

It is related: The Jews said to the Prophet: 'If you are a prophet, can you not speak with God and see him like Moses did? We will not believe in you until you do this.' To this the Prophet answered: 'Moses did not see God.' Then the present verse came down.

From 'Ā'isha (is related): Whoever asserts that Muḥammad saw his Lord perpetrates an evil slander against God. Then she said: 'Have you not heard your Lord say . . .' and recited this verse.

*Surely He is All-high* above the qualities of his creatures and *All-wise*: he causes his acts to occur according to the requisites of wisdom and speaks sometimes indirectly and sometimes directly, (that is,) it might be through inspiration or through speech.

Baiḍāwī on Sūra 4:164/162

*And messengers (rusul) We have already told thee of before, and messengers We have not told thee of; and unto Moses God spoke directly.*

. . . This is the most direct form of inspiration, as Moses was unique among the messengers.<sup>5</sup> However, God granted (to the Prophet) Muḥammad priority, in that he gave to him something which counterbalanced (everything) that he had given to the (earlier) messengers.

Zamakhsharī on the same passage

. . . The supposition that the (word) 'speak' (*kallama*) here is derived from the word 'wound' (*kalm*), and that the meaning may thus be that God wounded Moses with nails of affliction and claws of temptation, belongs to the category of (heretical) innovations (*bida'*) in the interpretation of this verse.

## 2. Gabriel as the mediator of revelation

Baiḍāwī on Sūra 2:97f./91f.

*Say: 'Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel—he it was that brought down the Qur'ān<sup>6</sup> upon thy heart by the leave of God, confirming what was before it, and for a guidance and good tidings to the believers.*

*Whoever is an enemy to God and His angels and His messengers, and Gabriel, and Michael—surely God is an enemy to the unbelievers.'*

(These verses) came down regarding (Rabbi) 'Abd Allāh ibn Ṣūriyā', who once asked the Messenger of God: 'Who usually brings down the revelation?' When the latter answered: 'Gabriel', the former replied: 'He is our enemy. He appeared hostile against us repeatedly, the worst time being when he sent down (the proclamation) to our prophet that Nebuchadnezzar would destroy Jerusalem.<sup>7</sup> Then we sent out someone to slay Nebuchadnezzar. When he found him in Babylon, Gabriel sent him away from Nebuchadnezzar saying: "If your God has commanded him to destroy you, he will give you no power over him. But if no such command exists, why do you seek to kill him?"'

Some say: One day 'Umar went to the synagogue of the Jews and asked them about Gabriel. They answered: 'He is our enemy who has given to Muḥammad information regarding our revealed knowledge which is kept secret. He makes use of every baseness and persecution. On the other hand, Michael retains it with fruitfulness and tranquillity.' When 'Umar then asked which positions they had with God, the Jews said: 'Gabriel stands on the right and Michael on the left side of God. Between them, however, enmity prevails.' Then 'Umar replied: 'If this is the case with them, as you say, then they are not enemies. You are indeed as disbelieving as the asses.<sup>8</sup> Whoever is an enemy of one of them is an enemy of God.' When 'Umar returned to Muḥammad he found that Gabriel had been there before him with the present revelation. Muḥammad said, however: 'God has agreed with you, 'Umar!' . . .

*Upon thy heart*: the heart is that which first receives the revelation and comprehends and preserves it. It would have been correct if Muḥammad had said 'upon my heart'. However, this wording came as the verbatim report of God's statement, as if it said: 'Say what I have stated!' . . .

## 3. The receiving of divine inspiration

Zamakhsharī on Sūra 75:16–19

*Move not thy tongue with it to hasten it;*



*Ours it is to gather it, and to recite it.  
So, when We recite it, follow thou its recitation.  
Then Ours it is to explain it.*

*With it:* that is, with the Qur'ān. As the Messenger of God received the revelation with immediate understanding, he attempted to snatch the recitation away from Gabriel and did not have patience until the latter had finished it. For he wanted to commit the revelation to memory quickly and he feared that some of it might slip away from him. Thereupon he was commanded to listen to Gabriel and devote his heart and hearing to him so that he could transmit his revelation to him completely. Then Muḥammad could devote himself to a thorough study until he was certain of it. The meaning is (therefore): Do not move your tongue with the recitation of the revelation so long as Gabriel is still reciting it!

*To hasten it:* so that you receive the Qur'ān quickly and it does not slip away from you. Now God established the prohibition against excessive haste when he said: *Ours it is to gather it, and to recite it* in your heart, and to confirm his recitation through your tongue.

*So, when We recite it:* Here God places Gabriel's recitation on the same level as his own. And the recitation (*al-qirā'a*) is the Qur'ān.

*Follow thou its recitation:* follow Gabriel in it and do not enter into competition with him! Have no fear that the recitation will not be preserved. We guarantee it.

*Then Ours it is to explain it:* when any of its meanings cause difficulties for you. It is as if Muḥammad was in too great a hurry with the memorization, as well as with the questions regarding the meaning, as is seen when someone shows much thirst for knowledge. Accordingly it is said (in the Qur'ān): 'And hasten not with the Qur'ān before its revelation is accomplished unto thee! And say: "O my Lord, increase me in knowledge."' (Sūra 20:114/113).

#### 4. The occasion of the earliest proclamation

Zamakhsharī on Sūra 2:185/181

*[Prescribed for you is the Fast during] the month of Ramaḍān, wherein the Qur'ān was sent down to be a guidance to the people, and clear signs of the guidance and the salvation. So let those of*

*you, who are present at the month, fast it; and if any of you be sick, or if he be on a journey, then a number of other days; God desires ease for you, and desires not hardship for you; and that you fulfil the number, and magnify God that He has guided you, and haply you will be thankful.*

(The word) *ramaḍān*<sup>9</sup> is the verbal noun (*maṣdar*) from *ramaḍa* (to burn); specifically, this word comes from *ramḍā'* (glowing ground). The word 'month' was then added and it became a proper name. . . .

If one now asks why the month of Ramaḍān was designated as the time of fasting, then I answer: The fast during this month is an old form of worship. The time of fasting was given this name to some extent because one 'becomes inflamed' by the heat of hunger and the suffering of austerity during this month. Likewise, this month has also been designated as *nātiq* (agitated), since it agitates the men, that is, it afflicts them in a burdensome manner because of its severity. Some say: The names of the months are understood to have been taken from the old language; and the months were named according to the times in which they fell. Thus, this month fell during the days of burning heat. . . .

*Wherein the Qur'ān was sent down:* . . . The meaning of these words is: wherein it began to be sent down. This occurred during the Night of Destiny (*lailat al-qadr*<sup>10</sup>). Some say that it may have been sent down as a whole to the lowest heaven (on this night) and then piece by piece to the earth. Others say (that the meaning is): '(the month of Ramaḍān) on account of which the Qur'ān was sent down', yet God's word reads: 'Prescribed for you is the Fast, even as it was prescribed for certain days for those who were before you—perhaps you will be godfearing' (Sūra 2:183f./179f.). . . . From the Prophet (the following) is related: The sheets (*ṣuḥuf*) of Abraham came down in the first night of Ramaḍān; the Torah<sup>11</sup> had been sent down after a lapse of six nights, the Gospel after a lapse of thirteen, and the Qur'ān after a lapse of twenty-four (nights of Ramaḍān). . . .

Zamakhsharī on Sūra 44:2/1–5/4

*By the clear Book (al-kitāb al-mubīn).  
We have sent it down in a blessed night.*



*We have warned (man thereby).  
In this night<sup>12</sup> every wise bidding is determined  
as a bidding from Us.*

... The clear Book is the Qur'ān and the blessed night is the Night of Destiny (*lailat al-qadr*). Some say that it refers to the middle night of (the month) Sha'bān<sup>13</sup> and that it has four names: blessed night (*lailat mubāraka*), the night of innocence (*lailat al-barā'a*), the night of contract (*lailat aṣ-ṣakk*), and the night of mercy (*lailat ar-raḥma*). Others say that between it and the Night of Destiny lie forty nights. Concerning its designation as the 'night of innocence' and the 'night of contract', some say: When the agent collects the land tax he writes out a receipt for the people concerned. It is the same with God, who issues to his believing servants in this night the document of innocence.

(Further) it is said that this night may be distinguished in particular through five characteristics:

(1) In it every wise concern and the purity of worship are separated out (*tafīrīq*). The Messenger of God has said: Whoever prays one hundred *rakā'āt* (sing. *rak'a*)<sup>14</sup> in this night, God will send to him one hundred angels—thirty to announce paradise to him, thirty to protect him from the punishment of the fire, thirty to keep the accidents of this world, and ten the cunning of Satan, far from him.

(2) Mercy comes down in this night. The Prophet has said: God shows mercy to my (religious) community (*umma*) in this night in ways as numerous as the sheep of the Banū Kalb<sup>15</sup> have hair.

(3) Forgiveness occurs in this night. The Prophet has said: In this night God forgives all Muslims with the exception of the soothsayer (*kāhin*), the sorcerer (*sāḥir*), the one who is quarrelsome, the one who drinks (intoxicating beverages), the one who is disobedient to his parents, and the one who is unchaste.

(4) In this night the Messenger of God received the complete measure of his intercession (*shafā'a*). That is, in the night of the 13th of Sha'bān he prayed for his (religious) community and was given one-third of his intercession. Then, on the night of the 14th he prayed and received (altogether) two-thirds of his intercession. Finally, on the night of the 15th he prayed and (therewith) received all of his intercession, (for all of his community) except those who flee from God like obstinate camels (who bolt and run away).

(5) On the basis of the custom of God (which regulates the occurrence of natural phenomena), in this night the water of the well of Zamzam (in Mecca) used to increase noticeably.

Most Traditions say (however) that the 'blessed night' is the Night of Destiny, for God's word says: 'Behold, We sent it (that is, the Qur'ān) on the Night of Destiny' (Sūra 97:1). Moreover, his words *In this night every wise bidding is determined* correspond with his words: 'In it the angels and the Spirit descend, by the leave of their Lord, upon every command' (Sūra 97:4). Finally, this also corresponds with his words: 'The month of Ramaḍān, wherein the Qur'ān was sent down' (Sūra 2:185/181<sup>16</sup>). According to most Traditions the Night of Destiny falls during the month of Ramaḍān.

If one asks what the sending down of the Qur'ān in this night means, then I answer: It is said that God sent it down in its entirety from the seventh heaven<sup>17</sup> to the lowest heaven. Then he commanded excellent writers to transcribe it in the Night of Destiny. Gabriel (then) sent it down piece by piece to the Messenger of God...

(The words) *every wise bidding is determined* mean: Every wise bidding is discharged and fixed in writing, that is, the means of sustenance for God's servants, the times of their deaths, and also all their affairs from this night on until the future life. Some have said that the copying of these things from the well-preserved (heavenly) tablet (*lauḥ mahfūz*<sup>18</sup>) began in the Night of Innocence and was completed in the Night of Destiny. The copy containing the means of sustenance will be handed over by Michael, and that with the wars will be handed over by Gabriel, along with the copy with the earthquakes, flashes of lightning, and the sinking in (of the earth). The copy with the deeds (of men) will be handed over by Ismā'īl to the lord of the lowest heaven, one of the mighty angels. And that copy with the accidents is preserved by the Angel of Death.

### 5. The celestial original text

Zamakhsharī on Sūra 43:2/1–4/3

*By the clear Book,  
behold, We have made it an Arabic Qur'ān.  
Perhaps you will understand!  
And behold, it<sup>19</sup> is with Us in the umm al-kitāb,  
sublime indeed, wise.*



By the clear Book (*al-kitāb mubīn*): I swear by the clear Book, that is, by the Qur'ān. God has placed his words *We have made it an Arabic Qur'ān* as the final clause of the oath (as is shown by the contents). This is a beautiful and unique oath because both the vow and the concern which is being sworn by the oath go well together and are both derived from the same area (*wādī*). . . .

*Clear (mubīn)*: clear for those to whom the Book was sent down, since it is (composed) in their language and style. Some say (also that it may mean): evident to those who reflect upon it. Others say that *mubīn* refers to that which distinguishes (*abāna*<sup>20</sup>) the paths of true guidance from those of error, and that which separates out (*abāna*) what the community (*umma*) needs in the religious areas (*abwāb*). . . .

*Perhaps (la'alla)*: (This word) conveys the meaning of a wish, because there is a correlation between the significance of this term and that of hoping.<sup>21</sup> (Consequently) it means: We have created the Book in Arabic and not in other languages because we had the wish that the Arabs would understand it and not be able to say: 'If only the verses (*āyāt*) of the Book had been set forth clearly!' . . .

The original text is the tablet<sup>22</sup> corresponding to the words of God: 'No, it is a glorious Qur'ān, in a well-preserved tablet' (Sūra 85:21f.). This writing is designated *umm al-kitāb* (mother of the book<sup>23</sup>) because it represents the original (*aṣl*) in which the (individual) books are preserved. They are taken from it for copying. It is of elevated rank among the books, for it is contrasted from them as a matchless miracle (*mu'jiz*<sup>24</sup>). . . .

## 6. Concerning the concept Qur'ān

Baidāwī on Sūra 12:1-3

*Alif Lam Ra*

*These are the signs of the clear Book.  
We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'ān;  
perhaps you will understand.*

*We will relate to thee the fairest of stories in that we have  
revealed to thee this Qur'ān, though before it thou wast one of  
the heedless.*

*These are the signs (or 'verses', āyāt) of the clear Book: (the word)*

'these' (*tilka*) is a demonstrative pronoun referring to the (following) verses of the sūra. By the 'book' here is meant the sūra itself. The meaning is (therefore): These verses constitute the verses of the sūra which presents itself clearly as inimitability (*ī'jāz*); or, as that of which the meanings are clear; or, as that which makes clear (*bayyana*) to anyone who reflects upon it that it comes from God; or, that which makes clear to the Jews what they have asked about. It is related that the learned men among the Jews said to the leaders of the polytheists: 'Ask Muḥammad why the family of Jacob moved from Syria to Egypt, and (ask him) about the story of Joseph!' Thereupon this sūra was sent down. . . .<sup>25</sup>

*As an Arabic Qur'ān*: This part (of the whole revelation) is designated here as *Qur'ān*. In origin this word is a generic noun which is applicable to the whole (of the class) as well as to a part of it. It then became predominant as a proper name referring to the whole. . . .

*Perhaps you will understand*: This is the reason why God sent down the Book in this (Arabic) form. The meaning is (therefore): We have sent it down to you as something that is composed in your own language or can be recited in your own language, so that you will be able to understand it and grasp its meanings; or, that you will employ your intellect and (through it) discover that the account, out of the mouth of a man like this who could not produce a (comparable) account (previously),<sup>26</sup> is a matchless miracle (*mu'jiz*) which one can conceive only as having been revealed.

*We will relate to thee the fairest of stories*: (We will relate) in the best manner, since the account is given in the finest linguistic form; or, (we will relate) the best account (regarding its content), since it contains marvellous things, wisdom, signs (*āyāt*), and admonitions. . . .

*Though before it thou wast one of the heedless* of this account, since it had never come to your mind, nor had you ever heard of it. It is for this reason that the account must have been inspired.

## 7. The faithful rendering of the revelation

Zamakhsharī on Sūra 22:52/51

*We have never sent any messenger or prophet before thee, but  
that Satan cast into his fancy, when he was fancying; but God*



*annuls what Satan casts, then God confirms His signs—surely God is All-knowing, All-wise.*

*We have never sent any messenger or prophet:* (This) is a clear proof that a distinction exists between a messenger (*rasūl*) and a prophet (*nabī*). (It is related) from the Prophet that he was asked about the prophets, whereupon he said: '(There are) one hundred and twenty-four thousand.' When he was then asked how many messengers there were among these, he answered: 'The great host of three hundred and thirteen.'<sup>27</sup> The distinction between the two is that a messenger is one of the prophets to whom, together with the verification miracle (*mu'jiza*), the Book is sent down. A prophet, on the other hand, who is not a messenger, is one to whom no book is sent down, but who was commanded only to restrain people on the basis of the earlier revealed law (*sharī'a*).

The occasion of the sending down of the present verse is the following: As the members of the tribe of the Messenger of God turned away from him and took their stand against him, and as his relatives also opposed him and refused to be guided by what he brought to them, then, as a result of the extreme exasperation concerning their estrangement and as a result of the eager desire and longing that they be converted to Islam, the Messenger of God sheltered the wish that nothing would come down to him that could make them shy away. Perhaps he should have been able to use that for the purpose of converting them and causing them to be dissuaded from their error and obstinacy. Now this wish continued in him until the sūra called 'The Star' (that is, Sūra 53) came down. At that time he found himself with this wish in his heart regarding the members of his tribe. Then he began to recite, and when he came to God's words 'and Manāt, the third, the other' (Sūra 53:20), Satan substituted something in accordance with the wish which the Messenger of God had sheltered, that is, he whispered something to him which would enable the Messenger to announce his wish. In an inadvertent and misleading manner, his tongue hurried on ahead of him, so that he said: 'These (goddesses<sup>28</sup> are the) exalted cranes. Their intercession (with God) is to be hoped for.' . . . Yet, the Messenger of God was not clear at this point until the protection (of God) (*iṣma*) reached him and he then became attentive again.

Some say that Gabriel drew his attention to it, or that Satan himself spoke those words and brought them to the people's hearing. As soon as the Messenger of God prostrated (for prayer)

at the end of the sūra, all who were present did it with him and felt pleased (that is, the unbelievers felt pleased that their goddesses had been accepted as intercessors with God). That the possibility to do this would be given to Satan was a temptation and God's test through which the 'hypocrites' (*munāfiqūn*) should increase in grievance and injury, but the believers should increase in enlightenment and assurance.

The meaning (of this verse) is: The messengers and prophets before you were subject to the same custom. If they wished for certain things like you did, God placed Satan in the way as an obstacle to introduce something into their wishes just as he did with you. God wished thereby to test those who were around the prophets. It is incumbent upon God according to his will to put his servants to the test through (various) kinds of trials and temptations, in order to multiply the reward for those who are steadfast and to increase the punishment for those who waver.

Some say that (the word) 'to wish' (*tamannā*) here has the meaning 'to recite' (*qara'a*) and cite (the following verse as an example):

He recited (*tamannā*) the Book of God at the beginning of the night, just like David conveniently recited (*tamannā*) the Psalms.

Also, (the expression) 'his wish' (*ummiyatuhu*) is synonymous with 'his recitation' (*qirā'atuhu*).

Others say that (the expression) 'these exalted cranes' refers to the angels. That is, they are the ones who intercede with God, and not the idols (*aṣṅām*). . . .

*But God annuls what Satan casts:* that is, God causes it to disappear and destroys it.

#### 8. Clarity and ambiguity in the revelation

Zamakhsharī on Sūra 3:7/5

*It is He who sent down upon thee the Book (al-kitāb), wherein are clear verses that are the umm al-kitāb, and others that are ambiguous. As for those in whose hearts is swerving, they follow the ambiguous part, desiring dissension, and desiring its interpretation. But none knows its interpretation, except God and those firmly rooted in knowledge. They say: 'We believe in it; all is from our Lord'; yet none remembers, but men of understanding.*



*Clear verses (āyāt muḥkamāt)*: those whose diction and meaning are clear to the extent that they are preserved from the possibility of various interpretations and from ambiguity.<sup>29</sup> *And others that are ambiguous (mutashābihāt)*: those (verses) which are ambiguous in that they allow various interpretations.

*That are the umm al-kitāb*: that is, the origin (*aṣl*) of the book, since the ambiguous (verses) are to be traced back to it and must be reconciled with it.<sup>30</sup> Examples<sup>31</sup> of it are the following: 'The vision reaches Him not, but He reaches the vision; He is the All-subtle, the All-aware' (Sūra 6:103).<sup>32</sup> 'Upon that day faces shall be radiant, gazing upon their Lord' (Sūra 75:22f.).<sup>33</sup> 'And whenever they commit an indecency they say: "We found our fathers practising it, and God has commanded us to do it." Say: "God does not command indecency! What, do you say concerning God such things as you know not?"' (Sūra 7:28/27).<sup>34</sup> 'And when We desire to destroy a city, We command its men who live at ease, and they commit ungodliness therein. Then the word is realized against it, and We destroy it utterly' (Sūra 17:16/17). If one then asks whether the (meaning of the) entire Qur'ān might be (clearly) determined, (I answer that) men would (then) depend on it since it would be so easily accessible, and (in this manner) turn away from what they lack—research and meditation through reflection and inference. If they did that, then they would neglect the way by which alone one can reach the knowledge of God and his unity (*tauhīd*). (Further grounds are the following): In the ambiguous verses lie a trial and a separation between those who stand firm in the truth and those who waver regarding it. And great advantages, including the noble sciences and the profit of higher orders, are given by God, when the scholars stimulate each other and develop their natural abilities, arriving at the meanings of the ambiguous verses and reconciling these with the (clearly) determined verses. Further, if the believer is firmly convinced that no disagreement or contradiction can exist in God's words (that is, the Qur'ān), and then he notices something that in outward appearance seems to be a contradiction, and he then zealously seeks some means by which he can bring it into harmony, treating it according to a uniform principle, and he reflects upon it, coming to an insight about himself and other things and being inspired by God, and (in this manner) he acquires a clear perception of the harmony which exists between the ambiguous verses and the (clearly) determined verses, then, his certainty

regarding the contents of his conviction and the intensity of his certitude increase.

*As for those in whose hearts is swerving*: These are the people who introduce (heretical) innovations (*bida'*, sing. *bid'a*).

*They follow the ambiguous part*: They confine themselves to the ambiguous verses, which (on the one hand) allow the point of view of the (heretical) innovations without harmonizing them with the (clearly) determined verses. However (on the other hand), (these verses) also allow an interpretation which agrees with the views of the orthodox (*ahl al-ḥaqq*).

*Desiring dissension*: seeking to lead the people into error and divert them from their religion.

*And desiring its interpretation*: and seeking the interpretation they wanted it to have.

*And none knows its interpretation, except God and those firmly rooted in knowledge*: Only God and his servants who have a firmly-rooted knowledge, that is, those who are firm in knowledge and thereby 'bite with the sharp molar', come to the correct interpretation, according to which one must necessarily explain it. Some people place a pause after *except God* and begin a new sentence with *and those firmly rooted in knowledge ... say*. They interpret the ambiguous verses as those concerning which God reserves to himself alone the knowledge of their meaning and the cognizance of the wisdom present in them, as is the case with the exact number of the executioners of hell and similar questions.<sup>35</sup> The first (interpretation regarding where the sentence should end) is correct. A new statement begins with *they say*, setting forth the situation of those who have a firmly-rooted knowledge, namely, in the following sense: These who know the meaning say *we believe in it*, that is, in the ambiguous verses.<sup>36</sup>

*All is from our Lord*: that is, every ambiguous verse and every (clearly) determined verse is from him. Or, not only the ambiguous verses in the Book but also the (clearly) determined verses are from God, the Wise One, in whose words there is no contradiction and in whose Book there is no discrepancy. ...

#### 9. The abrogation of revelations

Zamakhsharī on Sūra 2:106/100

*And for whatever verse We abrogate or cast into oblivion,*



*We bring a better (verse) or one which is equal to it. Knowest thou not that God is powerful over everything?*

(As the occasion of the revelation of this verse) the following is related: The unbelievers had challenged the cancelling of verses and said: 'Look at Muḥammad, how he commands his companions to do something, and then forbids it to them and commands the opposite. He says something today and retracts it tomorrow.' Thereupon this verse came down.

Instead of *whatever verse We abrogate (nansakh)*, some read: *whatever verse we allow (or cause) to be abrogated (nunsikh)*. . . .

*Or cast into oblivion (nansa'hā)*: Some read: or cause to be cast into oblivion (*nunsihā*<sup>37</sup> or *nmassihā*). Others read this as if addressed specifically to the Messenger of God: or when you forget it (*tansahā*). Still others read: or when you are caused to forget it (*tunsahā*). 'Abd Allāh (ibn 'Abbās) read: when we cause you to forget (*nunsika*) or to abrogate it (*nansakhhā*). And Ḥudhaifa read: when we abrogate (*nansakh*) a verse or cause you to forget it (*nunsikahā*).

To abrogate a verse means that God removes (*azāla*) it by putting another in its place. To cause a verse to be abrogated means that God gives the command that it be abrogated; that is, he commands Gabriel to set forth the verse as abrogated by announcing its cancellation. Deferring a verse means that God sets it aside (with the proclamation) and causes it to disappear without a substitute. To cause a verse to be cast into oblivion means that it no longer is preserved in the heart. The following is the meaning: Every verse is made to vanish whenever the well-being (*maṣlaḥa*) (of the community) requires that it be eliminated—either on the basis of the wording or the virtue of what is right, or on the basis of both of these reasons together, either with or without a substitute.

*We bring a verse which is better for the servants (of God), that is, a verse through which one gains a greater benefit, or one which is equal to it in this respect.*

*God is powerful over everything*: he is able to produce what is good, but also something which is even better or something which is equal in its goodness to the first.

Baiḍāwī on the same passage

. . . This verse proves the possibility of abrogation and of the

postponement of revelation, since it concerns the rule (*aṣl*) that (the Arabic word) *in* ('if') (as the particle of the real conditional sentence), in addition to the contents of the verse, refers to the (entire) range of possible things. It is true that the introduction of regulations and the sending down of verses for the benefit of the servants (of God) and the perfecting of their souls result from divine goodness and mercy. However, regarding different ages and persons there are distinctions in this, just as there are different means of livelihood. What can be of use in one age can be harmful in another.

Those who refuse any abrogation which does not have (an equal) substitute, or one that is more important, use the present verse as an argument for rejecting the abrogation of (any part of) the Book (of God) by means of (statements in) the *sunna*, since that which abrogates is what is brought as a substitute, and this is not the purpose of the *sunna*. This stands on weak grounds, however, since sometimes what is lacking in a certain regulation, or in one that is more important, is more useful (*aṣlah*) (than the existing one), and the abrogation also can be made discernible from another quarter. Also, the *sunna* is indeed something which God has brought. Since here the speech is among the best or most important, it is not meant in any way other than what is provided in its external wording.

The Mu'tazilites based on (the doctrine of abrogation) their view that the Qur'ān originated (in time, and thus has not existed from eternity), since the properties of change and diversity are connected with it as necessary properties (implied in its essence). To this I reply that both of these properties belong among the non-essential (linguistic-material) aspects, to which is attached the meaning (*ma'nā*) (of the Qur'ān) which exists in itself from eternity.

#### 10. Revelation, divination, and poetry

Baiḍāwī on Sūra 69:40–43

*It is the speech of a noble messenger.  
It is not the speech of a poet  
(little do you believe)  
nor the speech of a soothsayer  
(little do you remember).  
A sending down from the Lord  
of all Being.*



... The Qur'ān is the speech of a noble messenger, who delivers it from God. Since the 'messenger' does not speak for himself ... either Muḥammad or Gabriel is referred to here.

Unlike the denial of the soothsayer character (of the Qur'ān) based on the warning nature of the utterances, the denial of the poetic character (of the Qur'ān) is clear to all except those who stubbornly deny the facts, for no kind of similarity exists between the Qur'ān and poetry.<sup>38</sup> The difference between the Qur'ān and soothsaying exists on other grounds, for to recognize them is based on the fact that one permits himself to be admonished through the circumstances of the Messenger and the meaning of the Qur'ān which are incompatible with the way of the soothsayers and the meaning of their utterances. ...

Zamakhsharī on Sūra 36:69f.

*We have not taught Muḥammad<sup>39</sup> poetry; it is not seemly for him. It<sup>40</sup> is only a remembrance and a clear Qur'ān, that he may warn whosoever is living, and that the word may be realized against the unbelievers.*

Some took the Messenger of God to be a poet, and indeed it is related that (the Meccan) 'Uqba ibn Abī Mu'aiṣ was one who did this. Thereupon it was said (by God): *We have not taught him poetry*; that is, while teaching him the Qur'ān, we have not taught him poetry. This is to be understood in the sense that the Qur'ān is neither poetry nor does it have anything to do with it, but on the contrary is far removed. Poetry consists of statements that convey meaning through metre and (poetical) rhyme (*muqaffā*). Where, however, are metre and (poetical) rhyme (in the Qur'ān)? And to what extent are the themes (*ma'ānī*) to which the poets devote themselves the themes of the Qur'ān? How far removed, furthermore, is the structure (*naẓm*) of the poet's assertions from the structure and style of the Qur'ān? Thus, close investigation shows that the only relationship between the Qur'ān and poetry is that both are written in the Arabic language.

*It is not seemly for him*: He is not successful in the art of poetry, (a skill) that would be unattainable (for him even) if he aspired to it. That is, we have created him in such a way that even if he wanted to compose poetry he would not be able to do so and would not suc-

ceed in it. Also, we have made him to be an uneducated man (*ummi*) who has not been introduced to the art of writing and thus has not mastered it, so that (in this manner) the evidence (for his prophetic mission) becomes stronger and the suspicion (against it) may be invalidated more easily.<sup>41</sup>

From al-Khalīl (is related) that poetry was dearer to the Messenger of God than many (other) ways of speaking; yet the art of poetry was not given to him. Now one can ask about the (following) lines (in the *rajaz* metre<sup>42</sup>):

I am the Prophet. That is no lie.  
I am the son of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib.

and

You (my soul) are nothing but a finger bleeding.  
What you suffered happened for the sake of God.

To this I answer: Here are nothing more than examples of one of his manners of expression, as he was in the habit of uttering hastily without artistic skill and without any formal display. Although (these examples) correspond (with poetry) since they happen to be metrical, the agreement with poetry is unintentional and unnoticed by him, just like numerous formulations of men in their speech, letters, and discussions occur in metrical form which no one designates as poetry and by which neither the speaker nor the hearer comes to the opinion that he is dealing with poetry. If one examines every utterance according to this kind of criterion, one will find that what is created in this manner is not admirable (at all). For this reason al-Khalīl did not (even) regard the *rajaz* hemistich as poetry.

And since God did not wish that the Qur'ān become poetry in any sense, he said: *It is only a remembrance and a clear Qur'ān*. By this the following is meant: It is only a remembrance of God by which both men and jinn<sup>43</sup> are warned, just as God says: 'It is only a reminder to all beings' (Sūra 12:104 and 81:27). And it is only the Qur'ān from a heavenly book which one recites in the prayer niche and reads out in the places of worship, whereby through recitation and appropriate actions one gains success in both worlds (this world and the next). How great then is the distance between the Qur'ān and poetry, which is provoked here by the satans!

*That he (or, it) may warn*: that is, (either) the Qur'ān or the Messenger of God. ...



*Whosoever is living*: that is, those who are sensible and those who meditate,<sup>44</sup> since those who are inattentive are like the dead. Or, those one may know to be believing and thus through faith will be alive.

*And that the word may be realized*: and that the word of judgment may be inevitable.<sup>45</sup>

*Against the unbelievers*: against those who do not meditate and of whom one cannot anticipate that they will believe.

### 11. *The first proclamation*

Zamakhsharī on Sūra 74:1-5

*O thou shrouded in thy mantle,  
arise, and warn!  
Thy Lord magnify,  
thy robes purify,  
and defilement flee!*

*O thou shrouded in thy mantle (muddaththir)*<sup>46</sup>: O you who wear a mantle (*dithār*). This is worn over the undergarment which comes in direct contact with the body. To this refers the saying of the Prophet: 'The "helpers" (*anṣār*) are the undergarment and the (other) men the *dithār*.'

Some assert that this was the first sūra to be sent down.<sup>47</sup> Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh related (the following account) from the Messenger of God: I was on Mount al-Ḥirā' (near Mecca) when someone called out to me: 'Muḥammad! You are the Messenger of God.' I looked to the right and to the left, but saw nothing. Then I looked up above me and there I saw something. In the Tradition according to 'Ā'isha it is said (by the Prophet): I glanced up above me and there I saw someone sitting on a throne between heaven and earth—meaning that it was the angel (Gabriel) who had called to him. I was frightened and returned to Khadīja and called out: 'Dress me in a *dithār*, dress me in a *dithār*!' Then Gabriel came and said: 'O thou shrouded in thy *dithār*!'

From az-Zuhrī (is related): The first sūra to come down is 'Recite in the name of thy Lord' down to the words of God 'what he had not known' (Sūra 96:1-5). (After the sending down of this sūra) the Messenger of God became sad (because a cessation had

occurred in the proclamation<sup>48</sup>) and began to climb to the tops of the mountains. Then Gabriel came to him and said: 'You are the Prophet of God.' And then Muḥammad returned to Khadīja and called out: 'Dress me in a *dithār* and pour cold water over me!' Thereupon came down (the sūra which begins): 'O thou shrouded in thy *dithār*!'

Others say that the Prophet heard certain things from the (members of the tribe) Quraish which displeased him, and that this caused him to grieve. Afterwards he was wrapped in his robe reflecting on what grieved him, as grieving people were accustomed to do. Then he was commanded (through the present sūra) to warn his countrymen unremittingly (of the punishment of God), even when they had insulted him and had caused him injury. . . .

*Thy robes purify*: This is a command to keep the clothes free from all impurity, since the cleanliness (*ṭahāra*) of the clothes is a necessary condition for the (ritual) prayer (*ṣalāt*) which otherwise is not valid. Besides prayer, cleanliness is the fairest and most desirable state, and it is detestable when a good believer is burdened with what is repugnant. Some say that what is involved here is a command to shorten the robes and to wear them differently from the Arabs, who kept their robes long and wore trains (which dragged in the dirt); however, one could not be certain that dirtiness would thereby be prevented.

Others say that what is involved here is a command to keep the soul pure from unclean acts and objectionable habits. One says 'so and so has clean robes, pockets, trains, and sleeves' when he wants to represent someone as being completely free from faults and weaknesses of character. (In the opposite manner one says) of pernicious people 'so and so has dirty robes'. Since the robe covers the man and wraps around him, one can use it metonymically for him. . . .

### 12. *The essential and the non-essential in revelation*

Zamakhsharī on Sūra 80:24-32

*Let man consider his nourishment,  
We poured out the rains abundantly,  
then We split the earth in fissures  
and therein made the grains to grow,*



and vines and reeds,  
and olives and palms,  
and dense-tree'd gardens,  
and fruits and herbage (abb),  
an enjoyment for you and your flocks.

... Then We split the earth in fissures: Here is a reference to the splitting of the earth by the plants as they spring up, but possibly also a reference to its splitting by ploughing with oxen. God mentions the splitting himself in such a manner as one attributes an act to its cause. ...

From Abū Bakr, the eminently veracious (*aṣ-ṣiddīq*), (is related) that when asked about the meaning of *abb*<sup>49</sup>, he said: 'Which heaven would cover me and which earth would support me if I were to say that there is something in the Book of God that I know not?'

From 'Umar (is related) that he once recited this verse and said: 'We all know that. But what is *abb*? Then he threw away a stick which he had in his hand, and said: 'By the eternal God! That is artificiality. What does it amount to for you, son of the mother of 'Umar, if you do not know what *abb* is?' And then he added: 'Obey what is clear to you in this Book and leave aside what is not clear!'

One may now say: This appears to forbid inquiry into the meaning of the contents of the Qur'ān and examination of its obscure passages. To this I answer: 'Umar did not mean this. But the people (at that time) had turned their primary concern to doing things, while to them the pursuit of scholarliness, which does not serve practical matters, was considered artificiality. 'Umar meant that this verse was produced because man took for granted the favour of sustenance; and here he is summoned to thankfulness. 'Umar knew from the context of this verse that *abb* is something that man plants for his necessities of life or for his grazing animals. (What he meant is:) One should reflect primarily upon those blessings of God listed here which are clear and not obscure, since they awaken thankfulness to God in stronger measure. And one will not be dissuaded from this through the question of the meaning of *abb* and the knowledge of certain plants which bear this name. One is to be satisfied (for the present) with the knowledge that is adequate, until these words are made clear at a later time. Then, 'Umar recommended to men that they observe this rule also with (other) similar obscure passages of the Qur'ān.

## Ṭabarī on Sūra 12:20

Then they <sup>50</sup> sold him for a paltry price, a handful of counted dirhams; for they set small store by him.

... By the phrase a *handful of counted dirhams* God means that they sold him for (a number of) dirhams which were insufficient, inadequate, and not weighed, because *they set small store by him*. Some say that the term 'counted' indicates that the number was fewer than forty, since at that time any number of dirhams fewer than forty was not weighed because the smallest and most insignificant weight was the *uqiyya*<sup>51</sup> which amounted to forty dirhams. Others say that God indicates with his word 'counted' simply that it was only a few dirhams for which they sold him.

Some commentators say that it may have been twenty dirhams. . . . Others say that it may have been twenty-two, so that each of the eleven brothers of Joseph received two. . . .

At any rate, it is correct to say the following: God has declared that they sold him for 'counted' rather than 'weighed' dirhams, without specifying the amount according to weight and number. There occurs in addition to this neither an indication in a book (of God) nor an account from the Messenger. Possibly it was twenty or twenty-two or forty dirhams, or (it could have been) more or fewer. However many it may have been, it was in any case 'counted' and not 'weighed' dirhams. If one knew the amount of their weight, this would bring no advantage for religion, and if he did not know it, this would bring no harm. Man's duty (*farḍ*) is to believe in the external wording (*ẓāhir*) of the revelation; he is not required to know anything which goes beyond this.

## 13. The Qur'ān in the lives of the believers

Ghazzālī on the excellence of the Qur'ān<sup>52</sup>

... The Prophet has said: There is no intercessor (*shāfi'*) who enjoys such excellent esteem with God as the Qur'ān, neither a prophet nor an angel nor anything else. . . . He also said: The most excellent worship for my (religious) community (*umma*) is recitation of the Qur'ān. Further: God recited sūras Ṭā Hā (Sūra 20) and Yā Sīn (Sūra 36) a thousand years before he began the creation. And when the angels heard the recitation (*qur'ān*), they exclaimed: 'Blessed



be a community to which this will be sent down, and blessed be the hearts (*ajwāf*) which will preserve it, and blessed be the tongues which will pronounce it! Also the Prophet said: The best among you are those who learn and teach the Qur'ān. And: God has said: 'To whomever recitation of the Qur'ān occupies to the extent that he forgets to call upon me and to make requests of me, to him will I grant the most excellent reward for those who are thankful.' And: The people who occupy themselves with the Qur'ān (*ahl al-qur'ān*) constitute the family and intimate friends of God. . . .

Ibn Mas'ūd said: If you want knowledge, then disseminate the Qur'ān, for in it lies the knowledge of the forefathers and the descendants! And further: None of you will be questioned about himself without reference to (his relation to) the Qur'ān. Whoever loves and admires the Qur'ān loves God and his Messenger; whoever abhors the Qur'ān abhors God and his Messenger.

'Amr ibn al-Āṣ has said: Every verse of the Qur'ān is a step into paradise and a light in your homes. He also said: Little by little prophecy will penetrate into whoever recites the Qur'ān, except that a (direct, divine) revelation will not be granted to him.

Abū Huraira has said: A house in which the Qur'ān is recited becomes rich with its people. Good increases in it and the angels are present in it, while the satans abandon it. But a house in which the Book of God is not recited falls into distress with its people. Good decreases and the angels abandon it, while the satans are present in it.

Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal has said: I saw God in my sleep and said to him: 'Lord! What is the best way to draw near for those who wish to draw near to you?' God answered: 'Through my words (in the Qur'ān), Aḥmad.' Then I asked: 'Lord! With or without understanding?', and he said: 'With and without understanding' . . . .

#### 14. The sciences of revelation

Ghazzālī on the sciences as collective duty<sup>53</sup>

. . . The sciences of revelation (*'ulūm shar'īyya*) . . . are all praiseworthy; however, one sometimes confuses them with sciences which, although considered to be sciences of revelation, are (in reality) blameworthy.<sup>54</sup> Consequently one must classify these sciences as praiseworthy or blameworthy. The praiseworthy scien-

ces have roots (*uṣūl*), branches (*furū'*), suppositions (*muqaddimāt*), and completions (*mutammimāt*). They comprise, therefore, four kinds.

The 'roots',<sup>55</sup> of which there are four, constitute the first kind: the Book of God, the *sunna* of his Messenger, the consensus of the (religious) community (*ijmā' al-umma*), and the Traditions (*āthār*) concerning the Companions of the Prophet. The consensus (of the community) is a 'root' because it furnishes indications of the *sunna*. As a 'root' it is ranked third (in relation to the Qur'ān which is ranked first and the *sunna* which is ranked second as roots of the sciences of revelation). The same is true for the Traditions (concerning the Companions of the Prophet) which likewise provide indications of the *sunna*. The Companions witnessed the inspiration and sending down (of the Qur'ān) and were able to comprehend much through a combination of circumstances which others were unable to observe. Sometimes the explicit statements (of revelation) do not contain something that one can comprehend through a combination of circumstances. For this reason the men of learning found it beneficial to follow the example of the Companions of the Prophet and to be guided by the Traditions regarding them. . . .

The 'branches' constitute the second kind. This group deals with that which one comprehends on the basis of the 'roots' mentioned above—and indeed which cannot be gleaned from the external wording alone—through which the mind is awakened and understanding is thus expanded, so that one comprehends other meanings which are beyond the external wording. Thus one comprehends from the words of the Prophet: 'The judge may not judge in anger' that he (also) should not judge when hungry, needing to urinate, or in the pains of sickness. The 'branches' comprise two sub-types, the first of which deals with the requisites of the present world. This subtype is contained in the books of law (*fiqh*) and is entrusted to the lawyers, who are thus the men of learning responsible for the present world. The second sub-type deals with the requisites of the hereafter, thus the knowledge of the circumstances of the heart, its praiseworthy and blameworthy characteristics, that which is pleasing to God, and that which is abhorrent to him. That sub-type is contained in the second half of the present work (on 'The Revival of the Religious Sciences'). . . .

The 'suppositions' constitute the third kind. They are tools such as lexicography and grammar, which are naturally one tool for



gaining knowledge of the Book of God and the *sunna* of his Prophet. In themselves lexicography and grammar do not belong to the sciences of revelation; however, one must become engrossed in them for the sake of revelation because the latter appears in the Arabic language. Since no revelation comes forth without language, the mastering of the language concerned becomes necessary as a tool. Among the tools (of this kind) belong also the skill of writing; however, this is not unconditionally required since the Messenger of God was illiterate (*ummī*).<sup>56</sup> If a man were able to retain in his memory everything that he hears, then the skill of writing would be unnecessary. Yet, since people are not able to do this, in most cases the skill of writing is essential.

The 'completions' (*mutammimāt*), that is, in relation to the study of the Qur'ān, constitute the fourth kind. This group contains the following divisions: (1) that which is connected with the external wording, such as the study of the (various) readings and of phonetics; (2) that which is connected with the meaning of the contents, such as (traditional) exegesis (*tafsīr*), where one must also rely upon tradition (*naql*) since the language alone does not yield the meaning; and (3) that which is connected with the 'decisions' of the Qur'ān, such as the knowledge of the abrogating and abrogated (verses), the general and the particular, the definite and the probable, as well as the kind and manner, in the same way that one makes one decision in relation to others. This is the science which has been designated as 'roots of law'. It extends also to the *sunna*.

The 'completions' relating to the Traditions and accounts consist of: (1) the study of the authorities, including their names and relationships (with one another), as well as the names and characteristics of the Companions of the Prophet; (2) the study of the reliability of the transmitters; (3) the study of the circumstances under which the transmitters lived, in order to be able to distinguish between those who are unreliable (*da'īf*) and those who are reliable (*qawī*); and (4) the study of the life spans of the transmitters, through which that which is transmitted with defective chains of authorities (*asānīd*, sing. *isnād*)<sup>57</sup> can be distinguished from that which exhibits unbroken chains. The same designation also refers to other aspects connected with these.

These are the sciences of revelation and they are all praiseworthy. Moreover, they belong (not among the duties of individuals, but) among the collective duties (about which enough is done when a sufficient number of believers are concerned about them).

## II

## MUḤAMMAD

## 1. Muḥammad's proclamation

Zamakhsharī on Sūra 61:6

*And when Jesus son of Mary said: 'Children of Israel, I am indeed the messenger of God to you, confirming the Torah which was before me,<sup>1</sup> and giving good tidings of a messenger who shall come after me, whose name shall be Aḥmad.'<sup>2</sup> Then, when he brought them the clear signs, they said: 'This is a manifest sorcery.'*

Some maintain that Jesus said 'Children of Israel' (*yā banī isrā'īl*), and not 'fellow tribesmen' (*yā qaum*) as Moses had done, because Jesus had no relatives among them through whom they would be his fellow tribesmen<sup>3</sup>. . . .

According to Ka'b (al-Aḥbār, it is related) that the disciples of Jesus asked: 'Oh spirit (*rūḥ*) of God, will there be another (religious) community (*umma*) after us?', and that Jesus then said: 'Yes, the community of Aḥmad. It will consist of people who are wise, knowing, devout, and pious, as if in religious knowledge (*fiqh*) they were prophets. They will be satisfied with modest sustenance from God, and he will be pleased with modest conduct on their part'. . . .

Baiḍāwī on the same passage

*. . . And giving good tidings of a messenger (rasūl) who shall come after me, whose name shall be Aḥmad: that is, Muḥammad. The meaning is: My religion subsists in holding on firmly to the books of God and his prophets. Accordingly, Jesus mentions (as a part of the collective books of God and all the prophets only) the first of the well-known books, concerning which the (earlier) prophets*



gave their decision, and only that prophet who (as the last) constitutes the seal of those who are sent (by God). . . .

## 2. Muḥammad's human nature

Baiḍāwī on Sūra 3:144/138

*Muḥammad is only a messenger; messengers have passed away before him. Why, if he should die or is slain, will you turn about on your heels? If any man should turn about on his heels, he will not harm God in any way; and God will recompense the thankful.*

*Muḥammad is only a messenger; messengers have passed away before him: he will pass away as they did, through a natural or violent death.*

*Why, if he should die or is slain, will you turn about on your heels?* Here it is denied that the believers will desert and turn away from their religion simply because the Messenger of God passes through a natural or violent death, since they know that the messengers before him passed away and their religion endured as something to which its adherents held fast. . . .

(As the occasion for the proclamation of the present verse) the following is related: 'Abd Allāh ibn Qumai'a al-Ḥārithī threw stones at the Messenger of God, breaking his teeth and making his face bloody.<sup>4</sup> Muṣ'ab ibn 'Umair, the standard-bearer (of the Prophet), protected him until Ibn Qumai'a slew Muṣ'ab. But Ibn Qumai'a thought he had slain the Prophet, so he said: 'I have killed Muḥammad!' Then someone cried out: 'Indeed, Muḥammad has been slain!' Then as the men began to retreat, the Messenger of God called out: 'To me, servants of God!' Thirty of his followers closed in around him and protected him until they drove away the polytheists, and the others had scattered. (Meanwhile) one of those protecting the Prophet (became frightened and) said: 'Oh, that ('Abd Allāh) Ibn Ubayy would seek protection for us from Abū Sufyān!<sup>5</sup> And certain (other) 'hypocrites' (*munāfiqūn*) (who took Muḥammad for dead) said: 'If he had (really) been a prophet, then he could not have been killed. So turn back to your (heathen) brothers and to your (old) religion!' Thereupon, Anas ibn an-Nadr, the uncle of Anas ibn Mālik, said: 'People, if Muḥammad has been

killed, surely his Lord is alive and will never die. What do you want to do with your lives after he is no longer here? (Be prepared to die) and fight for that for which he fought (surrendering his life)!' Then he added: 'Oh, God, I ask for your forgiveness for what they have said; I have nothing to do with it.' He then drew his sword and fought on until he was killed. Thereupon the (present) verse came down.

*If any man should turn about on his heels through his apostasy, he will not harm God in any way but only himself. And God will recompense for the benefit of Islam the thankful who hold fast to it like Anas and people like him.*

Zamakhsharī on Sūra 7:188

*Say: 'I have no power over benefit or harm to myself, except as God wills. If I had knowledge of the unseen I would have acquired much good, and evil would not have touched me. I am only a warner and a bearer of good tidings to a people who believe.'*

*Say: I have no power over benefit or harm to myself:* Here is declared the (human) servant nature (of Muḥammad) and his lack of knowledge of the unseen, which belongs specifically to the (divine) nature of the master alone. The meaning is: I am a feeble servant who (alone) can neither provide profit nor prevent harm, just as is the case with those in bondage and those servants (in the position of slaves).

*Except as God, my Lord, wills to provide profit for me and to prevent harm from me. If I had knowledge of the unseen:* that is, if my situation were other than it (now) is, so that *I would have acquired much good*, obtaining abundant profit, and were I able to avoid evil and whatever is harmful so that I would not have to suffer, and in battle were not sometimes the victor and sometimes the vanquished, and in trading were not sometimes the gainer and sometimes the loser, and in planning were not sometimes on the mark and sometimes going astray.

*I am only a servant who has been sent as a warner and a bearer of good tidings.* It is not for me to know the unseen.

*To a people who believe:* It is possible that this passage refers not only to (the word) 'warner' but also to (the expression) 'bearer of good tidings', since warning and bearing good tidings both bring



benefit to the believers. However, the passage may refer only to (the expression) 'bearer of good tidings', so that (the word) 'warner' would then be independent (and supplementary). Therefore: I am nothing other than a warner to the unbelievers and a bearer of good tidings to people who believe.

Zamakhsharī on Sūra 29:50/49

*The unbelievers<sup>6</sup> say: 'Why have no signs been sent down upon Muḥammad?' from his Lord?' Say: 'The signs are only with God, and I am only a plain warner.'*

In this verse some read 'why have no signs', while others read 'why has no sign'. The unbelievers mean: Why has no (miraculous) sign been sent down upon Muḥammad, like the she-camel which was given to Ṣāliḥ as a sign, the table which was sent down to Jesus<sup>8</sup>, and others like these?

*The signs are only with God:* He sends down among them only what he wishes, and if he had wished to send down the sign which they demand then he would have done so.

*I am only a plain warner:* I am commissioned to warn and to make this warning clear through the sign (that is, the Qur'ān) which has been given to me. It is not for me to make a choice from among God's signs, so that I could say: 'Send down to me one of this kind and not one of that kind!' Besides, I know that each sign has a lasting purpose, and each sign is as good as that of anyone else in this regard.

Baiḍāwī on Sūra 25:7/8

*The unbelievers<sup>9</sup> also say: 'What ails this messenger that he eats food and goes in the markets? Why has an angel not been sent down to him, to be a warner with him?'*

*What ails this messenger (rasūl):* what ails this one who claims to be a messenger. In this (expression) lies contempt and scorn.

*That he eats food as we do and goes in the markets* to seek his sustenance as we do. The meaning is: If what he asserts is correct, then why is it that he is not in a different state from us? The unbelievers said this because they were perplexed and were limited to their view of the physically perceptible indications

(of his nature). (In fact) the messengers are not distinguished from other men by physical signs, but by their spiritual condition, as God has shown in his words: 'Say: "I am only a mortal like you; it is revealed to me that your God is One God"' (Sūra 18:110). . . .

3. *A temptation of Muḥammad*

Zamakhsharī on Sūra 17:73f./75f.

*Indeed the unbelievers<sup>10</sup> were near to seducing thee from that which We revealed to thee, that thou mightest forge against Us another than the Qur'ān<sup>11</sup>, and then they would surely have taken thee as a friend;  
and had We not confirmed thee, surely thou wert near to inclining unto them a very little.*

(As the occasion for the proclamation of this passage) the following is related: The (members of the tribe) Thaḳīf<sup>12</sup> said to the Prophet: 'We will not join your cause unless you grant to us conditions which we can extol to (other) Arabs, namely, that the tithe not be demanded from us, that we not be expelled (from our hereditary habitats), that we not be required to throw ourselves down in prayer, that (in spite of the prohibition against usury) we be paid all interest on money borrowed from us but that all interest be exempted for those to whom we are indebted, that you permit us to continue to manage the shrine of (the goddess) al-Lāt<sup>13</sup> for one more year and that after the year we not be required to destroy it with our own hands, and that you assume protection against those who break into our valley Wajj to take away the (sacred) trees. If the (other) Arabs ask you why you have made these (concessions), then say: "God has commanded me to do it."' Now they brought their document and Muḥammad ordered to be written: 'In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. This is a writing from Muḥammad, the Messenger of God, to (the tribe) Thaḳīf. The members of this tribe are not required to pay the tithe and will not be expelled.' (As the scribe reached this point) they said: '(Now continue:)' "And they are not required to prostrate themselves (at prayer)." But the Messenger of God remained silent (and did not continue to dictate), so they said to the scribe: 'Write: "And they are not required to prostrate themselves (at prayer)!"' At that,



the scribe looked at the Messenger of God, and 'Umar ibn Khaṭṭāb rose up drawing his sword and said: 'Men of (the tribe) Thaḳīf you have set the heart of our Prophet on fire!' But they replied: 'We are not speaking with you, but with Muḥammad.' Thereupon the present verses came down.

(Also) it is related that the (unbelieving members of the tribe) Quraish said to Muḥammad: 'Change a verse of mercy into a verse of punishment and a verse of punishment into a verse of mercy in order that we may believe in you!' Thereupon the present verses came down.

*Indeed they were near to seducing thee:* ... The meaning is: Those who were involved with the affair had almost deluded you, that is, through misleading infatuation.

*From that which We for our part as command and prohibition as well as promise and warning revealed to thee, that thou mightest forge against Us another:* so that you would say something that we have not said in a manner that will be falsely judged as against us. What is meant is the change of promise which the (members of the tribe) Quraish had demanded of Muḥammad, and also the imperious proposal of the (tribe) Thaḳīf that Muḥammad should ascribe something to God which had not been sent down upon him.

*And then, that is, if you had complied with their wish, they would surely have taken thee as a friend,* and you would have become their intimate friend (*walī*) and would have lost the relationship of confidence with me.

*And had We not confirmed thee:* had not our strengthening and protection (*iṣma*) been with you.

*Surely thou wert near to inclining unto them:* you had almost inclined towards their deception and cunning. Here God gives to the Prophet encouragement and gracious strengthening, wherein lies an act of mercy for the believers. ...

#### 4. The night journey and the ascension

Zamakhsharī on Sūra 17:1

*Glory be to Him who carried His servant by night from the holy mosque to the farthest mosque<sup>14</sup> the precincts of which We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs. He<sup>15</sup> is the One who hears, the One who sees.*

... *Who carried (asrā<sup>16</sup>) His servant by night (lailan):* ... One may ask: Since the (word) *asrā* in itself already means 'to undertake a night journey', then what does the stipulation 'by night' add to the meaning of the statement? To this I reply: With the expression 'by night'<sup>17</sup> ... God wishes to indicate the duration of the night journey as short, saying that within a (single) night he and his servant accomplished the journey from Mecca to the Syrian lands (*ash-sha'm<sup>18</sup>*) which (usually) required forty nights. ...

There is disagreement regarding the place from which the night journey originated. Some say that it was the holy mosque (of Mecca) (*al-masjid<sup>19</sup> al-ḥarām*) itself. This is likely since it is mentioned in the following account from the Prophet: While I was between being asleep and awake in the apartments near the Ka'ba (*al-bait*) at the holy mosque, Gabriel came to me with the (steed) Burāq.<sup>20</sup> Others say (however) that the journey of Muḥammad originated from the dwelling of (his cousin) Umm Hāni', the daughter of Abū Ṭālib. In this case the expression 'holy mosque' would indicate the holy precinct (of Mecca) (*al-ḥaram*), since this area includes the mosque and can thus be referred to by this designation. According to Ibn 'Abbās the entire sacred precinct is a mosque.

(Furthermore) the following is related: After the evening prayer Muḥammad slept in the dwelling of Umm Hāni', when he was taken on the night journey (to Jerusalem) and returned in the same night. Afterwards he related the story to Umm Hāni', saying: 'The prophets have appeared to me and I have performed the prayer with them.' As he now rose to go to the mosque, Umm Hāni' clung to his robe, and he said: 'What do you want?' She answered: 'I fear that your fellow tribesmen will accuse you of falsehood if you relate that to them.' To this he replied: 'What, would they accuse me of lying?', and he went away. Then when Abū Jahl sat down next to him and the Messenger of God related the story of the night journey to him, Abū Jahl called out: 'Men of the (tribe of) Banū Ka'b ibn Lu'ayy, come here!' Then Muḥammad related the account to them. While some gave their approval to him, others placed their hands on their heads with astonishment and disapproval. Some people who had believed in the Prophet previously now turned away from him. Some men, however, ran to Abū Bakr, who (after hearing their account) said: 'If Muḥammad said this then it is the truth.' When the men then asked: 'Do you then believe (*ṣaddaqa*) that he did this?', he answered: 'I believe him in matters even more



unlikely than this.' For this reason Abū Bakr is called 'the eminently veracious' (*aṣ-ṣiddīq*).

Among those present, however, were some who had previously travelled to that place and they challenged Muḥammad to give a description of it. Jerusalem (*bait al-muqaddas*) stood clearly before his eyes, so he looked over it immediately and began to describe it to them. They said: 'The description is accurate', and then they added: 'Tell us about our caravans (which are returning from Jerusalem)!' So he told them the number of their camels and their condition and then said: 'They will arrive at sunrise on such and such a day, with a grey camel leading them.' On that day the Meccans went (out from their city) and ran quickly to (the passageway) ath-Thaniyya. Then one of them said: 'By God, the sun is just coming up!' And another said: 'By God, here comes the caravan with a grey camel at the head, just as Muḥammad said.' (In spite of this) they did not believe (Muḥammad's account of his night journey to Jerusalem), but said: 'This is nothing but manifest magic (*siḥr mubīn*).'

In the same night (in which the journey to Jerusalem occurred) Muḥammad was (also) raised up to heaven; that is, the ascension<sup>21</sup> took its departure from Jerusalem. Muḥammad told the (members of the tribe) Quraish also of the wonderful things which he had seen in heaven, that he met the prophets there and went as far as the house visited (by the pilgrims) (*al-bait al-ma'mūr*<sup>22</sup>) and the Zizyphus tree at the far end of heaven (*sidrat al-muntahā*<sup>23</sup>).

There is (also) disagreement concerning the date of the night journey. While some say that it occurred one year before the emigration (to Medina), according to Anas (ibn Mālīk) and al-Ḥasan (al-Baṣrī) it took place (even) before the mission (of Muḥammad as a prophet). (Furthermore) there is disagreement concerning whether the night journey occurred (while Muḥammad was) in the state of being awake or asleep. The following is (related) from 'Ā'isha: 'By God, the body of the Messenger of God was not missed (during the night journey); rather, the ascension to heaven occurred with his spirit (*rūḥ*).' According to Mu'āwiya (also) it took place only with the spirit. On the other hand, according to al-Ḥasan (al-Baṣrī) it was a vision which Muḥammad had in his sleep; yet most Traditions stand in opposition to this contention.

*The farthest mosque:*<sup>24</sup> Jerusalem. At that time no mosque existed farther away (from Mecca) than the one at Jerusalem.

*The precincts of which We have blessed:* God means the blessing of religion and of the present world, for Jerusalem had been since the time of Moses the place of worship of the prophets and the place to which (divine) inspiration was restricted (before the time of Muḥammad), and it is surrounded with flowing rivers and fruit-bearing trees. . . .

*He is the One who hears* the speech of Muḥammad, *the One who sees* his deeds and the one who knows of his purity and uprightness. . . .

### 5. Accusations against Muḥammad

Zamakhsharī on Sūra 16:103/105

*And We know very well that the unbelievers<sup>25</sup> say: 'Only a mortal (basha) is teaching him.'<sup>26</sup> The speech of him at whom they hint is foreign, while this is clear Arabic speech.*

The man referred to by the unbelievers was a servant (*ghulām*) of Ḥuwaiṭib ibn 'Abd al-'Uzzā. This servant had embraced Islam and was an excellent Muslim. He was called 'Ā'ish or Yā'ish and he possessed books. Some say (however) that the reference is to Jabr, a Byzantine servant (*ghulām*) of 'Āmir ibn al-Ḥaḍramī. Others say the reference is to two slaves, Jabr and Yasār, who manufactured swords in Mecca and used to read (*qara'a*) the Torah and the Gospel. When the Messenger of God passed by them, he stopped to listen to what they read. From this the unbelievers asserted that these two taught him (what he later proclaimed as revelation). When this was said to one of them, he said: 'No, Muḥammad teaches me!' (Finally, still) others say that the reference is to (the Persian) Salmān al-Fārisī. . . .

*The speech of him at whom they hint* (*yulḥidūna*, sing. perf.: *alḥada*): One says (in Arabic) *alḥada l-qabra* . . . when someone deviates from a straight line and digs to one side when digging up a grave.<sup>27</sup> This word is used regarding any deviation from a straight line. Thus one says: 'He deviates from the straight line in his assertion (*qaul*)'; and, 'So-and-so deviates from the straight line in his religion (*dīn*).' The (word) *mulḥid* (heretic, unbeliever) refers to this because the *mulḥid* deviates from all religion in his beliefs, and in renouncing one religion does not turn his belief to another. (In the present case) the meaning is: The speech of him at whom



they bend their assertion, deviating from the straight line, *is foreign* (non-Arabic), unclear speech.

While this Qur'ān (on the contrary) *is clear Arabic speech*, which possesses clarity and purity (*faṣāḥa*) and (in this manner) disproves the assertion of the unbelievers and destroys their slander. . . .

6. *God's comfort and support for Muḥammad*

Zamakhsharī on Sūra 93:6-8

*Did He not find thee an orphan, and shelter thee?*

*Did He not find thee erring, and guide thee?*

*Did He not find thee needy, and suffice thee?*

Here God enumerates for his Prophet the mercies and benefits that he had granted to him, and reminds him that he did not allow any failure since the beginning of his shaping and growth. God wishes to prepare him for what he has in mind for him (for later). From the preceding demonstrations of mercy, Muḥammad should be able to consider what he (still) has to wait for from God's goodness, so that he should prepare for the best result as well as an increase of good and authority, rather than becoming faint-hearted and impatient.

*Did He not find thee an orphan:* Here the expression 'find' has the sense of knowing (about Muhammad's situation). . . . The meaning is: Were you not an orphan? Muḥammad's father died three months before Muḥammad was born, and his mother died when he was eight years old. Then God appointed Muḥammad's paternal uncle Abū Ṭālib as his guardian and awakened in him a feeling of affection for Muḥammad, so that Abū Ṭālib brought him up well. . . .

*Did He not find thee erring:* The meaning is that (at that time) Muḥammad was found erring regarding knowledge of the revealed laws (*sharā'ī*, sing. *sharī'a*), which can be perceived only through being instructed (*sam*<sup>28</sup>). Thus God says: 'Thou knewest not what the (revealed) Book was, nor belief; but We made it a light, whereby We guide whom We will of Our servants. And thou, surely thou shalt guide unto a straight path' (Sūra 42:52). However, some say that in his youth Muḥammad once lost his way on a mountain

path near Mecca and that Abū Jahl brought him back to (his grandfather) 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib. Others say that (the wet nurse) Ḥalima led Muḥammad astray outside the gates of Mecca as soon as she had weaned him, and wanted to bring him back to 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib. Still others say that Muhammad got lost once on the way to Syria when Abū Ṭālib took him along on a journey.

*And guide thee:* and introduce to you the Qur'ān and the revealed laws. Or: and see to it that you no longer stray away from the right path from your grandfather and your paternal uncle. If one asserts that for forty years Muḥammad lived just like his fellow tribesmen, and if this is meant in the sense that like them he lacked learning, which can be gained only through being instructed (*sam*'), then this is fine; however, if, one means it in the sense that he lived according to the religion and the unbelief of his fellow tribesmen, then God forbid! For the prophets must remain free (*ma'sūm*) from shameful sins, both serious and mild, before and after the commencement of their prophethood, and how then can there be unbelief and ignorance of the (divine) creator? (The answer to this is given in the words of God:) 'It is not ours to associate anything with God (as a partner in his divinity)' (Sūra 12:38). In the eyes of the unbelievers it would be a sufficient defect in the Prophet if he had lived in unbelief before the commencement of his prophethood. . . .

*And suffice thee:* and make you rich either through the wealth of (your wife) Khadija or through the booty which God furnished for you. (In the latter sense) the Prophet said: 'My livelihood is placed under the shadow of my lance.' However, some say (that it means): God has granted you contentment and has made your heart rich.

Zamakhsharī on Sūra 2:119/113

*We have sent thee with the truth, to bear good tidings and warning. Thou shalt not be questioned (lā tus'alu) concerning the inhabitants of hell.*

*We have sent thee:* in order to proclaim good news and to warn, but not to force people to believe. The purpose here is to comfort the Messenger of God and take away his sorrow. He was grieved and depressed because of the persistence and tenacity of his compatriots in their unbelief.



And we will not ask you *concerning the inhabitants of hell* (in order to receive from you an account on this point), why they have not believed after you have exerted yourself again and again summoning them (to belief). To this refers God's words: 'Whether We show thee a part of what We promise them or call thee to Us, it is thine only to deliver the message; and the reckoning is Ours' (Sūra 13:40).

Some read in the sense of a prohibition: And you are not to ask (*lā tas'al*) about the inhabitants of hell. It is related that Muḥammad once said: 'If I only knew the fate of my parents!' Then he was forbidden to ask about the circumstances (*aḥwāl*) of unbelievers and to grieve over the enemies of God. Others say that this prohibition indicates that the punishment which comes upon the unbelievers is especially severe. This is like asking: 'How is it with such-and-such a person?', when inquiring about someone who has fallen into misfortune, and then receiving the answer: 'You had rather not ask about him!' When through such a prohibition (the punishment or the misfortune of the one concerned) is represented as especially severe, then the above is fundamentally the case, because the one questioned must be afraid of it, bringing to the relatives the dreadful condition of the one concerned. Thus, do not question him and trouble him with something that (only) agonizes! Or (the following reason is submitted): You who ask are not able to bear hearing the report you seek, for this causes torment and grief to the listener; so (rather) do not ask. . . .

Baidāwī on Sūra 48:1-3

*Surely We have given thee a manifest victory,  
that God may forgive thee thy former and thy latter sins, and  
complete His blessing upon thee, and guide thee on a straight  
path,  
and that God may help thee with mighty help.*

*Surely We have given (fataḥnā) thee a manifest victory (fath mubīn):* Either this is a promise that Muḥammad will conquer (*fataḥa*) Mecca,<sup>29</sup> this promise being given in the form of the perfect tense (with the content of the promise thus being represented as something already accomplished, although Mecca had not yet been conquered at the time of the sending down of this revelation),

thus indicating that the conquest was already a certainty, or it is a promise of what happened to Muḥammad in that year (in which this revelation came down), like the conquest of Khaibar and Fadak.<sup>30</sup> Or, it is a report of the agreement of al-Ḥudaibiya (which had just been accomplished). In this case the term 'victory' (and not simply 'agreement') is used because this agreement occurred when Muḥammad had already subdued the polytheists to the extent that they had asked for an agreement; and because of it the conquest of Mecca was made possible. Through it the Messenger of God won time (to occupy himself) with the remaining Arabs. He could attack them, conquering villages and causing numerous men to enter into Islam. Also, at al-Ḥudaibiya an important sign (*āya*) appeared to Muḥammad: The water there had completely dried up, and when he rinsed out his mouth (with water) and spat it out at this spot, the water (of al-Ḥudaibiya) flowed so abundantly that all his companions could drink from it.

Or, this is a reference to the victory of the Byzantines who defeated the Persians in that year (in which this revelation came down<sup>31</sup>). One knows indeed from the sūra called 'The Byzantines' (Sūra 30) that this was a victory for the Messenger of God (who had predicted the success of the Byzantines and had represented it as a joyous event for the believers).

Some say (also) that the (word) *fataḥa* ('to grant a victory') here has the meaning of *qaḍā* ('to determine'). (In this case) the verse means: We have determined for you that you shall soon enter Mecca (as a conquerer).

*That God may forgive thee:* This is a reason for the victory (which was granted to Muḥammad as pardon and reward for his zeal). That is, the occasion given here for the victory is that Muḥammad had fought against the unbelievers and had taken the trouble to elevate the religion, to eliminate idolatry, (to begin) to perfect the imperfect souls so they might come step by step to voluntary perfection, and to liberate the weak from the hands of tyrants.

*Thy former and thy latter sins:* everything blameworthy that has proceeded from you.

*And complete His blessing upon thee:* by elevating the religion and now also by linking the rule (of the country) with the prophethood.

*And guide thee on a straight path:* by establishing the mission, and with the appointment of rules of conduct for the guidance (of the community). . . .



## 7. Muḥammad's personal situation

Zamakhsharī on Sūra 33:40

*Muḥammad is not the father of (any) one of your men, but the Messenger of God, and the Seal of the Prophets; God has knowledge of everything.*

*Muḥammad is not the father of (any) one of your men:* that is, he is not actually the father of (any) one of your men, so that between him and you exist the same marriage prohibitions and marriage relationships as between a father and his (male) offspring.

*But (he is) the Messenger of God:* . . . Every messenger is the father of his (religious) community (*umma*) in so far as they are obliged to respect and honour him, and he is obliged to provide for them and give them advice. On the other hand, regarding the other regulations existing between fathers and sons, he is not the father of his community. Zaid (ibn Ḥāritha, whom Muḥammad had adopted as a son) is (also) one of your men who are not actually his offspring; thus, the same lawful regulation applies to him as to you, since adoption and the acceptance of a child are nothing but instances in the realm of special relations and the choice of a companion (and establish no relationship of paternity).

*And the Seal of the Prophets (khātam an-nabiyyīn):* . . . That is, if he had received a male offspring who had reached the age of adulthood, then the latter (also) would have become a prophet and Muḥammad would not be the Seal of the Prophets. Thus it is related that Muḥammad said after the death of (his son) Ibrāhīm<sup>32</sup>: 'Had he lived (longer) he would have become a prophet.'

If one now asks whether Muḥammad was not the (actual) father of aṭ-Ṭāhir, aṭ-Ṭayyib, al-Qāsim, and Ibrāhīm, then I answer: They do not fall under the denial (of fatherhood) in God's words: 'Muḥammad is not the father of (any) one of your men' for two reasons: first, these sons did not reach the age of adulthood; and second, with the word 'men' God was referring to those being addressed and not to these (sons of Muḥammad), who would be Muḥammad's 'men' and not those of the hearers.

If one asks (further) whether Muḥammad was not the father of (his grandsons) al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusain, then I answer: Certainly, but they were not men at that time, and they too would be Muḥammad's 'men' and not those of the hearers. Moreover, there is a further

reason: The text refers to a (direct) offspring of Muḥammad and not to his grandchild, as follows from God's words 'and the Seal of the Prophets', since al-Ḥasan lived past the age of forty and al-Ḥusain lived past the age of fifty (without either becoming a prophet and thus forming the Seal of the Prophets). . . .

If one (finally) asks how Muḥammad (as the Seal of the Prophets) can be the last prophet when Jesus will come down at the end of time (as a sign that the hour of judgment has come),<sup>33</sup> then I reply: That Muḥammad is the last of the prophets means that after him no one else will be active as a prophet; and Jesus was active as a prophet before Muḥammad. And when Jesus comes down he will do this because he devotes himself to the law (*shari'a*) of Muḥammad and performs his prayer according to Muḥammad's direction of prayer (*qibla*) (facing Mecca), as if he were a member of his community.

Zamakhsharī on Sūra 33:37

*When thou saidst to him whom God had blessed and thou hadst favoured: 'Keep thy wife to thyself and fear God', and thou wast concealing within thyself what God should reveal, fearing other men; and God has better right for thee to fear Him. So when Zaid had accomplished what he would of her, then We gave her in marriage to thee, so that there should not be any fault in the believers, concerning the wives of their adopted sons, when they have accomplished what they would of them; and God's commandment must be performed.*

*To him whom God had blessed (an'ama):* through Islam, which represents the greatest blessing, and through the support (*taufīq*)<sup>34</sup> which God grants to you, as you had thereby liberated him (from slavery), had grown fond of him and (through the adoption as a son) had established an especially intimate relationship with him.<sup>35</sup>

*And thou hadst favoured (an'amta):* through every act by which God grants (*waffaqa*) his assistance to you. Thus, Zaid ibn Ḥāritha lived not only under the mercy (*ni'ma*) of God but also within the special favour (*ni'ma*) of the Messenger of God.

*Keep thy wife to thyself:* that is, Zainab bint Jaḥsh. After having given her to Zaid ibn Ḥāritha as a wife, the Messenger of God once caught sight of her, and she made an impression of him. At



this sight he said: 'Praise be to God who changes the heart!' Previously his soul had turned away from her so that he had not desired her (as a wife). If he had desired her at that time, he would have asked for her hand in marriage. Now Zainab heard of this praise and mentioned it to (her husband) Zaid, who understood and to whom God gave antipathy against her and aversion to intimacy with her. So Zaid said to the Messenger of God: 'I might divorce my wife', to which the latter replied: 'What is it? Has something filled you with mistrust against her?' Zaid answered: 'By God, no! I have observed only good in her; yet her noble rank places her too high above me and causes me to feel hurt.' Thereupon the Messenger of God said: 'Keep thy wife to thyself and fear God.' But Zaid (nevertheless) separated from her, and as soon as the waiting period (during which the wife may enter into no new marriage<sup>36</sup>) had elapsed, the Messenger of God said (to Zaid): 'I have no one whom I trust more than you; therefore, seek the hand of Zainab for me!'

Zaid reported: I went forth and there I suddenly found her just as she was leavening some dough. As soon as I saw her she made such an impression on me, since I knew that the Messenger of God had been speaking of her. So I turned my back to her and said: 'Zainab, be happy, for the Messenger of God asks for your hand in marriage.' Then she was pleased and said: 'I do nothing without first seeking advice from my Lord God.' Then she set off for her mosque and (the following portion of) the Qur'an came down: *We gave her in marriage to thee.* Then the Messenger of God took her as a wife and consummated the marriage with her. He had given none of his wives such a feast as he gave to her.<sup>37</sup> He had sheep slaughtered and supplied the men with bread and meat until the light of day spread forth.

If one now asks what God meant with his words *and fear God*, I answer that he meant: And fear God and do not set her free! God wished thereby to forbid Zaid from holding his wife in too high a position and untouched, for it would have been most appropriate if he had not separated from her. Some say (however) that God meant: And fear God and do not blame her for her high position and the offence she thus inflicts upon her husband!

One may ask what the Prophet kept secret within himself. To this I answer: the fact that he was devoted to her in his heart. Others say: the wish that Zaid might separate from her. Still

others say: his knowledge that Zaid would separate from her and that he would marry her, for God had already given this knowledge to him. From 'Ā'isha is (the following related): If the Messenger of God kept to himself something of the revelation which God had given to him then it would be this verse (which was embarrassing for him).

(Further) one may ask what the Prophet should have said when Zaid informed him that he wanted to separate from Zainab, since it would have been objectionable if he had said: 'Do it, for I want to marry her!' To this I reply: It may perhaps be God's will that in this case he keep silent or say to Zaid: 'You know your situation best.' In this manner he would not have contradicted his secret which he (later) indicated had been revealed. God wishes from his prophets that the external and the internal be the same, that they show firmness in their calling, that the situations into which they fall are proper, and that they remain on a determined path. Thus, there is a Tradition according to which the Messenger of God wished to have 'Abd Allāh ibn Abī-Sarḥ put to death, a design that 'Uthmān opposed through intercession. In this Tradition it is said that 'Umar said to Muḥammad: 'My eye is set right on you; if you give me a (secret) sign, I will put him to death.' Then the Messenger of God answered: 'The prophets give no secret signs; with them the external and the internal are one and the same.'

(Also) one may ask how God could blame the Prophet for keeping something secret when the Prophet considered its open announcement to be objectionable. But did the Prophet not consider the open announcement of the affair objectionable only because this affair was itself objectionable and indeed was opposed by men who witnessed something which they viewed as scandalous according to their understanding and their custom? And why did God not reprove the Prophet for the affair itself and command him to suppress his desire, and refuse to himself the feeling of inclination for Zainab and the retention of this wife? Why did God not protect ('*aṣama*) his Prophet from this association with something objectionable and the gossip which affected him (at that time)?

To this I answer: There are many situations in which a person exercises caution and in which he feels uneasy even though these matters are completely legal (*mubāḥ*) and are absolutely allowed (*ḥalāl*), and concerning which before God there is neither rumour nor reproach! Frequently, participation in such lawful matters



becomes a stairway for the attainment of duties (*wājibāt*) which have a great influence in the religion and result in a significant reward. If a person were to exercise no caution here, then many people would give a free course to their tongues regarding the matter (and would put all sorts of rumours into circulation), except, of course, those people who have preserved not only excellent knowledge, religion, and insight into the real nature (of the matter) but also the kernel as well as the external appearance of the affair. Are the people then not like those who (once) ate in the apartments of the Prophet and who (after the meal) stubbornly remained seated, without making a move from their places because they sought sociability through conversation? At this their remaining seated annoyed the Messenger of God and their conversation made him uneasy, but his sense of shame prevented him from ordering them to rise from the table. Finally (the following verse) came down: 'O believers, enter not the apartments of the Prophet for a meal unless you have been given permission, and wait not until meal-time. But come when you are invited, and disperse when you have had the meal, not lingering for idle talk. For that is hurtful to the Prophet, and he is shy before you. But God is not shy before the truth!' (Sūra 33:53).

Had the Messenger of God (in this case) expressed his secret thoughts openly and commanded the people to go their way, then he would have caused them grief and this would have resulted in some gossip. The wish of the Prophet regarding marriage with Zainab involves the same kind of situation. When the heart of a man aspires to something desirable like a wife or something else, then this can be considered as objectionable neither against reason nor against divine law (*shar*<sup>38</sup>), since such an aspiration is not the work of the man and does not persist through his free choice (*ikhtiyār*). If one (then) receives what is legal in a lawful way, then nothing of impropriety lies therein. This is true also for the courtship (by the Prophet) of Zainab and his marriage with her, since Zaid was not asked to renounce her and no request was put to him. More significant than (an act like) putting on a garment, it is incumbent upon the Prophet to assist Zaid in his separation from her, especially since it was quite certainly known to him that Zaid's soul was no longer in any way filled with affection for Zainab but was alienated from her, while the soul of the Messenger of God was devoted to her. Moreover, the people did not consider it as

offensive, since a man had renounced all claim to his wife for the benefit of his friend, and they did not hold it objectionable that the other married her after such a renunciation. When the 'emigrants' (*muhājirūn*) arrived in Medina, the 'helpers' (*anṣār*) shared everything with them, even to the extent that a man who had two wives renounced one of them, and the 'emigrant' (to whom he surrendered her) married her.

It is now therefore as follows: The affair (of the courtship and marriage with Zainab) was legal in all points and contained nothing that was objectionable in any way, nor anything disgraceful, nor any wrong to Zaid or anyone (else). On the contrary, it brought (numerous) benefits (*maṣāliḥ*) with it, not the least of which is the fact that the daughter of the paternal aunt of the Messenger of God (that is, Zainab) was (in this way) preserved from the destiny of being without a man and (thus) from perishing, and that she attained a high position and became one of the 'mothers of the Muslims'.<sup>39</sup> Also, this led to the general benefit mentioned by God when he said: *so that there should not be any fault in the believers, concerning the wives of their adopted sons, when they have accomplished what they would of them.* (Since this was the case and Muḥammad's inclination for Zainab was not blameworthy as such) then the appropriateness (of the situation) lay in the fact that God rebuked his Messenger for exercising secrecy and going so far as to say (to Zaid): 'Keep thy wife to thyself and fear God!' and that God sanctioned no other conduct by his Messenger than that in which there was conformity between the internal and the external and steadfastness in matters of truth, so that the believers could take him as an example and thus must perceive no shame in him, when they were confronted with the truth. (This was appropriate) also since it was bitter (for the Prophet). . . .

Zamakhsharī on Sūra 33:50/49-52

*O Prophet, We have made lawful for thee thy wives to whom thou hast given their dowries, and those whom thy right hand owns (as slaves), whom God has given to thee as spoils of war, and the daughters of thy paternal uncles and paternal aunts, thy maternal uncles and maternal aunts, who have emigrated with thee, and any woman believer, if she give herself to the Prophet and if the Prophet desire to take her in marriage. This is a special*



*exception for thee and not for the believers, so that no fault may be found in thee. We know what We have imposed upon the believers concerning their wives and what their right hands own (as slaves). God is All-compassionate, All-forgiving.*

*Thou mayest put off whom thou wilt of them, and whom thou wilt thou mayest take to thee; and if thou seekest any thou hast set aside there is no fault in thee. So it is likelier they will be comforted, and not sorrow, and every one of them will be well-pleased with what thou givest her. God knows what is in your hearts; God is All-knowing, All-clement.*

*Thereafter women are not lawful to thee, nor art thou permitted to take other wives<sup>40</sup> in exchange for them, even though their beauty please thee, except what thy right hand owns (as slaves); God keeps watch over everything.*

*Their dowries:* their bridegroom's gift (*mahr*) to the bride on the day after marriage. This bridegroom's gift is a payment for the (surrender of the) vulva. One could either pay the bridegroom's gift at once (as soon as the marriage settlement is concluded) or the amount could be arranged and stipulated in the marriage settlement (and paid later). One may now ask: Why does God say: *Those to whom thou has given their dowries* as well as those whom God has given to thee (*mimmā afā' a llāhu 'alaika'*) as spoils of war and those who have emigrated with thee? Wherein lies the advantage of these (restricting) specifications? To this I answer: God has chosen for his Messenger the most excellent and most appropriate and has recommended to him the best and the purest, just as he also granted others to him (in addition to the particular ones which are specified here) and has also distinguished him through other signs. Reference to the bridegroom's gift in the marriage settlement is more appropriate and more excellent than omitting the reference, although the marriage settlement is possible (also without this). (In the latter case) the man has the right to touch the woman and the duty to pay to her the 'appropriate bridegroom's gift' (*mahr al-mithl*<sup>41</sup>) when he cohabits with her. On the other hand, 'compensation' (*mut'a*) is to be paid if he does not cohabit with her (and withdraws from the marriage). Immediate payment of the bridegroom's gift (as soon as the marriage settlement is concluded) is now more excellent than a reference to it (in the marriage settlement) and deferment of payment. Immediate payment was the

custom and practice among the ancestors, and nothing different from this was known then.

The same is true of the female slave, when she has been captured by the one who possesses her, in which case the sword and lance are the suitors of the betrothed, and she belongs among the booty which God has granted (to the believers) when in the 'sphere of war' (*dār al-ḥarb*<sup>42</sup>), allowing (for marriage) sooner and better than one who is acquired through importation and purchase. . . . Also the female relatives who emigrated with the Messenger of God were in a similar position and were not forbidden to him (for reasons of too close a blood relationship or relationship by marriage), but were more excellent (for marriage) than those who had not emigrated with him. From Umm Hāni', the daughter of Abū Ṭālib (and cousin of Muḥammad on his father's side), (the following account) is related: The Messenger of God asked for my hand in marriage, but I excused myself regarding his proposal and he accepted the excuse, whereupon God sent down the present verse. Now I was no longer allowed to him (for marriage) since I did not emigrate with him but had been an unbeliever up to the time of the surrender of Mecca.

*And any woman believer, if she give herself to the Prophet and if the Prophet desire to take her in marriage:* We have allowed to you such of the believing women who desire to give themselves to you, without requiring a bridegroom's gift—should this case ever occur. For this reason (because it is undecided whether this case occurs), (the word) 'woman' appears without the definite article. There is no agreement that this (actually) ever happened. According to Ibn 'Abbās, the Messenger of God did not receive a single wife (who gave herself to him) as a gift. (On the other hand) some say that he had four wives who had given themselves to him, namely, Maimūna bint al-Ḥārith, Zainab bint Khuzaima, the 'mother of the poor among the "helpers" (*ansār*)', as well as Umm Sharīk bint Jābir and Khaula bint Ḥakīm. . . .

*So that no fault may be found in thee:* so that you may not be hampered (by any fault) in your religion, since we have especially distinguished you through the purification (of your humble way of acting) and through the selection of what is more appropriate and excellent; and (that no fault may be found in thee) in your secular life (*fī dunyāka*) because we have allowed to you (in spite of the alleged restrictions based upon principle all) categories of wives



whom one may marry (that is, non-relatives, slaves, paternal as well as maternal female cousins), and have added to this those who give themselves to you. . . .

*God is All-compassionate* towards him who falls into oppression, provided that he becomes converted, and *All-forgiving* since he is generous concerning his servants.

The following is related: When the 'mothers of the believers'<sup>43</sup> (once) were jealous of each other and wished (each for herself) for an increase in their allowances and for this reason caused the anger of the Messenger of God, he held himself aloof from them for an entire month. Then the (so-called) *takhyīr* came down (that is, the verse: 'Thy Lord creates whatever He wills and chooses (*ikhtāra*); they have not the choice (*al-khiyāra*)', Sūra 28:68), and they became apprehensive that the Prophet would divorce them. So they said: 'Messenger of God, make the decision yourself concerning us, and rule according to your wish!' From 'Ā'isha is related that she said to the Prophet: 'Messenger of God, I see that your Lord is in a hurry whenever your inclination for affection (*hawāka*) is concerned.'

*Thou mayest put off whom thou wilt of them, and whom thou wilt thou mayest take to thee: . . .* That is: You may refrain from sexual intercourse with whomever you please and cohabit with whomever you please among them. Or, you may divorce whomever you please and retain whomever you please. Or, you are not required to grant a share (of sexual intercourse) to any unless you so desire, and you may grant a share to whomever you please. Or, you may discontinue marriage with women of your (religious) community (*umma*) from whom you wish to separate, and you may enter into marriage with whomever you wish. (Finally) from al-Ḥasan (al-Baṣrī) (is related): When the Prophet sought marriage with a woman, no one else could ask to marry her until the Prophet released her.

Thus, an extensive pattern is suggested here, of which the following is to be kept in mind: The Prophet may divorce (a woman) or keep (her). If he keeps (her) he may practise or refrain from sexual intercourse (with her) and grant to her a share (of sexual intercourse) or not. If he divorces or separates (from her) he may leave the divorced woman alone without wishing to take her (back) or he may wish to take her again.

It is related that the Prophet (refrained from sexual intercourse and) put off temporarily the following wives: Sauda, Juwairiya,

Ṣafiyya, Maimūna, and Umm Ḥabība. In so doing he used to grant them a share (of sexual intercourse) according to his wish. Among the wives whom the Prophet preferred to take to himself belong 'Ā'isha, Ḥaḥṣa, Umm Salama, and Zainab (bint Jahsh). Thus, he used to put five off temporarily in order to take four to himself. (On the other hand) it is related that, disregarding divorce and the selection concerned with it, the Prophet treated (all his wives) the same, with the exception of Sauda, who relinquished the night belonging to her to 'Ā'isha and said (to the Prophet): 'Do not divorce me but let me remain in the company of your wives!' . . .

*God knows what is in your hearts:* Herein lies a threat against the wives of the Prophet who are not satisfied with what God has decreed in this respect, but who have entrusted themselves to the will of his Messenger. (At the same time, herein lies) an inducement for the submission of their hearts, for a peaceful settlement among themselves, and for a common effort towards the contentment and happiness of the Messenger of God. . . .

*Thereafter:* after the nine (wives which you have<sup>44</sup>). That is, nine is the right number of wives for the Messenger of God, just as four is the right number for his community. He is not allowed to exceed this number.

*Nor art thou permitted to take other wives in exchange for them: . . .* (According to this revelation) the Prophet is restricted to his nine wives (named above), whom he left behind (as widows) at his death. . . .