

Chapter 67

The Kingdom

(Sūrat al-Mulk)

سورة الملك

Notes on its tafsīr, delivered in Ramaḍān 2023

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This small effort of mine is presented in the hope that it may benefit the ordinary worshipper amongst us. May Allāh accept it. Āmīn.

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TRANSLITERATION KEY

Arabic has been transliterated according to the following system.

ء ' ʾ	ز z	ق q
ب b	س s	ك k
ت t	ش sh	ل l
ث th	ص ṣ	م m
ج j	ض ḍ	ن n
ح ḥ	ط ṭ	ه h
خ kh	ظ ḏ	و w
د d	ع ʿ	ي y
ذ dh	غ gh	
ر r	ف f	

Short vowels are written a, i, u, and long vowels ā, ī, ū. The diphthongs are written aw and ay, as in *ṣawm* and *Shaykh*. The *tā' marbūṭa* is rendered without a final “h” (Sūra, Fātiḥa), and as “-at” in construct (Sūrat al-Fātiḥa); words found in the English dictionary keep their common spelling (Sunnah, Ummah), as do Makkah and Madīnah. The definite article is written al- in names and titles, and is joined and assimilated as pronounced in recitation passages (ar-Raḥmān, bi-yadihi'l-mulk) so that the reader can recite correctly.

BACKGROUND TO THE SŪRA

Sūrat al-Mulk is a Makkī sūra, and it is known to us by several names, each of them earned by what it does for the one who keeps its company. It is called *al-Wāqiya*, the shielder, *al-Māni'a*, the preventer, and *al-Munjiya*, the rescuer, for it shields, prevents and rescues its reciter from the punishment of the grave, as the narrations that follow will show.

One of its beauties is that the mention of Allāh's *rahma* embraces the sūra at both ends: the sūra opens with the boundless blessing of the One in whose hand is the kingdom, and it closes with the mercy of the flowing water by which He keeps us alive.

As for its link to the sūra before it, in Sūrat al-Taḥrīm Allāh ﷻ shows us two types of people. The first are the people who pass the tests: Āsiya, the wife of Pharaoh, who was severely tested and yet remained constant in her sincerity to Allāh, and also Maryam عليها السلام, the mother of 'Īsā عليه السلام. The second are the people who do not pass the tests: the wife of the Prophet Nūḥ عليه السلام, and the wife of the Prophet Lūṭ عليه السلام, who failed the test and died a disbeliever. Sūrat al-Mulk then opens by declaring the kingdom of the One who created life and death precisely to test us, so that we may ask ourselves which of the two types we shall be.

VIRTUES OF SŪRAT AL-MULK

إِنَّ سُورَةَ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ ثَلَاثُونَ آيَةً شَفَعَتْ لِرَجُلٍ حَتَّى غُفِرَ لَهُ،
وَهِيَ سُورَةُ تَبَارَكَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ الْمُلْكُ

Sayyidunā Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه narrated that the Prophet ﷺ said, “A sūra from the Qur’ān containing thirty verses will intercede for a man so that he will be forgiven. It is the sūra *Tabāarak alladhī bi-yadihi’l-mulk*.” [Tirmidhī, 2891; Abū Dāwūd, 1400; Ibn Mājah, 3786]

Sayyidunā ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd رضي الله عنه said, “Whoever reads *Tabāarak alladhī bi-yadihi’l-mulk* every night, Allāh will protect him from the torment of the grave. At the time of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ we used to call it *al-māni’a*, that which protects. In the Book of Allāh it is a sūra which, whoever recites it every night, has done very well.” [Nasā’ī, al-Sunan al-Kubrā]

Khālīd ibn Ma’dān رحمه الله, the *tābi’ī*, said about Sūrat al-Mulk and Sūrat al-Sajda that these two sūras will fight for their reciter in the grave and will say, “*O Allāh! If we belong to Your book, accept our intercession in his favour. In case we do not, get us obliterated.*” These sūras will spread their wings like birds and will save the person from the torment of the grave. [Mishkāṭ al-Maṣābiḥ]

Sayyidunā Anas ibn Mālik رضي الله عنه reports that the Prophet ﷺ said, “*A sūra of the Qur’ān that consists of merely thirty verses will argue on behalf of the one who recites it until he is admitted into Janna. It is Sūrat al-Mulk.*” [Ṭabarānī, al-Mu‘jam al-Awsaṭ]

كَانَ النَّبِيُّ ﷺ لَا يَنَامُ حَتَّى يَقْرَأَ الْمُنَزَّلَ وَتَبَارَكَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ
الْمُلْكُ

Sayyidunā Jābir ibn ‘Abdillāh رضي الله عنهما reports that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ would not sleep until he had recited Sūrat al-Sajda and Sūrat al-Mulk. [Tirmidhī, 2892]

THE PUNISHMENT OF THE GRAVE

Since this sūra is the protector from the torment of the grave, it is fitting that we pause, before entering its verses, at what our Prophet ﷺ taught us about that torment.

خَرَجْنَا مَعَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ فِي جِنَازَةِ رَجُلٍ مِنَ الْأَنْصَارِ، فَاتَّهَيْنَا إِلَى الْقَبْرِ وَلَمَّا يُلْحَدُ، جَلَسَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ وَجَلَسْنَا حَوْلَهُ كَأَنَّا عَلَى رُءُوسِنَا الطَّيْرَ، وَفِي يَدِهِ عُودٌ يَنْكُتُ بِهِ فِي الْأَرْضِ، فَرَفَعَ رَأْسَهُ فَقَالَ: اسْتَغِيثُوا بِاللَّهِ مِنْ عَذَابِ الْقَبْرِ، مَرَّتَيْنِ أَوْ ثَلَاثًا

Sayyidunā al-Barā' ibn 'Āzib رضي الله عنه said, “We went out with the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ for the funeral of a man from among the Anṣār. We came to the grave, and when the deceased was placed in the grave, the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ sat down and we sat around him, as if there were birds on our heads, quiet and still. In his hand he had a stick with which he was scratching the ground. Then he ﷺ raised his head and said, ‘Seek refuge with Allāh from the torment of the grave,’ two or three times.” [Abū Dāwūd, 4753]

إِنَّهُمَا لَيُعَذَّبَانِ، وَمَا يُعَذَّبَانِ فِي كَبِيرٍ؛ أَمَّا أَحَدُهُمَا فَكَانَ لَا يَسْتَتِرُ مِنْ بَوْلِهِ، وَأَمَّا الْآخَرُ فَكَانَ يَمْشِي بِالنَّمِيمَةِ

Sayyidunā Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنهما narrated that the Prophet ﷺ passed by two graves and told us about two men whom he saw being punished in their graves. One of them used to walk around spreading malicious gossip among people, and the other failed to take precautions to avoid getting urine on himself. The latter failed to purify himself as required,

and the former did something that creates enmity among people by talking, even if what he said was true. [Bukhārī, 218; Muslim, 292]

لَوْ نَجَّا أَحَدٌ مِنْ ضَمَّةِ الْقَبْرِ لَنَجَّا سَعْدُ بْنُ مُعَاذٍ، وَلَقَدْ ضَمَّ ضَمَّةً ثُمَّ
رَخِيَ عَنْهُ

Sayyidunā Ibn ‘Abbās رضي الله عنهما reported, On the day the Prophet ﷺ buried Sa’d ibn Mu’ādh رضي الله عنه, he was sitting over his grave and he said, “*If anyone were to be saved from the trial of the grave, it would have been Sa’d ibn Mu’ādh. He was given a mighty squeezing, but then he was relaxed.*” [Ṭabarānī, al-Mu‘jam al-Kabīr]

إِنَّ هَذِهِ الْأُمَّةَ تَبْتَلَى فِي قُبُورِهَا، فَلَوْلَا أَنْ لَا تَدَافِنُوا لَدَعَوْتُ اللَّهَ
أَنْ يُسْمِعَكُمْ مِنْ عَذَابِ الْقَبْرِ الَّذِي أَسْمَعُ مِنْهُ

Sayyidunā Zayd ibn Thābit رضي الله عنه reported that the Prophet ﷺ said, “*Verily, this nation will be put to trial in their graves. Were it not that you would stop burying each other, I would have called upon Allāh to make you hear the punishment of the grave as I hear it.*” Then the Prophet ﷺ turned to face us, saying, “*Seek refuge in Allāh from the torment of the Hellfire.*” They said, “*We seek refuge in Allāh from the torment of the Hellfire.*” He said, “*Seek refuge in Allāh from the torment of the grave.*” They said, “*We seek refuge in Allāh from the torment of the grave.*” He said, “*Seek refuge in Allāh from tribulations, the evident of them and the hidden.*” They said, “*We seek refuge in Allāh from tribulations, the evident of them and the hidden.*” He said, “*Seek refuge in Allāh from the tribulation of the false messiah.*” They said, “*We seek refuge in Allāh from the tribulation of the false messiah.*” [Muslim, 2867]

If only we could hear the sounds from the graves.

‘Uthmān رضي الله عنه weeps at the graveside

إِنَّ الْقَبْرَ أَوَّلُ مَنْزِلٍ مِنْ مَنَازِلِ الْآخِرَةِ، فَإِنْ نَجَا مِنْهُ فَمَا بَعْدَهُ أَيْسَرُ
مِنْهُ، وَإِنْ لَمْ يَنْجُ مِنْهُ فَمَا بَعْدَهُ أَشَدُّ مِنْهُ . مَا رَأَيْتُ مَنْظَرًا قَطُّ
إِلَّا الْقَبْرُ أَفْظَعُ مِنْهُ

It was narrated that Hānī, the freed slave of ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān رضي الله عنه, said, “When ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān stood by a grave he would weep until his beard became wet. It was said to him, ‘You remember Paradise and Hell and you do not weep, but you weep because of this.’ He said, ‘The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, “*The grave is the first of the stages of the Hereafter; whoever is saved from it, what comes afterwards will be easier for him, but if he is not saved from it, what comes afterwards will be worse for him.*” And the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, “*I have never seen any scene but the grave is more frightening than it.*”’” [Tirmidhī, 2308 – ḥasan]

THE TAFSĪR OF THE SŪRA

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

تَبَارَكَ الَّذِي يَدِهِ الْمُلْكُ وَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ



Glorious is the One in whose hand is the Kingdom (of the whole universe), and He is powerful over every thing. [1]

Tabārak is from the pattern *mufā'ala*, which usually carries a mutual sense, but here it is used for emphasis, for only He is this blessed. He is the source of all *baraka*, and *baraka* is to maximise what we have: it could be increase, it could be longevity, it could be saving.

Alladhī, “the One who”: Allāh does not explicitly mention His own name here, so as to draw the attention of the non-believers. *Bi-yadihi* is brought forward in the sentence, a *muqaddam*, so that the meaning becomes, in only His hand is absolute kingdom, like no other. As for the “hand”, we do not understand it and we do not try, for Allāh is not like us; we accept, and we move on. The Ash'arīs allow a possible figurative meaning, such as control or authority.

Al-mulk is the kingdom: He has total control, and nobody can change what He decides. *Shay'* covers all things big and small, everything, for

His kingdom is great and yet His attention is intimate. Nothing is impossible for Allāh, and He is never distracted by His authority.

ج
الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا
وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْغَفُورُ ﴿٢﴾

*The One who created death and life, so that He may test you
as to which of you is better in his deeds. And He is the All-
Mighty, the Most-Forgiving. [2]*

Khalaqa: Allāh is unique in His creating, because there was no previous example to follow, no time needed and no ingredients needed; in fact, He used a lowly liquid to fashion the best of creation, the *insān*.

Al-mawt is the non-existence which is followed by existence, before this life and before the Hereafter. Death is mentioned before life because we were first dead before He gave us life, or, it is said, to awaken us. And in the Hereafter, death itself will be brought in the form of a ram and will then be given death.

Ayyukum, “which of you”, man or woman alike: this is the equality that matters. *Aḥsanu ‘amalan* is the best of deeds, not the most deeds; quality over quantity, and consistency is key. Think about our food diet: we do not eat the week’s worth in a day. The best deed is the sincere one, for people in the world know the *what*, but Allāh knows the *why*. Allāh says, مَنْ جَاءَ بِالْحَسَنَةِ فَلَهُ عَشْرُ امْتَالِهَا, “whoever brings a good deed shall have ten like it” [al-An‘ām, 160]: it is not enough merely to do, but for our actions to be accepted and brought forth on that Day.

Al-Azīz is for those who do not take heed from the reminder of death, and *al-Ghaḥfūr* is for those who turn back to Him. Imām al-Rāzī رحمه الله

mentions in Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb that Allāh uses three words to describe His forgiveness in contrast to the actions of *insān*, so that as *insān* commits more sins, Allāh offers more forgiveness: *Ghāfir* for the *ẓālim*, *Ghaffār* for the *ẓallām*, and *Ghafūr* for the *ẓalūm*.

الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ طِبَاقًا مَّا تَرَىٰ فِي خَلْقِ
الرَّحْمَنِ مِن تَفَافُوتٍ فَارْجِعِ الْبَصَرَ هَلْ تَرَىٰ مِن فُطُورٍ



Who has created seven skies, one over the other. You will see nothing out of proportion in the creation of the Raḥmān (the All-Merciful Allāh). So, cast your eye again. Do you see any rifts? [3]

ثُمَّ ارْجِعِ الْبَصَرَ كَرَّتَيْنِ يَنْقَلِبْ إِلَيْكَ الْبَصَرُ خَاسِئًا وَهُوَ
حَسِيرٌ

Then cast your eye again and again, and the eye will come back to you abased, in a state of weariness. [4]

There is a parallel here to Sūrat Yāsīn, where Allāh likewise speaks about the wonders of His creation. *Ṭibāqan* means stacked one on top of the other. *Tafāwut*: you will never find a fault in Allāh's creation, despite how hard you look, and anyone who sees the skies and claims a fault will simply be challenged to create something themselves.

It is named the creation of *al-Raḥmān* because it is Allāh's mercy that everything works in complement with everything else: the orbits never cross, and the planets never collide.

Farjī'il-baṣar, “cast your eye again”: *al-Shinqīṭī* رحمه الله observes that when you combine the āyāt, the command amounts to looking four times, and still the eye returns humbled and worn out.

وَلَقَدْ زَيَّنَّا السَّمَاءَ الدُّنْيَا بِمَصَابِيحَ وَجَعَلْنَاهَا رُجُومًا
لِّمَشَاطِينٍ ۖ وَأَعْتَدْنَا لَهُمْ عَذَابَ السَّعِيرِ ﴿٥﴾

And We have decorated the nearest sky with lamps, and have made them devices to stone the devils, and We have prepared for them the punishment of Hell. [5]

Zayyannā, “We have decorated”: look at the Northern Lights in the Nordic countries. *Al-samā' al-dunyā* is the closest sky, itself a protection from the sun's rays.

The *maṣābīḥ* are the stars, and they serve three purposes: to beautify the skies, to guide us on our journeys, and to be fired at the devils. This āyah also indicates the sheer size of Allāh's created universe, because all the stars we can see, millions of miles away, still belong only to the closest sky to us. The rest of the skies have no need of stars, so they do not have them. Imagine how big it is!

Rujūman, “devices to stone”: compare *Sūrat al-Ṭariq*, *al-najm al-thāqib*, and *Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt*: “Verily, We have adorned the near heaven with the stars, and to guard against every rebellious devil. They cannot listen to the higher group of angels, for they are pelted from every side, outcast, and theirs is a constant torment, except such as snatch away something by

stealing, and they are pursued by a flaming fire of piercing brightness.” [al-Ṣāffāt, 6–10] These are the jinn who come to eavesdrop in the skies and take what they hear back to the soothsayers, with very little accuracy.

وَلِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ عَذَابُ جَهَنَّمَ ۖ وَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ



And for those who disbelieved in their Lord, there is the punishment of Jahannam, and it is an evil end. [6]

Kafarū: the root *kafara* carries a negative connotation, so it is used for hiding and covering the truth with falsehood, whereas *ghafara* carries a positive connotation, so it is used for hiding and covering bad deeds. Here too is a parallel to Sūrat Yāsīn, where Allāh speaks of the punishment of those who reject Him.

إِذَا أُلْقُوا فِيهَا سَمِعُوا لَهَا شَهِيقًا وَهِيَ تَفُورُ ۖ

When they will be thrown in it, they will hear a terrible sound from it, and it will be boiling. [7]

Ulqū, “they will be thrown”: the word carries the sense of being dismissed as worthless. The imagery, as al-Ṣābūnī رحمه الله describes it, is of the disbelievers being swallowed by Hell, which then lets out a horrifying sound as it exhales. We often see something of this in our own homes when water is boiling in a pot over the fire and we toss something into it for cooking, and it answers with a hissing sound.

And Allāh says elsewhere, *يَوْمَ نَقُولُ لِلْجَهَنَّمَ هَلِ امْتَلَأَتْ وَتَقُولُ هَلْ مِنْ مَزِيدٍ*
“On the Day We will say to Jahannam, ‘Are you full?’ and it will say, ‘Is there any more?’” [Qāf, 30]

تَكَادُ تَمِيزُ مِنَ الْغَيْظِ كُلَّمَا أُلْقِيَ فِيهَا فَوْجٌ سَأَلَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَا
أَلَمْ يَأْتِكُمْ نَذِيرٌ ﴿٨﴾

Seeming as if it will burst out of fury. Whenever a group is thrown into it, its keepers will say to them, “Had no warner come to you?” [8]

The *nadhīr*, the warner, is everything that could possibly make us take heed: the Messenger ﷺ, the message, the miracles, and even our grey hairs, our grandchildren, and the deaths around us.

قَالُوا بَلَىٰ قَدْ جَاءَنَا نَذِيرٌ فَكَذَّبْنَا وَقُلْنَا مَا نَزَّلَ اللَّهُ مِن
شَيْءٍ إِنَّا أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا فِي ضَلَالٍ كَبِيرٍ ﴿٩﴾

They will say, “Yes, a warner had come to us, but we had rejected, and said, ‘Allāh has not revealed anything. You are only in great error.’” [9]

وَقَالُوا لَوْ كُنَّا نَسْمَعُ أَوْ نَعْقِلُ مَا كُنَّا فِي أَصْحَابِ السَّعِيرِ
﴿١٠﴾

And they will say, “Had we been listening or understanding, we would not have been among the people of the Hell.” [10]

فَاعْتَرَفُوا بِذَنبِهِمْ فَسُحْقًا لِأَصْحَابِ السَّعِيرِ ﴿١١﴾

Thus they will confess their sin. So, away with the people of the Hell! [11]

لَنْ يَهْلِكَ النَّاسُ حَتَّىٰ يُعْذِرُوا مِنْ أَنْفُسِهِمْ

Imām Aḥmad رحمه الله recorded from Abū al-Bakhtarī al-Ṭāṭī that he heard from one of the Companions that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, “The people will not be destroyed until they themselves confess their guilt.” [Aḥmad, 5:293] Their confessions in the afterlife only make them

deserving of the Hellfire, because confession is the leader of all evidence.
[al-Mukhtaṣar fī al-Tafsīr; al-Ṣābūnī]

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُم بِالْغَيْبِ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَأَجْرٌ كَبِيرٌ

﴿١٢﴾

*Surely, for those who have awe of their Lord without seeing
(Him), there is forgiveness and a big reward. [12]*

Here again is a parallel to Sūrat Yāsīn: “You can only warn the one who follows the *dhikr* and fears the Raḥmān in the unseen.”

Khashya is a deep fear borne out of love, out of knowing who Allāh is, that He is watching you and has full capability over you, and this then dictates how you obey Him, like the true ‘*ulamā*’. Our private lives are what will dictate our relationship with Allāh.

Maghfira shares its root with *mighfar*, the helmet which covers the head: forgiveness covers your sins, clearing the account, and the *ajr kabīr* then fills the account with a huge payment.

Of this *khashya* Allāh says of the stones, وَإِنَّ مِنْهَا لَمَّا يَلْهَبُ مِنْ خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ, “and there are some that fall down out of the fear of Allāh” [al-Baqara, 74], and He says, لَوْ أَنزَلْنَا هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ عَلَى جَبَلٍ لَّرَأَيْتَهُ خَاشِعًا مُتَصَدِّعًا مِنْ خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ, “Had We sent down this Qur’ān upon a mountain, you would have seen it humbled, split apart from the fear of Allāh.” [al-Hashr, 21]

وَأَسِرُّوا قَوْلَكُمْ أَوِ اجْهَرُوا بِهِ إِنَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ

﴿١٣﴾

Whether you keep your talk secret or make it aloud, He knows well what lies in the hearts. [13]

The parallel in Sūrat Yāsīn: “Do not let their statements grieve you; We know what they conceal and what they declare.” Private and public are the same for Allāh; a thought and an action are the same for Allāh; to whisper or to shout is the same for Allāh.

It is related from Ibn ‘Abbās رضي الله عنهما that Allāh would inform His Prophet ﷺ of what the disbelievers said among themselves, so the Prophet ﷺ would tell them, “You said such-and-such,” until some of them said to the others, “Keep your speech secret, so that the Lord of Muḥammad does not hear it,” and Allāh revealed, “Whether you keep your talk secret or make it aloud, He knows well what lies in the hearts.” And there is a connection to Sūrat al-Tahrim immediately before this sūra, where the Prophet ﷺ confided a matter to one of his wives, and when it was divulged, Allāh made it known to him, and she asked, “Who told you of this?” and he said, “I was told by the All-Knowing, the All-Aware.”

أَلَا يَعْلَمُ مَنْ خَلَقَ وَهُوَ اللَّطِيفُ الْخَبِيرُ ﴿١٤﴾

Is it (imaginable) that He who has created (them) will not have (such a) knowledge, while He is the Knower of the finest things, the All-Aware? [14]

The parallel in Sūrat Yāsīn: *wa huwa bi-kulli khalqin ‘alīm*, “and He knows every creation full well.” Allāh can see a black ant on top of a black rock in a dark night. [al-Ṣābūnī]

هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ ^طذُلًّا فَامْشُوا فِي مَنَاكِبِهَا
وَكُلُوا مِنْ رِزْقِهِ وَإِلَيْهِ النُّشُورُ ﴿١٥﴾

*He is the One who has made the earth subjugated for you, so
walk on its shoulders, and eat out of His provision, and to
Him is the Resurrection. [15]*

Once again there is a parallel to Sūrat Yāsīn, in how Allāh has made His creation subservient to us, to serve us, so that we are grateful and turn to Him. Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله writes that Allāh here mentions His favour to His creation in subjugating the earth to them and making it subservient to them, by making it a stable abode and dwelling place, placing in it mountains, causing water springs to gush forth from it, fashioning pathways, and placing in it useful things and places fertile for the growth of fruit and vegetation.

Dhalūl is a *mubālagha*, an intensive form: extremely submissive, low, soft and easy-going. As for *manākib*, the shoulders of the earth, Ibn Abī Ḥātim relates that Bashīr ibn Ka‘b recited this āyah and said to his slave-mother, “If you can tell me what *manākibihā* means, you are freed.” She said, “It means the mountains.” He then asked Abū al-Dardā’ رضي الله عنه, and he said, “It means the mountains.”

How the earth is subservient to us

First, the earth has been made easy and smooth to tread and travel upon; it is not like the mountains, which are rough. Second, it is soft: it is easy to dig in it, to build in it and even with it, making bricks and the like. It could have been surfaced like metal, hard to dig, extremely hot when heated by the sun, and extremely cold in the winter when the sun withdraws. Third, it is fertile, so that we can grow plants in it and eat from it to sustain life. Fourth, it is manageable and stable: the earth is firm and does not crumble away when we stand on it, nor is it like water, for we do not sink into it, gravity keeping us firmly placed on its surface, as was explained in depth under the third āyah of this sūra.

لَوْ أَنكُمْ كُنْتُمْ تَوَكَّلُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ حَقَّ تَوَكُّلِهِ لَرَزَقَكُمْ كَمَا يَرْزُقُ الطَّيْرَ،
تَغْدُوْا خِمَاصًا وَتَرُوحُ بِطَانًا

On *tawakkul*, the Prophet ﷺ said, “If you would trust in Allāh as He truly should be trusted in, He would surely provide for you as He provides for the birds. They set out in the morning with empty stomachs and return in the evening with full stomachs.” [Tirmidhī, 2344; Aḥmad, 1:52]

And the āyah ends with *al-nushūr*, the Resurrection: prepare for the life under the ground, as you live above the ground.

أَأَمِنْتُمْ مَّن فِي السَّمَاءِ أَنْ يَخْسِفَ بِكُمْ الْأَرْضَ فَإِذَا هِيَ
تُورُ ﴿١٦﴾

*Have you become fearless of Him who is in the sky if He
makes you sink into the earth, and it starts trembling at once?*

[16]

The parallel in Sūrat Yāsīn is the threat and the promise, but alongside it the great mercy that He gives us respite to seek forgiveness, rather than punishing us immediately.

Man fi'l-samā', “Him who is in the sky”: why specify the skies? First, because Allāh’s *malakūt*, the angels and the Lawḥ Maḥfūz are in the skies; second, because the angels who are tasked with His command are in the skies; and third, al-Qurṭubī رحمه الله says it means Allāh, the Creator of those in the skies. The wider question of what such expressions mean, and of where Allāh is, is taken up in the appendix at the end of these notes.

Recall the punishment of Qārūn: Allāh swallows you up in the earth and then shakes it, so that you disappear.

أَمْ أَمِنْتُمْ مَّن فِي السَّمَاءِ أَنْ يُرْسِلَ عَلَيْكُمْ حَاصِبًا^ص
فَسَتَعْلَمُونَ كَيْفَ نَذِيرِ ﴿١٧﴾

*Or, have you become fearless of Him who is in the sky if He
looses a violent wind with stones against you? So, you will soon
come to know how was My warning!* [17]

This was the punishment of the people of the Prophet Lūṭ عليه السلام: *kadhhabat qawmu Lūṭ*. Notice the pairing across these two āyāt: the earth was the army sent against Qārūn, and the sky against the people of Lūṭ. The world around us is something we must seek guidance from; it will otherwise become a punishment for us.

وَلَقَدْ كَذَّبَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَكَيْفَ كَانَ نَكِيرِ

﴿١٨﴾

And of course, those before them (also) rejected (the truth). So, how was My censure? [18]

Notice the *iltifāt*, the turn from second person to third person: Allāh is distancing Himself from them, indirectly.

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا إِلَى الطَّيْرِ فَوْقَهُمْ صَافَّاتٍ وَيَقْبِضْنَ مَا
يُمْسِكُهُنَّ إِلَّا الرَّحْمَنُ إِنَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ بَصِيرٌ ﴿١٩﴾

Have they not looked to the birds above them spreading their wings, and (at times) they fold (them) in? No one holds them up except the Raḥmān (the All-Merciful Allāh). Surely He is watchful of every thing. [19]

Allāh says similarly, أَلَمْ يَرَوْا إِلَى الطَّيْرِ مُسَخَّرَاتٍ فِي جَوِّ السَّمَاءِ مَا يُمْسِكُهُنَّ إِلَّا اللَّهُ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ “Have they not looked at the birds, held under control in the atmosphere of the sky? Nothing holds them but Allāh. Surely, in that there are signs for a people who believe.” [al-Nahl, 79]

It is a sign of His power, and it has come in other āyāt that it is He who holds up the heavens and the earth by His power: إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُمْسِكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ أَنْ تَزُولَا وَلَئِنْ زَالَتَا إِنْ أَمْسَكَهُمَا مِنْ أَحَدٍ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ حَلِيمًا غَفُورًا. [Fāṭir, 41]

The birds swim through the air without falling, as fish do through the water, and it is Allāh alone who made them this way. [al-Ṣābūnī] Where is the engine in their bodies to keep them up? *Insān* cannot come close to Allāh's creation.

Al-Shinqīṭī رحمه الله mentions a nuance from Abū Ḥayyān on the precision of the Qur'ānic wording: *ṣāffāt* is a noun, denoting permanence, because most of the time their wings are spread, while *yaqbiḍn* is a verb, because they only fold up their wings temporarily. Al-Shinqīṭī also points to the contrast between the birds suspended safely in the skies and the threat, in the verses before, to swallow up humans in the earth.

أَمَّنْ هَذَا الَّذِي هُوَ جُنْدٌ لَكُمْ يَنْصَرُّكُمْ مِنْ دُونِ الرَّحْمَنِ
ج إِنَّ الْكَافِرُونَ إِلَّا فِي غُرُورٍ ﴿٢٠﴾

Now, who is there to act as a force for you to help you, except the Raḥmān? The disbelievers are in nothing but delusion.

[20]

The armies of the Most Merciful are limitless, and therefore there is no force that can prevent His punishment from taking place whenever He wants to punish someone. In the previous few verses, Allāh mentioned two of His armies: the earth and the sky.

يَا غُلَامُ إِنِّي أُعَلِّمُكَ كَلِمَاتٍ: احْفَظِ اللَّهَ يَحْفَظَكَ، احْفَظِ اللَّهَ
تَجِدْهُ تُجَاهَكَ، إِذَا سَأَلْتَ فَاسْأَلِ اللَّهَ، وَإِذَا اسْتَعَنْتَ فَاسْتَعِنْ
بِاللَّهِ، وَاعْلَمْ أَنَّ الْأُمَّةَ لَوِ اجْتَمَعَتْ عَلَى أَنْ يَنْفَعُوكَ بِشَيْءٍ لَمْ
يَنْفَعُوكَ إِلَّا بِشَيْءٍ قَدْ كَتَبَهُ اللَّهُ لَكَ، وَلَوْ اجْتَمَعُوا عَلَى أَنْ يَضُرُّوكَ
بِشَيْءٍ لَمْ يَضُرُّوكَ إِلَّا بِشَيْءٍ قَدْ كَتَبَهُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكَ، رُفِعَتِ الْأَقْلَامُ
وَجَفَّتِ الصُّحُفُ

Here belongs the famous counsel of the Prophet ﷺ to Ibn ‘Abbās رضي الله عنهما: “O young man, I shall teach you some words: Be mindful of Allāh and Allāh will protect you. Be mindful of Allāh and you will find Him in front of you. If you ask, ask of Allāh; if you seek help, seek help of Allāh. Know that if the nation were to gather together to benefit you with anything, they would not benefit you except with what Allāh had already prescribed for you, and that if they gathered together to harm you with anything, they would not harm you except with what Allāh had already prescribed against you. The pens have been lifted and the pages have dried.” [Tirmidhī, 2516 – ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ]

The disbelievers are deceived and deluded by the devil [al-Mukhtaṣar fī al-Tafsīr], and they persist in their disbelief despite knowing that nothing can help them against Allāh; they are being foolish. [al-Sa‘dī]

أَمَّنْ هَذَا الَّذِي يَرْزُقُكُمْ إِنْ أَمْسَكَ رِزْقَهُ بَلْ لَجُّوا فِي
عَتَوْ وَنِفْورٍ ﴿٢١﴾

Or, who is there to give you sustenance, if He withholds His sustenance? Still, they persist in rebellion and aversion. [21]

Allāh says, مَا يَفْتَحُ اللَّهُ لِلنَّاسِ مِنْ رَحْمَةٍ فَلَا مُمْسِكَ لَهَا وَمَا يُمْسِكُ فَلَا يُعْزِلُ سَبِيلَ, "Whatever mercy Allāh opens for the people, there is none to withhold it, and whatever He withholds, there is none to release it thereafter; and He is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise." [Fāṭir, 2] And He has stated this very question and its answer plainly: قُلْ مَنْ يَرْزُقُكُمْ قُلْ مَنْ خَالِقُ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ, [Saba', 24], and, قُلْ اللَّهُ هَلْ مِنْ خَالِقٍ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ يَرْزُقُكُمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَاتَى تَوْفِكُونَ [Fāṭir, 3]

Allāh could withhold provisions in numerous ways, by blocking the means to them, such as the rain, the air, the sun, the trees and the fruits, because they are all in the Hands of Allāh. [al-Ṣābūnī]

It has come from ʿĀ'isha رضي الله عنها that she said, "By Allāh, the īmān of the servant is not complete until his certainty in what is with Allāh is greater than his certainty in what is in his own hand."

And note the word *fī*, "in rebellion and aversion": they are immersed in it.

أَفَمَنْ يَمْشِي مُكِبًّا عَلَىٰ وَجْهِهِ أَهْدَىٰ أَمَّنْ يَمْشِي سَوِيًّا عَلَىٰ
صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

Then, is the one who walks falling down (frequently) on his face more right, or the one who walks properly on a straight path? [22]

The ones who crawl face-down are those who are only concerned with this world and live their life chasing it. They do not know where they are heading, because they are not living with a purpose in life; they walk like the blind who cannot see where they are going, their sight and their hearts blinded. The ones who walk upright on the straight path are those who follow guidance and live their life with an ultimate purpose; they walk like those standing upright, able to see where they are going. [al-Ṣābūnī]

However, the disbeliever will in truth be gathered walking on his face to the Hellfire. Allāh says, احْشُرُوا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا وَأَزْوَاجَهُمْ وَمَا كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَاهْدُوهُمْ إِلَىٰ صِرَاطِ الْجَحِيمِ, “Assemble those who did wrong, together with their companions and what they used to worship instead of Allāh, and lead them on to the way of the flaming Fire” [al-Ṣāffāt, 22–23], where “companions” means those like them. And Imām Aḥmad رحمه الله recorded from Anas ibn Mālik رضي الله عنه that it was said, “O Messenger of Allāh! How will the people be gathered on their faces?” and the Prophet ﷺ replied, أَلَيْسَ الَّذِي أَمْسَاهُ عَلَى الرَّجْلَيْنِ فِي الدُّنْيَا قَادِرًا عَلَىٰ أَنْ يَمْشِيَهُ عَلَىٰ وَجْهِهِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ, “Is not He who made him walk on two legs in this world able to make him walk on his face on the Day of Resurrection?” [Aḥmad, 3:167; Bukhārī, 4760; Muslim, 2806]

قُلْ هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْشَأَكُمْ وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ
وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

Say, "He is the One who has originated you, and made for you ears and eyes and hearts. How little you pay gratitude!"

[23]

We hear guidance before we see it, and then it penetrates the heart. Al-Ṣābūnī explains why these three particular senses are singled out: hearing, so that we may hear what benefits us; sight, so that we may observe the evidence of Allāh's power in this universe; and the heart, which relates to the intellect, so that we may ponder and reflect over the greatness of Allāh. The verse then ends by telling us how little thanks we give for these blessings.

These three senses are tools for knowing things and means to understanding, and yet people continue to persist in their erroneous ways, remembering Allāh in times of hardship and forgetting Him in times of ease and prosperity.

قُلْ هُوَ الَّذِي ذَرَأَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَإِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ
﴿٢٤﴾

Say, "He is the One who has scattered you on the earth, and to Him you will be assembled." [24]

Allāh is the One who creates unique things out of nothing, whereas humans take inspiration from what is already in the creation and slightly modify it, and then erroneously think that they have created something unique. The idol-worshippers of Makkah are being told that it is Allāh who spread them out through the earth, not their false idols who have never created anything, and they are also told that in the end everyone will be gathered before Allāh alone for accountability and reward or punishment, not before their idols, and therefore they should fear Him and worship Him alone. [al-Mukhtaṣar fī al-Tafsīr]

وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَىٰ هَٰذَا الْوَعْدُ إِن كُنتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٢٥﴾

And they say, “When will this promise (of the Day of Judgment) be fulfilled, if you are true?” [25]

The same questions appear in Sūrat Yāsīn, and they show a lack of faith. The “promise” refers to the resurrection, the reward, the punishment and the Day of Judgment, and the disbelievers said this out of ridicule and mockery. [al-Ṣābūnī]

قُلْ إِنَّمَا الْعِلْمُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَإِنَّمَا أَنَا نَذِيرٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٢٦﴾

Say, “The knowledge (of that day) is only with Allāh, and I am only a plain warner.” [26]

The exact time of the Final Hour and the resurrection is known to Allāh alone. The Prophet ﷺ is only a warner, sent to warn those who disbelieve of Allāh’s punishment if they do not believe. [al-Ṣābūnī] The

aspect of warning is highlighted here again, as it was in the eighth verse above, so that we may take heed now, while still alive, and save ourselves from the punishment of the afterlife.

فَلَمَّا رَأَوْهُ زُلْفَةً سِيئَتْ وُجُوهُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَقِيلَ هَذَا
الَّذِي كُنْتُمْ بِهِ تَدْعُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

Then, once they will see it approaching, the faces of the disbelievers will be turned awkward, and it will be said, "This is what you were calling for!" [27]

The parallel in Sūrat Yāsīn: “*They are not waiting for but a single shriek.*”

Allāh says, *يَوْمَ تَبْيَضُّ وُجُوهٌُ وَتَسْوَدُّ وُجُوهٌُ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ اسْوَدَّتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ* “On a day when some faces will turn bright and some faces will turn dark. As for those whose faces turn dark, ‘Did you disbelieve after you had accepted the faith? Now taste the punishment, because you used to disbelieve.’” [Āl ‘Imrān, 106] The people of meaning, as related in the tafsīr of al-Baghawī رحمه الله, say that the brightening of the faces is their radiance, glad tidings and joy at their deeds and at the reward of Allāh, while their darkening is their grief, sorrow and dejection at their deeds and at the punishment of Allāh. Compare His words, “*For those who do good there is the best, and even more*” [Yūnus, 26], “*Faces on that day will be glowing, looking towards their Lord*” and “*faces on that day will be scowling*” [al-Qiyāma, 22–24], and, “*Many faces on that day will be bright, laughing, rejoicing, and many faces on that day will be stained with dust.*” [‘Abasa, 38–40]

قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ أَهْلَكَنِیَ اللّٰهُ وَمَنْ مَّعِیَ أَوْ رَحِمَنَا فَمَنْ یُّجِیْرُ
الْكَافِرِیْنَ مِنْ عَذَابٍ أَلِیْمٍ ﴿٢٨﴾

Say, "Tell me, if Allāh destroys me and those who are with me (as you wish), or has mercy on us (as we wish), who can (in either case) save the disbelievers from a painful punishment?"

[28]

قُلْ هُوَ الرَّحْمٰنُ اٰمَنَّا بِهِ وَعَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْنَا فَسَتَعْلَمُوْنَ مَنْ هُوَ
فِی ضَلٰلٍ مُّبِیْنٍ ﴿٢٩﴾

Say, "He is the Raḥmān; we have believed in Him, and in Him we placed our trust. So, you will soon come to know who is in open error." [29]

قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ أَصْبَحَ مَاؤُكُمْ غَوْرًا فَمَنْ یَأْتِیْكُمْ بِمَآءٍ مَّعِیْنٍ
﴿٣٠﴾

Say, "Tell me, should your water vanish into the earth, who will bring you a flowing (stream of) water?" [30]

Allāh says in Sūrat al-Mu'minūn, وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً بِقَدَرٍ فَأَسْكَاهُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَإِنَّا عَلَى ذَهَابٍ بِهِ لَقَادِرُونَ, "And We sent down water from the

sky in due measure, then We lodged it in the earth, and surely We are able to take it away.” [al-Mu’minūn, 18]

The water here refers to the water of Zamzam found in Makkah, which was their main water source, so they are being asked how they would bring it back if Allāh were to sink it into the earth. Nobody would be able to bring it back for them except Allāh alone.



Jazākum Allāhu khayran. May Allāh reward us all in this special month, and may He make this sūra a shield for us in our graves and a companion arguing on our behalf until we are admitted into Janna. May Allāh accept this small effort of mine. Āmīn.

APPENDIX: WHERE IS ALLĀH?

The sixteenth and seventeenth āyāt of this sūra speak of “Him who is in the sky”, and so the question is sometimes raised of where Allāh is. This question really is not the great controversy it appears to be, aside from a single ḥadīth in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim. If it were a vital part of īmān, there would have been constant dialogue about it in the first three generations, and there was not. Some basic facts should settle the heart.

The Companions asked, “*Is our Lord close, so that we may whisper to Him, or is He far, so that we should raise our voices?*” and Allāh revealed, **وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ**, “*When My servants ask you about Me, then surely I am near.*” [al-Baqara, 186]

We do *dhikr* of Allāh and *fikr* upon the creation of Allāh; we should not delve too deep into intricate matters. Allāh is not like humans in any way: **لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ**, “there is nothing like unto Him.” [al-Shūrā, 11] Allāh has no physical direction or location, for that would limit Him. Imām al-Ṭaḥāwī رحمه الله states, “*Allāh is beyond having limits placed on Him, or being restricted, or having parts or limbs. Nor is He contained by the six directions like all created things.*” [al-‘Aqīda al-Ṭaḥāwiyya, 38]

Allāh is not within His creation, because that would mean that He moved, and this restricts Him. Nor is Allāh’s being simply “everywhere”, for that brings about difficult questions unbefitting of His majesty. Allāh is pure from every comparison we make, *munazzah*: His status is the most high, and He is beyond everything. So we do *tafwīd*: we accept the words, pass all understanding of them to Allāh, and move on. A major difficulty is translating any of this into English, because a translation is itself an interpretation, and that skews matters. [Based on the answer of Dārul Iftā’, islamqa.org]

A NOTE ON SOURCES

The translation of the āyāt is that of Muftī Muḥammad Taqī ‘Uthmānī. Aḥādīth are cited by their number in the standard editions of the collections: Bukhārī and Muslim (aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥayn), Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Mājah, Nasā’ī (al-Sunan al-Kubrā), Musnad Aḥmad (cited by volume and page), Ṭabarānī (al-Mu’jam al-Kabīr and al-Mu’jam al-Awsaṭ), and Mishkāt al-Maṣābiḥ.

The works of tafsīr drawn upon in these notes include Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr; Ṣafwat al-Tafāsīr of Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Ṣābūnī; Aḍwā’ al-Bayān of Muḥammad al-Amīn al-Shinqīṭī; Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb of Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī; al-Jāmi‘ li-Aḥkām al-Qur’ān of al-Qurṭubī; Ma‘ālim al-Tanzīl of al-Baghawī; Taysīr al-Karīm al-Raḥmān of al-Sa’dī; and al-Mukhtaṣar fī al-Tafsīr.