fire from the green tree, and, behold, you kindle from it.” 81 Is not He Who created the heavens and the earth able to create the like thereof? Yea, indeed, He is the knowing Creator. 82 His Command when He desires a thing is only to say to it, “Be!” and it is. 83 So glory be to Him in Whose Hand lies the dominion of all things, and unto Whom you shall be returned.

Commentary

1 *Yā. Sīn.*

1 The Arabic letters *yā* and *sīn* are among the separated letters (*al-muqattaʿāt*) that are found at the beginning of twenty-nine *sūrah*s and whose meaning is considered by most to be known only to God; see 2:1c. Some allow that *yā* *sīn* could be an abbreviation meaning “O human being” (Q). In this interpretation, the *yā* is the vocative “O,” used in many Quranic verses, and the *sīn* is an abbreviation for *unsayn*, the diminutive of *insān* (“human being”). In this context, the diminutive “O little human being” is a term of endearment interpreted as God’s address to the Prophet Muhammad. Others say that *Yā Sīn* is a name given to the Prophet by God whose exact meaning is unknown (Q). For this reason it is sometimes used in the Islamic world as the name for a male. °Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib is reported to have said, “I heard the Messenger of God say, ‘Verily God has named me by seven names in the Quran: Muhammad [3:144; 33:40; 47:2; 48:29], Aḥmad [61:6], Ṭā Hā [20:1], *Yā Sīn* [36:1], *thou enwrapped* [*al-Muzzammil*; 73:1], *thou who art covered* [*al-Mudaththir*; 74:1], and *servant of God* [°*Abd Allāh*; 72:19]” (IA, Q). Other commentators take *Yā Sīn* to be a name of the Quran itself, while al-Qushayrī identifies it with the Day of the Covenant (*yawm al-mīthāq*), when God made a covenant with all the children of Adam (see 7:172c).

2 By the Wise Quran,

2 *Ḥakīm*, here translated *Wise*, can also mean “determined” or “made firm” (*muḥkam*), as in 11:1, where the Quran is described as *a Book whose signs have been determined* (*uḥkimat*; Q). According to Ibn Kathīr, its being determined (*muḥkam*) indicates that *falsehood comes not upon it from before it or from behind it* (41:42). *Ḥakīm* could also mean something that makes wise (*muḥkim*), indicating that the Quran teaches the truth. According to Ibn Kathīr, the use of *ḥakīm* here alludes to the Quran as a revealed book. The Quran is also described as *wise* in 10:1; 31:2; 43:3–4.

3 truly thou art among the message bearers,

4 upon a straight path,

3–4 These verses affirm the Prophet’s mission, thus supporting the interpretations that see *Yā Sīn* as a reference to the Prophet himself. For *straight path*, see 1:6c.

5 a revelation of the Mighty, the Merciful,

5 *Revelation* can be read as the object of an implied verb, meaning, “We revealed it as a revelation,” in which case it refers back to the *Wise Quran*, or it can be read in the nominative, meaning, “It is a revelation.” Most commentators say *revelation* in either reading refers to the Quran, although some say it refers to the Prophet (Q, R), in which case “it” in the elided phrase would be rendered “he.” Both interpretations are possible, as the Prophet is also said to be *sent down*, as in 65:10–11: *God has certainly sent down unto you a reminder: a Messenger reciting unto you the clear signs of God*. The juxtaposition of *Mighty* and *Merciful* here and in other verses (esp. throughout *Sūrah* 26) is seen as an allusion to God being both just and merciful, vengeful toward those who oppose Him and merciful toward those who obey Him.

6 that thou mayest warn a people whose fathers were not

warned; so they were heedless.

6 This verse is similar to 32:3, which states that the Quran was sent so that the Prophet might *warn a people to whom no warner has come before*. Regarding the absence of a previous Arabic revelation, 34:44 says of the Arabs, *We have not given them any books that they study; nor have We sent them a warner before*. Although the Arabs had been sent messengers before in the intervening generations from the time of Ishmael, who was both a prophet and the progenitor of the Arabs (as Isaac was of the Jews), the pure monotheism of Abraham had become lost, and from the point of view of the Arabs the religion of their fathers was pagan. Read in connection to the following verse and the context of the entire Quran, there is an ominous tone to this verse, for as other verses state, *Thy Lord never destroys towns until He sends a messenger to their mother city to recite unto them Our signs* (28:59), and *Never did We destroy a town save that it had warners* (26:208); see also 6:131; 10:13. Some propose that the verse should be read, “of that of which their fathers were warned.”

7 The Word has indeed come due for most of them, for they do not believe.

7 *The Word has indeed come due for most of them* translates *ḥaqqā al-qawlu ‘alā aktharihim*, which could also be translated, “the Word has indeed proved true against most of them.” The *Word* most likely refers to *the Word of punishment* (39:71; see also 22:18); it indicates that they will be in Hell, for as 40:6 states, *Likewise did the Word of thy Lord come due for those who disbelieve, that they are the inhabitants of the Fire*. This is because *they do not believe* in the warning referred to in v. 6, in the *Wise Quran* (v. 2), or that the Prophet Muhammad is *among the message bearers* (v. 3). The *Word* that comes due or proves true is seen by some as God’s threat in 32:13: *But the Word from Me comes due: “I shall surely fill Hell with jinn and men all together!”* Similar threats occur in 11:119 and 38:84–5. The *Word* could also be a reference to the Quran itself, for it is thought that when one turns away from revelation, it proves one’s true nature. In this regard, a famous *ḥadīth* states, “The Quran is a proof, either for you or against you.”

⑧ Truly We have put shackles upon their necks, and they are up to their chins, so that they are forced up.

8 The disbelievers' hands are bound to their necks with *shackles*, which translates *aghlāl*, specifically indicating iron shackles that bind the hands in cuffs that are attached to an iron ring around the neck. *They* is thus taken by most to indicate the hands that are bound to their necks (Q, Ṭs) and is seen as related to 17:29, *And let not thine hand be shackled to thy neck* (IK, Q, Ṭ), which is a warning against miserliness. The binding of their hands to their necks is taken by some to indicate their state on the Day of Resurrection (Ṭs) or in the Hereafter, as in 40:71: *They will be dragged, with shackles and chains around their necks* (Q). Others say it refers to the state of the idolaters in this life, meaning that those who turn away from the Prophet's call are like those whose hands are shackled to their necks so that they cannot extend them toward what is good (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs). In this interpretation their chins being *forced up* alludes to their arrogance in the face of the truth (Q).

⑨ And We placed a barrier before them and a barrier behind them and veiled them; so they see not.

9 This verse is interpreted to mean, "We have placed a barrier between them (the disbelievers) and the truth" or "We have blinded them to the truth" (IK), in light of 10:96–97: *Truly those for whom the Word of thy Lord has come due will not believe, though every sign should come unto them, till they see the painful punishment*. Understood in this way, it means that they cannot benefit from guidance, no matter what the Prophet does. Thus God counsels the Prophet in v. 76, *Let not their speech grieve thee*. Some say the *barrier before them* refers to their being deluded in the life of this world and the *barrier behind them* refers to their denying the life of the Hereafter (Q). Others maintain that vv. 8–9 refer to a specific incident in which a leader from the tribe of Quraysh saw the Prophet praying and went to smash his head with a rock; as he moved his hand forward to cast the rock, his hand returned to his neck and the rock was stuck in it (Q, Ṭs). Then another man took the rock with the same purpose, but when he did so, he could hear the Prophet but not see him. When a third man went to smash the Prophet's head, he saw before him a tremendous camel that was about to swallow him (Q). These particular examples of the incident to which this verse may refer are not, however, taken to contravene the more general implications, but rather to

be manifestations of particular forms of denial and disbelief represented by the acts described.

⑩ It is the same for them whether thou warnest them or warnest them not; they do not believe.

⑪ Thou only warnest whomsoever follows the Reminder and fears the Compassionate unseen. So give such a one glad tidings of forgiveness and a generous reward.

10–11 Cf. 2:6. The last phrase of v. 10 could also be read, “they will not believe.” For similar verses where warnings and guidance are of no avail to disbelievers, see 7:193; 26:136; 63:6. These verses remind the Prophet that he cannot guide those whom God has not guided and should simply leave them to God: *Truly God leads astray whomsoever He will and guides whomsoever He will; so let not thy soul be expended in regrets over them. Truly God knows that which they do* (35:8). *The Reminder* is a reference to the Quran itself (IK, Q, R, T); for the Quran as *Reminder*, see 36:69c. *Fears the Compassionate unseen* (cf. 50:33) can be interpreted as a reference to worshipping God while God remains unseen or to worshipping God in seclusion (Q, T_s). *A generous reward* here means Paradise or *the Garden*. See also 67:12c.

⑫ Truly We give life to the dead and record that which they have sent forth and that which they have left behind. And We have counted all things in a clear registry.

12 This verse follows upon the counsel to the Prophet to deliver the warning and leave the disbelievers to their own devices, since the price of their wrongdoing will come due upon the Resurrection. *We give life to the dead* can be seen as a reference to the Resurrection; to God’s bringing the earth back to life, as in 57:17: *Know that God revives the earth after its death* (IK); to bringing people from idolatry to faith (Z); or to the revivification, through knowledge and truth, of hearts made dead through heedlessness and ignorance (Aj, IK). *That which they have sent*

forth refers to the deeds that will testify for or against them in the Hereafter; see 5:80; 75:13c; 82:5c. Here, *that which they have left behind* literally means “their footsteps” or “their traces.” It is said to refer to one of the tribes of Madinah, the Banū Salimah, who were settled far from the Prophet’s mosque and desired to relocate closer to it. This verse was then revealed. So the Prophet said to them, “Your footprints are recorded [i.e., you receive reward for walking to the mosque]. Why then do you want to move?” (IK, Q, Ṭ, W). More broadly, it is understood as a reference to the traces of good deeds that one leaves behind (Aj, Ṭ). As a well-known *ḥadīth* states, “When the son of Adam dies, all his deeds come to an end except three: knowledge that is beneficial, a righteous child who prays for him, or ongoing charity that he leaves behind” (IK); see 75:13c. *And We have counted all things in a clear registry (imām)* is taken by some to allude to the inscription of all things from the beginning of time to its end on the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22; Aj, Ṭb, Ṭs), which is the *imām* (“leader”) of all other books (Aj) and which is said to comprise all of God’s Decrees (Ṭb, Ṭs); for the inscription of God’s Decrees, see 68:1c. Others say *imām* refers to the book or “registry” in which all human actions are recorded (Aj, IK, Q, Ṭs); see 17:71c; 18:49c. This is also one of the central verses cited by Shiite theologians as Quranic support for the Shiite understanding of Divinely ordained leadership in the form of the *imamate* after the death of the Prophet. In this vein al-Qummī relates a saying from °Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib: “I, by God, am the *clear imām*; I clarify truth from falsehood. I inherited it from the Messenger of God” (Qm, Ṭb). Shiite sources also relate that the Prophet said regarding °Alī, “He is the Imam in whom God records the knowledge of all things” (Qm, Ṭb).

13 And set forth for them as a parable the people of the town, when the message bearers came unto it.

14 When We sent two unto them, they denied them. So We strengthened them with a third, and they said, “Verily, we have been sent unto you!”

13–14 The Prophet is here commanded to provide the Quraysh with an example of the fate that befell those who treated previous *message bearers* as they were treating him. The first phrase of v. 13 could also be rendered, “Set forth for them a parable, the people of the town.” Most identify the town as Antioch (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs), though this identification cannot be verified (IK). Most commentators view

the *message bearers* (*mursalīn*, rather than *rusul*, “messengers”) as apostles sent to the town by Jesus. In this interpretation, that God is said to have sent them indicates that Jesus was commanded by God to send them (Q, Ṭs). After the first two were sent, the people of the town beat and imprisoned them (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs). Some say this punishment was ordered by the king (Aj), after which a third *message bearer*, whom some identify as Jonas, was sent.

According to another opinion, the *message bearers* are prophets (Aj, Ṭs) rather than apostles sent by a prophet. This interpretation seems more likely, as the Prophet Muhammad is referred to as a *mursal* (*message bearer*) in v. 3 and in 2:252, and other prophets are referred to as *mursalūn* (*message bearers*) in over a dozen verses. *We have been sent unto you* here and in v. 16 could also be rendered, “we are message bearers unto you.”

①5 They said, “You are but human beings like us, and the Compassionate has not sent down anything. You are but lying.”

15 In other passages, many communities reject prophets because they are human, claiming that if God had wanted to send a message, He would have chosen an angel as His message bearer or messenger. As 17:94 states, *And naught hindered men from believing when guidance came unto them, save that they said, “Has God sent a human being as a messenger?”* (see also 6:8–9, 50; 11:12; 14:10; 23:33; 41:14; 64:6). In other verses, this same objection is attributed to those who opposed the Prophet Muhammad: *And they say, “What ails this Messenger, who eats food and walks in the markets? Why is there not an angel sent down unto him to be a warner with him?”* (25:7).

①6 They said, “Our Lord knows. Verily we have indeed been sent unto you!

16 The message bearers’ second statement of their mission is more emphatic than the first (v. 14), because it is a reaffirmation in the face of denial and rejection.

①⑦ And naught is incumbent upon us save the clear proclamation.”

17 Like the Prophet Muhammad, the *message bearers* are only instructed to deliver the message and to guide those who heed it; they are not responsible for those who deny it; see 36:10–11c. That the prophets are only responsible for delivering the message is emphasized in many passages; see, e.g., 3:20; 5:92, 99; 13:40; 16:35, 82; 24:54; 29:18; 42:48; 64:12.

①⑧ They said, “Truly we augur ill of you. If you cease not, we shall certainly stone you, and a painful punishment will certainly befall you from us.”

18 This is the response of the disbelievers to the *message bearers*, meaning, “We see an ill omen or foretell a punishment that will befall you.”

①⑨ They said, “Your auguring ill is upon yourselves though you have been reminded? Nay, you are a prodigal people!”

19 The response from the *message bearers* to the disbelievers is that the punishment the disbelievers foretell will befall them because of their disbelief. In the most widespread reading of this verse, *though you are reminded (in dhukkirtum)* is read *a in dukkirtum*, meaning, “Even if you are reminded . . .” In this reading, the ellipsis indicates a rhetorical elision that constitutes the object of the interrogative and serves as a rebuke, as if to say, “Do you augur ill and disbelieve, even when you have been reminded?” In another canonical reading, *a in dhukkirtum* is read *ayna dhukkirtum*, meaning, “now that you have been reminded” (*al-an dhukkirtum*; Q, Ṭ). Another reading is *an dhukkirtum*, meaning, “because you have been reminded” (Z). Cf. 17:13: *And [for] every man We have fastened his omen upon his neck, and We shall bring it forth for him on the Day of Resurrection*; see also 7:131; 27:47. That the disbelievers’ auguring ill rebounds upon them indicates the “reflexive” nature of good and evil deeds, which is emphasized throughout the Quran. For example, if one spends in charity, one spends it for oneself, as in 2:272: *Whatever good you spend, it is for yourselves, when*

you spend only seeking the Face of God. Conversely, whosoever is miserly is only miserly unto himself (47:38); if one tries to deceive, one only deceives oneself (2:9); if one tries to lead astray, one only goes astray (3:69; 4:113); and if some devise a plot against God and His Messenger, God will devise a plot against them (52:42); see 4:111c. For the meaning of *prodigal people*, see 10:12c.

20 And from the outskirts of the city, a man came running. He said, “O my people! Follow the message bearers!

20 The *man* in this verse is usually identified by the name Ḥabīb al-Najjār. Some claim that he worshipped God in seclusion, and when the news of the *message bearers* came, he proclaimed his faith (Aj). Others attribute a saying to the Prophet: “The foremost among the people are three who did not disbelieve in God for the blinking of an eye: ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the companion of *Yā Sīn*, and the believer among the people of Pharaoh [see 40:28–29]. They are the truthful (*ṣiddīq*)” (Sy, Th, Ṭs). Another interpretation says that Ḥabīb al-Najjār followed the first two *message bearers* after they healed his son (Aj, Q).

21 Follow those who ask not of you any reward and who are guided.

21 A mark of prophethood is to ask for nothing from the people, except that they follow the message the prophets are sent to deliver. As Noah says, *And if you turn your backs, I have not asked of you any reward. My reward lies only with God, and I am commanded to be among those who submit* (10:72). Thus the Prophet Muhammad is commanded in 6:90; 38:86; and 42:23, *Say, “I ask not of you any reward for it”* (see also 26:109, 127, 145, 164, 180).

22 Why should I not worship Him who originated me, and unto Whom you will be returned?

22 *Originated me* translates *faṭaranī*, which derives from the same root as

fiṭrah, or *primordial nature*, alluded to in 30:30: *Set thy face to religion as a ḥanīf, in the primordial nature from God upon which He originated mankind—there is no altering the creation of God; that is the upright religion, but most of mankind know not.* Read in light of 30:30 and 51:56, *And I did not create jinn and mankind, save to worship Me*, this verse implies that the worship of God is central to the primordial nature with which human beings were created.

23 Shall I take gods apart from Him? If the Compassionate desired harm for me, their intercession would avail me naught, nor would they save me.

23 The question means, “Shall I take gods other than God, worship them, and leave the worship of the One Who is worthy of worship?” (Sh). The Quran indicates that angels and prophets will be able to intercede on the Day of Judgment, but that *intercession* is entirely by the Will of God. As 20:109 states, *On that Day intercession will be of no benefit, save [that of] those whom the Compassionate has granted leave and with whose word He is content.* Thus 2: 255 asks rhetorically, *Who is there who may intercede with Him save by His Leave?* For intercession, see 2:48c; 2:255c.

24 Truly would I then be in manifest error.

24 *Manifest error* (*ḍalāl mubīn*) is employed throughout the Quran to indicate one whose wrongdoing makes him stray from the path of truth (Ṭ). It can also be understood to mean “error that makes manifest” or “makes clear.” It is also read by some as *ḍalāl mubayyan* (Bḍ), which would then indicate “error that has been made manifest” or “made clear.”

25 Truly I believe in your Lord, so listen to me.”

25 According to some, *so listen to me* is a call to the people to follow God and His *message bearers*; others say it is a call to the *message bearers*, asking

them to bear witness for the man before God (IK).

②⑥ It was said unto him, “Enter the Garden!” He said, “Would that my people knew

26 Some say that after his declaration to the people (v. 25), the man was stoned and killed (Aj, IK, Ṭs). Then he was told by God, or by the angels and the righteous, *Enter the Garden!* (Aj, R). Others maintain that God took him alive to heaven.

②⑦ how my Lord forgave me and placed me among the honored.”

27 This verse could also mean “for what my Lord forgave me and that He placed me among the honored” (Ṭs), which may imply the bad deeds that were forgiven or the good deed(s) for which God forgave him his sins. According to Qatādah (d. 117/726), one of the foremost commentators from the third generation of Muslim scholars, the people began to stone him while he was praying for God to guide them, and as they continued to stone him, he continued to pray for them, even while suffering a gruesome death at their hands (IK).

②⑧ And after him We did not send down a host from Heaven against his people; nor would We send down.

28 This verse is taken by many as a reference to the punishment that God inflicted upon his people for rejecting the *message bearers* and for killing (or seeking to kill) Ḥabīb al-Najjār, in which case it indicates that God wiped them out with *a single cry* (v. 29) rather than sending angels against them (IK, Q). Others say that *a host from Heaven* refers to the angels of revelation (Ṭs), meaning that God did not send another revelation after having sent *the message bearers* (Ṭ). The second interpretation is more consistent with this story in its function as a warning to the Quraysh, for it implies that accepting the revelation sent to the Prophet

Muhammad is their only opportunity and they will not receive another. The last phrase could also be rendered “nor what We used to send down” (Ka, Ṭs).

29 It was but a single cry. Then, behold, they were extinguished.

29 This verse indicates that the destruction for having disbelieved was instant.

30 Alas for the servants! Never did a messenger come unto them, but that they mocked him.

30 Cf. 15:11. *Alas for the servants!* is interpreted by most to indicate amazement at the extreme injustice disbelievers do to themselves and the punishment they will suffer (IK, Q). Others take *servants* as a reference to the prophets, in which case the verse expresses God’s lament for the hardships they endure when mocked by disbelievers (Q, Ṭs).

31 Have they not considered how many generations before them We destroyed, such that they return not unto them?

31 *They* and *them* can be read as a reference to the former peoples who were destroyed, to the inhabitants of Makkah who deny the prophethood of the Prophet Muhammad, or to both.

32 Each of them shall be a group arraigned before Us.

32 This verse and v. 53 indicate that all human beings, believers and disbelievers alike, will be *arraigned* on the Day of Judgment. But other verses

indicate that only the disbelievers will be *arraigned unto the punishment* (30:16; 34:38). It appears that these verses indicate two arraignments: the first is the gathering of all human beings referred to here and in v. 53; the second, which comes after the gathering of all human beings, is the Reckoning the disbelievers will endure before they are cast into Hell.

33 A sign unto them is the dead earth: We revive it and bring forth grain therefrom, that they may eat thereof.

34 And We place gardens of date palms and grapevines therein and make springs flow forth,

33–34 These verses mark the beginning of what can be seen as the second section of the *sūrah*. They employ a common Quranic rhetorical device by which the wonders of creation are cited as signs of God’s Oneness, Perfection, Wisdom, and Omnipotence; see 3:190–91c; 41:53c. The phrase *a sign unto them* can have three meanings: it is something to be contemplated; it is a blessing upon human beings; or it is a warning to human beings (Q). Here God’s ability to revive the earth is cited as evidence of His ability to resurrect (cf. 7:57; 16:65; 22:5; 29:63; 30:19, 24, 50; 35:9; 41:31, 39; 43:11; 45:5; 50:9–11). As in v. 12, it can also be seen as an allusion to the revivification, through faith and knowledge, of a heart that has been hardened. *Gardens of date palms and grapevines* (cf. 2:266; 23:19) are specified because they were thought by Arabs to be the best of fruits; they can thus be seen as an allusion to all forms of plant life by which people are nourished (Q).

35 that they may eat of its fruit and of that which their hands have worked. Will they not then give thanks?

35 *Its fruit* refers to the fruit produced by plants through the water from the springs (Q). Or it could be rendered “His fruit,” meaning the fruit that God has produced (Aj, IK). As translated, the verse can be read as a positive affirmation of eating the fruits of one’s own labor, for as a *ḥadīth* says, “No one eats any food that is better than that from the work of his own hand.” *That which their hands have worked* could also be rendered “though their hands did not make it” (IK, Q, R, Ṭ), a

reference to the fact that all fruits are ultimately produced by God (cf. 27:60; 56:64). People's lack of gratitude is a common Quranic theme, as in 2:243: *Truly God is Possessed of Bounty for mankind, but most of mankind do not give thanks* (cf. 10:60; 12:38; 22:66; 25:50; 40:61).

36 Glory be unto Him, Who has created the pairs, all of them, from what the earth makes grow, and from themselves, and from what they know not.

36 *Glory be* indicates both God's being beyond all that the idolaters associate with Him and amazement at what they say. *Pairs* translates *azwāj*, which can also mean "kinds" in the sense of species, thus indicating the many different kinds of things that God has created (Q). It can also be seen as a reference to the creation of all things in pairs, as in 51:49: *And of all things We created pairs, that haply you may remember* (IK). *From themselves* could also mean "from their souls," in which case it can be seen as a reference to the male and female, as in 53:45, *And that He creates the two (zawjayn)—male and female*, which are said to be *mates (azwāj)* created *from a single soul* (4:1; 6:98; 7:189; 39:6). *From what they know not* can be seen as an allusion to the unseen realm or to the many things in the created world that humans have not experienced, as in 16:8: *And He creates that which you know not*.

37 And a sign unto them is the night: We strip the day therefrom, and behold, they are in darkness.

37 The alternation of night and day are cited throughout the Quran as a sign of God's Power and Perfection, as are the sun and the moon. As 39:5 says, *He rolls the night up into the day and rolls the day up into the night, and He made the sun and the moon subservient, each running for a term appointed*. For the relationship between night and day, see 10:6c; 17:12c. *Strip* translates *naslakha*, which originally means to remove the skin from an animal.

38 And the sun runs to a dwelling place of its own. That is the decree of the Mighty, the Knowing.

38 It is reported that a Companion of the Prophet, Abū Dharr, said, “The Prophet asked me at sunset, ‘Do you know where the sun goes [when it sets]?’ I replied, ‘God and His Messenger know best.’ He said, ‘It travels till it prostrates itself underneath the Throne and asks permission to rise again, and it is permitted. Then it is about to prostrate itself, but its prostration will not be accepted, and it will ask permission to go on its course, but it will not be permitted and will instead be ordered to return whence it has come, and so it will rise in the west’” (IK). In light of this account, the verse alludes to the sun’s final *dwelling place* on the Day of Judgment. Others see the verse as a reference to the sun following its winter and summer orbits until each solstice, when it reaches its northernmost or southernmost extreme before reversing direction (IK). *Dwelling place* then indicates the solstice. In this interpretation it bears a close resemblance to the word “solstice,” which derives from the Latin *solstitium*, meaning “sun-stopping.” Another reading, “And the sun runs; it has no dwelling place (*lā mustaqarra lahā*),” was reportedly preferred by some of the Prophet’s Companions, such as the famous Quran scholars Ibn Mas‘ūd and Ibn ‘Abbās (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs).

39 And for the moon, We have decreed mansions, till it returns like an old palm stalk.

39 This verse is a reference to the waxing and waning of the moon through the twenty-eight stations (*manāzil*) of a single lunar month (Q). *Like an old palm stalk* is a reference to the appearance of what remains from a date cluster after its fruit has been removed and it has withered, when it resembles the thin crescent moon in shape, width, and color (Q, Z).

40 It befits not the sun to overtake the moon, nor the night to outstrip the day. Each glides in an orbit.

40 Cf. 21:33. The sun, moon, and other celestial bodies move in separate measurable orbits that are essential for navigating space and calculating time;

without them human beings would lose their bearings and not be able to continue their lives on earth; more specifically, they would not be able to perform the religious rites required of them. In this way they can be seen as manifestations of God's Guidance and Mercy. As 10:5 states, *He it is Who made the sun a radiance, and the moon a light, and determined for it stations, that you might know the number of years and the reckoning [of time]* (see also 17:12). In 2:189 the stations of the moon are specifically linked to performing the pilgrimage: *They ask thee about the new moons. Say, "They are markers of time for mankind and for the ḥajj."* In this way, the sun and the moon serve humanity in this life, though on the Day of Judgment *the sun and the moon are brought together* (75:9).

④① And a sign unto them is that We carried their progeny in the full-laden Ark.

41 According to most commentators, this verse refers to Noah's Ark, by which God preserved one generation of humanity and thereby all of humanity (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). Others interpret it as a reference to past generations being carried in the wombs of women, which are here likened to the *full-laden Ark* (Q, Z).

④② And We created for them the like thereof upon which they ride.

42 This verse is taken by many as a reference to other ships that are similar to Noah's Ark (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z), though many understand it as a reference to camels, which were known as "the ships of the desert" (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). Others say that it is a reference to all beasts of burden (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs).

④③ And if We will, We drown them, such that they would have none to call upon and would not be saved,

43 This verse indicates that God could drown people at any moment (IK). In this sense it is a reminder that one's life is always in God's Hands, as in other

passages that speak of those who remember God when they are on the verge of drowning, yet forget Him when danger is no longer imminent; see 10:22–23; 17:66–67. They *would have none to call upon* for help or protection. This phrase could also be rendered, “None would call upon them,” indicating that they are completely forgotten. This latter interpretation is supported by several verses that speak of the disbelievers being forgotten (e.g., 7:51; 9:67; 20:126; 32:14; 45:34; 59:19).

④ save as a mercy from Us and an enjoyment for a while.

44 *For a while* indicates that God will postpone the disbelievers’ punishment, thus giving them time until the moment of their death to repent or to prove their true nature, as in 3:178: *And let not those who disbelieve suppose that the respite We grant them is good for them. We only grant them respite that they may increase in sin, and theirs shall be a humiliating punishment.* In this context, *enjoyment for a while* indicates the ephemeral delights of this world, which are *naught but the enjoyment of delusion* (3:185; 57:20) and stand in stark contrast to the rewards of the next life (see 3:14; 4:77; 9:38; 13:26; 20:131; 28:60; 40:39; 42:36).

④ And when it is said unto them, “Be mindful of that which is before you and of that which is behind you, that haply you may receive mercy.”

45 *That which is before you* can be taken as a reference to the Hereafter, which is to come and for which one must work, and *that which is behind you* as a reference to this world, by which one should not be deluded (Q, Ṭs). According to others, the first phrase refers to what is apparent, and the second to what is hidden (Q), as in 34:9: *Have they not considered that which is before them and that which is behind them of the sky and the earth? If We will, We cause the earth to engulf them or fragments from the sky to fall upon them. Truly in that is a sign for every penitent servant.* According to Mujāhid and Ibn‘Abbās, the former refers to the sins one has committed (IK, Q), and the latter to the sins one will commit (Q), meaning that one should be mindful of God so as to avoid sin in the future and repent for the sins of the past (Ṭs). “They turn away from it” could be

placed at the end of the verse as an implied response to the conditional phrase *when is it said unto them* (Q, Ṭs).

④⑥ Never did a sign from among the signs of their Lord come unto them but that they turned away from it.

46 Cf. 6:4. This verse can be understood as a reference to the signs mentioned in the preceding verses, to the whole of the created order, to the whole of revelation, or to all three, as all are said to be *signs for those who possess intellect* (3:190). Thus 18:57 says, *And who does greater wrong than one who has been reminded of the signs of his Lord, then turns away from them and forgets that which his hands have sent forth? Surely We have placed coverings over their hearts, such that they understand not, and in their ears a deafness. Even if thou callest them to guidance, they will never be rightly guided* (see also 32:22). It is not that these people cannot see the signs, but that God veils them due to their arrogance and disbelief, as in 7:146: *I shall turn away from My signs those who wax arrogant upon the earth without right. Even if they were to see every sign, they would not believe in them.*

④⑦ And when it is said unto them, “Spend of that wherewith God has provided you,” those who disbelieve say to those who believe, “Are we to feed one whom, if God willed, He would feed him? You are in naught but manifest error.”

47 Although there are several different accounts identifying the subject of this verse, they all agree that it responds to those who scoffed at the injunction to *spend in the way of God*—to feed the poor—found throughout the Quran. It is said that some disbelievers among the Quraysh said to Abū Bakr, who used to feed the destitute among the Muslims from his own wealth, “O Abū Bakr, do you claim that God is able to feed these people?” He replied, “Yes.” To which they replied, “So why is it that he does not feed them?” He said, “Some people are tried with poverty, others with wealth. The poor are commanded to be patient, and the wealthy are commanded to give.” So they replied, “O Abū Bakr, surely you are in

error. Do you claim that God is able to feed these people, yet He does not feed them, then you feed them?” Then this verse was revealed, as were 92:5–6 (Q).

④⑧ And they say, “When will this promise come to pass, if you are truthful?”

48 Cf. 10:48; 21:38; 27:71; 34:29; 67:25. The disbelievers are said to have mocked the Prophet for not knowing exactly when the Hour and the Day of Resurrection, about which he warned them, would come to pass, for they expected a prophet to be able to see the future. In response to this expectation, 7:187 states: *They question thee about the Hour, when it will set in. Say, “Knowledge thereof lies only with my Lord. None save He shall manifest it at its proper time. Heavy shall it weigh upon the heavens and the earth. It shall not come upon you but suddenly.” They question thee as if thou knew it well. Say, “Knowledge thereof lies only with God, but most of mankind know not.”* According to some, the disbelievers referred to the Resurrection as *this promise*, because they thought they would be the ones to be rewarded with good. Thus Ibn Kathīr glosses this verse with 42:18: *Those who believe not in it seek to hasten it.*

④⑨ They await naught but a single cry that will seize them while they dispute among themselves,

49 *A single cry* refers to the first blast of Seraphiel’s trumpet (see 39:68c), which will level all that is on the earth. It will come while they are oblivious to it, disputing, bargaining, eating and drinking, and engaging in other affairs of the world.

⑤⑩ and then they can make no bequest, nor return to their people.

50 The Hour will come upon people in an instant, so that they cannot attend to any affairs of this world, thus indicating that one should be ready for death at every

moment. *Make no bequest* could also mean, “Do not exhort or enjoin” or “Give no advice,” which would then imply that there must be no delay in following the command to *exhort one another to truth, and exhort one another to patience* (103:3).

51 And the trumpet will be blown. Then, behold, they will rush forth from their graves unto their Lord.

51 The second blast from Seraphiel’s trumpet will herald the Resurrection. Between the two blasts there is said to be an interval of forty years (Āl, IK, Q, T); see also 70:43. For the relation between the two cries or blasts, see 39:68–70.

52 They will say, “Oh, woe unto us! Who has raised us from our place of sleep?” “This is that which the Compassionate did promise; and the message bearers spoke true.”

52 In an alternate reading, *Oh, woe unto us! Who has raised us* (*waylanā man ba^cathanā*) is understood to mean, “Oh, woe unto us for our having been raised” (*waylanā min ba^cthinā*; Āl, Q). *From our place of sleep* could also be read “from our sleep” (Āl). The last sentence of the verse is an answer to the question posed by the disbelievers in v. 48, as if to say that it does not matter when the promise will come to pass, only that people must be prepared for it. It can be seen as a continuation of what the disbelievers say to themselves, or as words of the angels addressed to them (IK).

53 There shall be but a single cry. Then, behold, they will all be arraigned before Us!

53 Cf. 79:13–14; that it is *but a single cry* is said to imply that *the matter of the Hour is as the blinking of an eye, or nearer still* (16:77). For *arraigned*, see

54 This day no soul will be wronged in any way, and you will not be recompensed, save for that which you used to do.

54 This verse does not mean that none shall be punished; rather, it indicates that the punishment the disbelievers receive is because they have wronged themselves by having disbelieved and turned away from God's signs. This idea is mentioned throughout the Quran, as in 3:117: *God wrongs them not, but themselves do they wrong*; and 10:44: *Truly God does not wrong human beings in the least, but rather human beings wrong themselves*. In this respect, even those who receive the worst of punishments are not wronged in the sense of having been treated unjustly; rather, *Judgment will be made between them in truth, and they shall not be wronged* (39:69); see also 45:22; 46:19.

55 Truly the inhabitants of the Garden on that Day will be busy rejoicing,

55 This verse implies that the *inhabitants of the Garden* are busy with the delights of Paradise and spiritual realities (IK, Q) rather than preoccupied by the concerns of this world. According to some, those in different levels of Paradise are occupied with different delights (Q), the highest of which involves being absorbed in the vision of God (R).

56 they and their spouses reclining upon couches in the shade.

56 Cf. 43:70. Those in Paradise are *reclining upon couches*, indicating that they are content and at peace (R on 18:31; 55:54). Some also view the couches as thrones, indicating that they have attained a high rank. Believers are to be rewarded with *spouses made pure* (2:25; 3:15; 4:57), which can be understood as an allusion

to spiritual beings particular to Paradise, spouses of this world who have also attained to Paradise, or both. For the connotations of the Quranic use of *shade*, see 56:30c.

57 Therein they have fruit and whatsoever they call for.

57 According to several *ahādīth*, the fruits of Paradise are far superior to those of this world. There are several accounts in which the Prophet is said to have stretched forth his hand as if reaching for something and, when asked about it, responded, “I was shown the Garden and wanted to have a bunch of fruit from it. Had I taken it, you would have eaten from it as long as the world remains.” The inhabitants of Paradise will receive *whatsoever they call for* (cf. 41:31; 44:55), will, or desire (see 16:31; 25:16; 39:34; 41:31; 42:22; 43:71; 50:35; 52:22; 56:20–24; 77:41–44), whereas for the disbelievers *a barrier is set between them and that which they desire* (34:54).

58 “Peace!” a word from a Lord most Merciful.

58 According to a saying attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās, “God Himself is peace upon the people of the Garden” (IK), perhaps referring to Peace (*al-Salām*) as one of the Names of God. This is similar to 33:44: *Their greeting on the day they meet Him will be “Peace”* (IK). According to a *ḥadīth*, “While the people of the Garden are in their bliss, a light shines upon them. Then they lift their heads, and it is God beholding them from above. Then He says, ‘Peace be upon you, O people of the Garden.’ And that is [the meaning of] His saying, ‘*Peace!*’ a word from a Lord most Merciful. So He looks at them and they look at Him, and they are not distracted by anything from that bliss so long as they are looking upon Him, until He is unveiled to them and His Light and His Blessing remain upon them in their abodes” (IK, Q).

59 Stand apart this Day, O guilty ones!

59 This verse is an allusion to the separation of believers and disbelievers on

the Day of Judgment, which because of this separation is also referred to as *the Day of Division* (37:21; 44:40; 77:13–14, 38; 78:17; see also 10:28; 30:14).

60 Did I not enjoin upon you, O Children of Adam, that you not worship Satan—truly he is a manifest enemy unto you—

61 and that you worship Me? This is a straight path.

60–61 *Enjoin* translates *a‘had*, which is from the same root as *‘ahd*, meaning “vow,” “pact,” or “covenant.” In this sense it relates to the covenant that all human beings made with God before coming into this world, for in acknowledging that God is their Lord, they acknowledge that only He is worthy of worship; see 7:172c and the essay “The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions.” For references to Satan as a *manifest enemy*, also see 2:168; 2:208; 6:142; 7:22; 12:5; 17:53; 28:15; 43:62. For *straight path*, see 1:6c.

62 For indeed he has led many among you astray. Did you not understand?

62 This verse asks, “Did you not understand the fundamental difference between worshipping God and worshipping Satan?” (IK).

63 This is the Hell that you were promised.

64 Burn therein today for having disbelieved!

63–64 These verses say essentially, “This is the Fire the prophets warned you about, but you denied, so *taste the punishment of the Fire that you used to deny!*” (32:20; 34:42).

65 On that Day We shall seal their mouths. Their hands will speak to Us, and their feet will bear witness to that which they used to earn.

65 On the Day of Judgment people will no longer be able to make excuses and hide their sins with lies and duplicity. *Hands* and *feet* are also spoken of in 24:24 as testifying on the Day of Judgment, but there tongues are mentioned as well. According to 41:20, *their ears, their eyes, and their skins will bear witness against them for that which they used to do*. For a more extensive account of the manner in which one's members and faculties bear witness against one's soul, see 41:20–23. A famous *ḥadīth* reported by Anas ibn Mālik (d. ca. 91/709), who served the Prophet for many years, says, “We were with the Messenger of God when he laughed and said, ‘Do you know at what I am laughing?’ We replied, ‘God and His Messenger know best.’ He said, ‘At what a servant says to his Lord. He says, “O Lord will you not protect me from injustice (*ẓulm*)?” He replies, “But of course.” He says, “I will not accept any witness against myself but myself.” God replies, “Today your soul suffices as a witness against you, as do the noble scribes [i.e., the angels who have recorded your deeds; see 80:15–16c].” Then his mouth will be sealed and it will be said unto his limbs, “Speak!” So they will speak of his deeds. Then he will be permitted to speak and will say [to his limbs], “Away with you! Be doomed! It was on your behalf that I contended””” (IK, Q).

66 And had We willed, We would have blotted out their eyes. Then they would race to the path; yet how would they see?

66 *Blotted out their eyes* indicates that God will make them blind to guidance and the straight path (Q, T); cf. 4:47.

67 And had We willed, We would have transformed them in their places. Then they could neither advance nor go

back.

67 *In their places* could also mean “in their dwellings.” In either reading it indicates that no matter where they may be, God can alter people’s state instantly or destroy them if He wills. This is seen by some as an allusion to God punishing disbelievers by transforming them into animals such as monkeys and pigs (Ṭs). See also 4:47c.

68 And whomsoever We give long life, We cause him to regress in creation. Do they not understand?

68 *We cause him to regress in creation* refers to physical and mental decline in old age. Here it is meant as an argument, as if to say, “Does not the One who has power to do this have the power to resurrect you?” This is similar to 30:54: *God is He Who created you from weakness, then ordained strength after weakness, then ordained weakness and old age after strength.* See also 22:5, in which all of the stages of earthly life from conception to old age are cited as signs of God’s Power.

69 And We have not taught him poetry; nor would it befit him. It is but a reminder and a clear Quran,

69 This verse returns to the discussion of the nature of revelation from the beginning of the *sūrah*. As in 26:224–27, it alludes to those who accused the Prophet of being merely a poet. According to several accounts, the Prophet did not have any facility with poetry, either its rhyme or meter (IK, Q). Regarding the accusations that the Prophet had himself authored the Quran, 29:48 replies, *And thou didst not recite before this any Book; nor didst thou write it with thy right hand, for then those who make false claims would have doubted.* That the Quran is *but a reminder* is repeated in several verses (6:69, 90; 12:104; 38:87; 68:52; 74:31; 81:27). To remind is the function of all revelation; hence the Torah is called *a Reminder* (40:54) and the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) are referred to as *the people of the Reminder* (16:43; 21:7). In this vein, the Quran is presented as a continuation of the previous Reminders that clarifies what humans may have forgotten from them. Thus 16:44 addresses the Prophet Muhammad: *And We have*

sent down the Reminder unto thee that thou mightest clarify for mankind that which has been sent down unto them, that haply they may reflect.

70 to warn whomsoever is alive, and so that the Word may come due for the disbelievers.

70 From one perspective, *to warn whomsoever is alive* indicates all of humanity, as in 6:19: *And this Quran has been revealed unto me, that thereby I may warn you and whomsoever it may reach* (IK). From another perspective, it refers to those whose hearts are alive (Q) and thus able to hear the warning and *soften unto the remembrance of God* (39:23). For the meaning of *the Word* coming due, see 36:7c.

71 Have they not considered that among that which Our Hands have wrought We created cattle for them, and that they are their masters,

72 and that We have subdued these for them, such that some are a mount for them and of some they eat?

73 And they have benefits and drinks therein. Will they not then give thanks?

71–73 God created Adam as a *vicegerent upon the earth* (2:30) and has also appointed human beings as *vicegerents upon the earth* (6:165; 35:39); humanity is thus told, *Hast thou not considered that God has made whatsoever is on the earth subservient unto you?* (22:65). But this vicegerency requires that a human being remain a servant of God (*‘abd Allāh*), recognizing that all these benefits are from *that which God’s Hands have wrought*, and thus be thankful. For *vicegerent*, see 2:30c; 6:165c.

This passage is one of several to invoke the benefits of cattle—their usefulness for riding and transporting goods, for providing clothing and furnishings, food and drink, and even their beauty—as signs of God’s beneficence toward human beings;

see 6:142; 16:5, 66, 79; 23:21–22; 40:79; 43:12–13. For v. 73, cf. 16:66; 23:21. *Drinks* could also mean “drinking places.”

74 Yet they have taken gods other than God, that perhaps they might be helped.

74 This verse refers not only to polytheism and idolatry, but also to the fact that in not giving thanks to God and failing to acknowledge that He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, human beings arrogate powers to themselves and others that have in fact only been lent to them by God. In a *ḥadīth* the Prophet warns against the subtler forms of idolatry: “The most frightening thing that I fear for my community is associating others with God. I do not mean that they will worship the sun, the moon, or idols. I mean that they will perform works for other than God with a hidden desire.”

75 They cannot help them, though they be a host made ready for them.

75 *Though they be a host made ready for them* may be seen as a reference to the idolaters who are ready to fight on behalf of their gods, though their gods will not be able to fight for them (Ṭ). Some take it as a reference to the gods they worship becoming a host who will testify against them at the Reckoning (IK, Q, Ṭ), but this interpretation is problematic, because it implies that such gods are real beings. The verse also implies that the hidden desires for which deeds are performed are a host of difficulties that continue to create obstacles in this life until one achieves full sincerity and strives only for God.

76 So let not their speech grieve thee. Truly We know what they hide and what they disclose.

76 On the one hand, this verse counsels the Prophet that he should not be grieved by the disbelievers’ accusations or their plotting against him in secret,

since God will protect him in this world and they will receive the proper punishment for their deeds, either in this life or the next. On the other hand, it indicates that the Prophet must not be concerned with their continuing disbelief, for once he has warned them, he has fulfilled his responsibilities (see 3:176; 5:41, 68; 6:33; 10:65; 15:88; 16:127; 18:6; 26:3; 27:70; 31:23; 35:8). As 2:272 says in addressing the Prophet, *Thou art not tasked with their guidance, but God guides whomsoever He will* (also see 28:56).

77 Has not man seen that We created him from a drop, and behold, he is a manifest adversary.

77 Cf. 16:4; the creation of the human being from *a drop* (cf. 18:37; 22:5; 35:11; 40:67; 53:46; 75:37; 76:2; 80:19), meaning sperm or as phrased elsewhere *a draught of base fluid* (32:8; cf. 77:20), is cited in several verses as testimony to God's ability to resurrect human beings in the Hereafter; see commentary on 32:7–11. For the phases of gestation, see also 22:5; 23:14. An argument implied here and elsewhere is that in not recognizing the nature of one's own creation and that to which it bears witness, one is *a manifest adversary* to oneself.

78 And he has set forth for Us a parable and forgotten his own creation, saying, "Who revives these bones, decayed as they are?"

79 Say, "He will revive them Who brought them forth the first time, and He knows every creation,

78–79 These verses express a common objection to the Quranic understanding of bodily resurrection (cf. 13:5; 17:49, 98; 23:35, 82–83; 27:67; 37:16–17, 53; 50:3; 56:47–48; 79:11). Regarding this particular instance, it is reported that a man by the name of Ubayy ibn Khalaf brought some withered bones to the Prophet and crushed them into pieces saying, "Do you think that God can revive these [bones] after they have decayed and become rot?" The Prophet answered, "Yes, indeed! And He will also throw you into the Fire." Then these verses were revealed (IK, JJ, Q, W). *And forgotten his own creation* could also be

rendered “having forgotten his own creation.” For a passage similar to v. 79, see 17:51.

80 Who made for you fire from the green tree, and, behold, you kindle from it.”

80 Just as God makes fire emerge from wood that is wet and moist, or that had been wet and moist, so too can He make life emerge from bones that are dead and decayed (Q). According to Ibn^c Abbās, this refers to the Markh and^c Afār trees that grow in the Hijaz, in western Arabia; rubbing two green branches from these trees together is known to produce fire (IK).

81 Is not He Who created the heavens and the earth able to create the like thereof? Yea, indeed, He is the knowing Creator.

81 Several passages maintain that the first creation itself is clear evidence of God’s Ability to re-create and to resurrect: *He created you the first time and unto Him shall you be returned* (41:21); *As We began the first creation, so shall We bring it back—a promise binding upon Us. Surely We shall do it* (21:104); see also 50:1; 79:27.

82 His Command when He desires a thing is only to say to it, “Be!” and it is.

82 This verse is one of the most frequently cited verses of the Quran (cf. 2:117; 3:47; 6:73; 16:40; 19:35; 40:68), and points to the fact that God’s creative act is dependent upon no other and is *like the blinking of an eye* (54:50); see 2:117c. *Be! and it is* (*kun fa-yakūn*) has become an aphorism in Arabic and other Islamic languages that is used often in daily discourse.

83 So glory be to Him in Whose Hand lies the dominion of all things, and unto Whom you shall be returned.

83 *Glory be* indicates both God's being beyond all that the idolaters associate with Him and amazement at what they say. *Dominion* translates *malakūt*, which is closely related to *mulk*, meaning *sovereignty* and found in the recurring phrase *Unto God belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth* (e.g., 2:107; 3:189; 5:17, 18, 40, 120; 9:116). Both words derive from the same root, *m-l-k*, which in verbal form means "to possess," "to control," "to rule," or "to reign." According to some, *malakūt* and *mulk* have the same meaning (IK). According to others, *malakūt* refers to God's Lordship over the unseen realm, and *mulk* refers to His Lordship over the visible world. In some Islamic cosmologies, this world is designated by *mulk*, while *malakūt* is understood as the level of being above this world, and above that lies the archangelic realm, which is designated by the term *jabarūt*. From one perspective this verse is an answer to the question posed in 23:88: *Who is it in Whose Hand lies the dominion of everything, who protects but is not protected against, if you know?* The phrase *shall be returned* could also be rendered "are being returned," which would emphasize the ongoing process of return to God experienced by all beings. The fact that both renderings are in the passive voice indicates that humans have no choice regarding whether they return or not.