

THE STUDY QURAN

A New Translation and Commentary

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HarperOne

An Imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers

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EDITORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Seyyed Hossein Nasr supervised the entire *Study Quran*, including selecting the editorial board and essay authors; editing the translation, commentary, and essays; and overseeing the style and scope of the translation and commentary. Caner K. Dagli wrote the commentary for *sūrah*s 2–3, 8–9, and 21–28, was the primary translator for *sūrah*s 2–3, 8–9, and 22–28, and was an editor for the remainder of the translation and commentary; he also conceived and supervised the design of the book. Maria Massi Dakake wrote the commentary for *sūrah*s 4–7 and 16–19, was the primary translator for *sūrah*s 4–7, 10–12, and 14–21, and was an editor for the remainder of the translation and commentary. Joseph E. B. Lumbard wrote the commentary for *sūrah*s 1 and 29–114, was the primary translator for *sūrah*s 1, 13, and 29–114, and was an editor for the remainder of the translation and commentary. Mohammed Rustom wrote the commentary for *sūrah*s 10–15 and 20 and contributed to editing other parts of the commentary and the translation.

APPROACHING *THE STUDY QURAN*

ne may approach the translation and commentary in *The Study Quran* in several different ways. Readers may:

1. Read the translation alone, in a linear fashion.
2. Read the translation in a linear fashion along with the commentary.
3. Read the translation along with the commentary, but allow the citations and cross-references in the commentary to take them to other parts of the Quran.
4. Use the index and key passages of commentary to search for specific subjects of interest.

One function of the commentary is to explain the text or to point readers to a different section of the commentary that addresses more fully the particular subject. Another function is to direct readers to similar or related passages in the Quran. Often an idea or theme can be better understood in light of the same or a related concept as it appears elsewhere in the Quran. Even in those cases where the index provides the necessary information, from within the translation readers will not necessarily know what to check in order to explore interconnections and relevant ideas. Moreover, simply pointing out that an idea or concept appears in several other places in the Quran is itself a valuable form of commentary.

One way of reading the translation and commentary is to follow it linearly: to read straight through the translation along with its corresponding commentary. But readers are also encouraged to follow the leads that are to be found in the commentary. The citations in one note about a related concept or verse will bring readers to another relevant passage, which will itself open out to other parts of the commentary, which will cite more verses in turn. By following these leads, readers will begin to get a sense of the inner architecture of the *Quran*, the internal resonances between ideas, and the shades of meaning of various concepts that come to light as readers see them in more than one passage.

Navigating the Text

The numbers that appear in red at the far right and far left of the header correspond to the commentary, and designate the range of commentary that appears on two facing pages. This is so because the red verse number medallions are already prominent near the top of the page, and some pages contain only commentary and no translation.



Sovereignty

al-Mulk

Although there are no definitive accounts as to when *al-Mulk* was revealed, most consider it to be from the middle of the Makkan period. In the sayings attributed to the Prophet, it is called by the first word, *Tabāarak*, meaning “Blessed,” or by the first few words, *Tabāraka al-ladhī bi yadihi’l-mulk*, “Blessed Is He in Whose Hand Lies Sovereignty.” It is also known as *al-Māni*^c, meaning “The Shield” or “The Protector,” after a famous *ḥadīth*: “*Sūrat Tabāarak* is a shield (*māni*^c) from the punishment of the grave.” According to some it was also known as *al-Munjiyyah*, “The Savior,” after another *ḥadīth*: “Verily, there is a *sūrah* in the Quran which contains thirty verses that will intercede on behalf of one who recites it until he is forgiven: *Blessed is He in Whose Hand lies sovereignty*” (IK, Ṭs). Another *ḥadīth* states, “There is a *sūrah* of the Quran which is but thirty verses that will argue on behalf of its companion until it causes him to enter the Garden: *Blessed is He in Whose Hand lies sovereignty*” (IK).

Based upon such *ahādīth* and upon several sayings of the Companions of the Prophet, it is believed that one who recites this *sūrah* will be spared from trials in both this life and the next. It is also reported that the Prophet said regarding *al-Mulk*, “I would love for it to be in the heart of every person among my community” (IK, Sy). Consequently, this is one of the best-known and most frequently recited *sūrahs* of the Quran.

The *sūrah* begins with an attestation to God’s omnipotence and the perfection of creation (vv. 1–4), followed by an assertion of the inability of the jinn to penetrate the heavens (v. 5). The dreadful ends of those who deny God’s messengers (vv. 6–11) are contrasted with the final ends of those who fear God (v. 12). God’s omnipotence and omniscience is then reasserted through a series of interposed statements and rhetorical questions (vv. 13–24), and the *sūrah* concludes with a series of questions that the Prophet is told to pose to those who question him regarding the end of time (vv. 25–30).

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

① Blessed is He in Whose Hand lies sovereignty, and He is Powerful over all things, ② Who created death and life that He may try you as to which of you is most virtuous in deed, and He is the Mighty, the Forgiving, ③ Who created seven heavens one upon another; no disproportion dost thou see in the Merciful's creation. Cast thy sight again; dost thou see any flaw? ④ Then

1 *Sovereignty* translates *mulk*, a word closely related to *malakūt*, which is rendered *dominion* in 36:83; they derive from the same root, *m-l-k*, which in verbal form means “to possess,” “to control,” “to rule,” or “to reign.” According to some, *malakūt* refers to God's Lordship over the unseen realm, while *mulk* refers to God's Lordship over the visible world. The Divine Name *Mālik* (“Master”) also derives from this root, as does the word for “king” (*malik*) and the most widely used word for “angels” (*malā'ikah*; sing. *malak*); for more on these terms and their use in Islamic cosmology, see 36:83c.

2 God's creation of life and death is often understood as His granting existence to what is nonexistent, as in 2:28: *How can you disbelieve in God, seeing that you were dead and He gave you life?* (IK). That the mention of death precedes life in this verse can be seen as an indication that God has created death for human beings in relation to this world, for *every soul shall taste death* (3:185; 21:35; 29:57), and life in relation to both this life and the Hereafter (Q). As a *ḥadīth* states, “God has humbled the son of Adam with death, and has made the world an abode of life, then an abode of death, and made the Hereafter an abode of recompense (*jazā'*), then an abode of eternal abiding (*baqā'*)” (IK, Q, Sy). Regarding the second half of the verse, see 18:7: *Surely We made whatsoever is on the earth an adornment for it, that We may try them as to which of them is most virtuous in deed* (see also 11:7). That God tries human beings is not considered unjust, for as other verses say, *God tasks no soul beyond its capacity* (2:286; see also 2:233; 6:152; 7:42; 23:62), and *thy Lord wrongs no one* (18:49). Trials are considered an aspect of God's Mercy, since they are an integral part of the process of purification. When asked

which human beings suffer the greatest trials, the Prophet answered, “The prophets, then those most like them. A person is tested according to the level of his faith. If his faith is firm, his trials increase in severity, and if there is weakness in his faith, he will be tried accordingly.” With regard to trials faced by believers, another *ḥadīth* says, “No fatigue, disease, sorrow, sadness, hurt, or distress befalls a Muslim—even if he be pricked by a thorn—but that God expiates some of his sins thereby.” In this sense, affliction can be a blessing for the opportunities it presents; another *ḥadīth* says, “If God wants to do good to somebody, He afflicts him with trials.” Conversely, wealth can be a curse for those who do not manage it properly, as in 9:85: *And let not their wealth or their children impress thee. God desires only to punish them thereby in this world, and that their souls should depart while they are disbelievers*. Thus one is tried both by affliction, in the face of which one must be patient, and by blessings, for which one must be thankful, recognizing that *God is Powerful over all things* (v. 1). Several early commentators note the significance of the fact that the verse says *most virtuous in deed* rather than “most accomplished” or simply “most” (IK), a position that reflects the emphasis upon intention found throughout the Quran and *Hadīth*. As the Prophet says in one of the most famous of *ahadīth*, “Deeds are only in accord with their intentions. And every person has only what he intended.” It is said that upon reciting this *sūrah* the Prophet stopped when he reached *which of you is most virtuous in deed* and said, “The most wary of what God has forbidden and the quickest to obey God” (Āl, Q).

3–4 The *heavens* can be seen as a reference only to the *heavens*, the whole of the created

cast thy sight twice again; thy sight will return to thee humbled and wearied. ⑤ Truly We have adorned the lowest heaven with lamps and made them missiles against the satans; and We have prepared for them the punishment of the Blaze. ⑥ And for those who disbelieve in their Lord is the punishment of Hell. What an evil journey's end! ⑦ When they are cast therein, they will hear it blaring as it boils over, ⑧ well-nigh bursting with rage. Whenever a group is cast therein, its keepers ask them, "Did not a warner come unto you?" ⑨ They say, "Indeed, a warner came unto us, but we denied him and said, 'God did not

order, or the universal levels or grades of existence, the last of which serves as a basis for various hierarchical cosmological schemes in some commentaries. *Disproportion* translates *tafāwut*, which here indicates something that lacks proportion or balance such that parts of it fail to connect with other parts of it (R, Z); thus some say it has the same meaning as *rifṭs* in 50:6: *Have they not looked upon the sky above them, how We built it and adorned it, and [how it] has no rifts?* The lack of *disproportion* can be understood as the absence of *rifṭs* between the seven heavens or more generally as an indication that there are no gaps in God's creation. As several verses indicate, all things are created *in truth*, as in 44:38–39: *And We did not create the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them in play. We did not create them, save in truth. But most of them know not* (see also 6:73; 10:5; 14:19; 15:85; 16:3; 29:44; 30:8; 39:5; 45:22; 46:3). That the eye returns *humbled* could also mean that an eye that tries to find defect returns "humiliated" or "debased" (IK). This verse is also related to 4:82, which maintains that for one who contemplates the Quran no *discrepancy* will be found in it.

5 According to a famous saying attributed to Qatādah, one of the foremost commentators from the third generation of Muslim scholars, "The creation of the stars is for three things: decoration of the nearest heaven, missiles to hit the satans, and signs to guide travelers" (IK, Ṭ). The first two functions are mentioned in this verse. It is said that the function of meteors or shooting stars is to bar the satans from listening to the secrets of Heaven, to which they had previously enjoyed

access; see 15:16–18; 37:6–10c; 72:8–9c, as well as the introduction to *Sūrah* 72.

6 This verse can be seen as a general warning against all forms of disbelief. But in relation to the discussion of satans in v. 5, it is said to apply to those who would seek information from fortune-tellers and sorcerers as an alternative to religion. As a *ḥadīth* says of this practice, "Whosoever comes to a fortune-teller (*kāhīn*) or diviner (*ʿarrāf*) and considers what he says to be true has disbelieved in what was revealed to Muhammad."

7–8 These verses refer to the hideous sound that Hellfire is said to make as the disbelievers are dragged into its depths. It is similar to the sound described in 25:12: *When it sees them from a place far off, they will hear its raging and roaring. Its keepers* refers to the angels serving as the gatekeepers of Hell, who are described elsewhere as *angels, stern and severe, who do not disobey God in what He commands of them and who do what they are commanded* (66:6). They number nineteen in 74:30–31, and the main keeper is identified as Mālik in 43:77–78: *And they will call, "O Mālik, let thy Lord put an end to us." He will reply, "You will surely remain. We did indeed bring you the Truth, but most of you were averse to the Truth."* Their question to the disbelievers, *Did not a warner come unto you?* is by way of reproach, for as 35:24 states, *There has been no community but that a warner has passed among them.*

9 As many verses attest, God promises that none will be punished unless they have been sent a clear warner, part of the test alluded to in v. 2. As 17:15 states, *And never do We punish till We have sent a messenger.*

send anything down; you are in naught but great error.” ¹⁰ They say, “Had we listened or had we understood, we would not be among the inhabitants of the Blaze.” ¹¹ Thus do they admit their sin; so away with the inhabitants of the Blaze! ¹² Truly for those who fear their Lord unseen there shall be forgiveness and a great reward. ¹³ Keep your speech secret or proclaim it; truly He knows what lies within breasts. ¹⁴ Does He Who created not know? He is the Subtle, the Aware. ¹⁵ He is the One Who made the earth tractable for you; so travel

^{10–11} On the Day of Judgment, all will see the truth. Those who denied it in this life will thus realize that they had been astray and admit the error of their ways, though it will be of no avail against the punishment of the Fire; as 4:18 says, *Repentance is not accepted from those who do evil deeds till, when death confronts one of them, he says, “Truly now I repent,” nor from those who die as disbelievers. For those We have prepared a painful punishment.* In a similar verse, the disbelievers even bear witness that they deserve Hellfire, saying, *“Yea, indeed!” But the Word of punishment has come due for the disbelievers* (39:71). The door of repentance is thus open until the moment of death. As a *ḥadīth* states, “God will accept the repentance of His servant until his death rattle”; see 4:17–18c.

¹² Cf. 36:11; 50:33. Some verses indicate that the fear of God is incumbent upon all believers, as in 3:175: *So fear them not, but fear Me, if you are believers.* To *fear* God *unseen* can be interpreted as a reference to worshipping God, Who is unseen, or as a reference to worshipping God in seclusion (IK, Q, Sh, Ṭs). The former interpretation sees one as worshipping God because one fears the punishment, even though one does not see the punishment. The latter implies a deeper level of devotion and reverence in which one fears to displease God because of the depth of one’s love for God, and thus refrains from any acts of disobedience both in public and in private. In a famous *ḥadīth*, one of seven categories of people said to be “shaded by God on the Day wherein there will be no shade other than His shade” is “a person who remembers God while alone and his eyes flow [with tears]” (IK). The *great reward* refers to Paradise (Q, Sh) and is also taken to imply that the delights of this world become small in the eyes of those who fear God (Bd).

¹³ According to Ibn ‘Abbās, this verse was revealed about the idolaters who would slander the Prophet and say to one another, “Lower your voices, lest Muhammad’s God hear you” (Q, W). As God overhears all, the Prophet advised his followers, “Whosoever believes in God and the Last Day, let him speak well or be silent.” That God *knows what lies within breasts* (3:119, 154; 5:7; 8:43; 11:5; 29:10; 31:23; 35:38; 39:7; 42:24; 57:6; 64:4) indicates that God is aware of the intentions behind all deeds and all inner thoughts. It does not, however, mean that one is accountable for all that one thinks unless that thought is put into action. In this vein, another *ḥadīth* states, “For my community God passes over that which arises within their souls, so long as they do not speak of it or act upon it.”

¹⁴ This verse could also be read, “Does He not know whom He has created, though He is the Subtle, the Aware?” (IK, Q). The idea expressed both in this reading and in the translation is further explained by 50:16: *We did indeed create man, and We know what his soul whispers to him; and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.* If read as a reference to the disbeliever’s ignorance of God, a third reading could be, “Does he not know who creates, though He is the Subtle, the Aware?” Of the several Divine Names that refer to God’s Omniscience, *the Aware* refers in particular to God’s Knowledge of things before they come into existence (Q). In contrast, *the Subtle* refers to God’s Knowledge of the minutest details. *The Subtle* renders *al-Laṭīf*, which can also mean “the Kind”; see 42:19c.

¹⁵ The beginning of this verse is similar to part of what Noah says to his people in 71:19–20: *And God made the earth an open expanse for you, that you may travel spacious paths therein* (see

the open roads thereof and eat of His provision. And unto Him is the Resurrection. ①⑥ Do you feel secure that He Who is in Heaven will not cause the earth to engulf you while it churns? ①⑦ Or do you feel secure that He Who is in Heaven will not unleash a torrent of stones upon you? Soon shall you know how My warning is. ①⑧ And indeed those before them denied. How, then, was the change I wrought! ①⑨ Have they not considered the birds above them, spreading and folding up [their wings]? None holds them save the Compassionate. Truly He sees all things. ②⑦ Who is it that will be a host for you, who may help you, apart from the Compassionate? The disbelievers are in naught but delusion. ②⑧ Who is it that will provide for you if He withholds His provi-

also 20:53; 21:31; 43:10). The command to travel or journey upon the earth and reflect upon the nature of the created order is a frequent refrain in the Quran. It is usually mentioned in relation to the transience of life (cf. 3:137; 6:11; 12:109; 16:36; 27:69; 30:9; 30:42; 35:44; 40:21, 82; 47:10), but is also mentioned in relation to understanding the nature of God's creative power, as in 29:20: *Journey upon the earth and observe how He originated creation. Then God shall bring the next genesis into being. Truly God is Powerful over all things.* The exhortation to travel or journey is thus an exhortation to reflect and contemplate, so that the heart may open to the truth, as in 22:46: *Have they not journeyed upon the earth, that they might have hearts by which to understand or ears by which to hear? Truly it is not the eyes that go blind, but it is hearts within breasts that go blind.*

16 Cf. 16:45: *Do those who have plotted evil deeds feel secure that God will not cause the earth to engulf them, or that the punishment will not come upon them whence they are not aware?* (see also 17:68–69). In 28:76–82 and 29:39–40 the story is told of Korah, who possessed great wealth, but was nonetheless engulfed by the earth as a punishment for oppressing the people.

17 Cf. 17:68. This verse is an allusion to the punishment sent upon the people of Lot (see 29:40; 54:34), and upon the masters of the elephant (105:1), who are said to have attempted to destroy the Ka'bah just forty years before the beginning of Islam; see the introduction to *Sūrah* 105. The last phrase could also be read "how my warner is,"

as a reference to the Prophet, meaning that the disbelievers will know his truthfulness and the punishment they deserve for denying him, as did those mentioned in vv. 8–11.

18 *How, then, was the change I wrought!* (cf. 22:44; 34:45; 35:26) could also be rendered, "How, then, was My reproach!" Both translations indicate that the punishment will be as severe as what befell the generations before; see 22:42–45c.

19 Cf. 16:79: *Have they not considered the birds, made subservient, in midair? None holds them save God. Truly in that are signs for a people who believe.* In this vein, a *ḥadīth* states, "Were you to trust in God as He merits, He would provide for you as He provides for the birds; they depart with empty stomachs and return full" (IK).

20 The idolaters of Makkah are said to have claimed that their gods would protect them from the punishments like those mentioned in vv. 17–18 and elsewhere. But as 36:75 says, *They cannot help them, though they be a host made ready for them.* Satan deluded them into thinking that they would be helped, but he then admits to this delusion on the Day of Judgment, saying, *Verily God made you the Promise of truth; and I made you a promise, but I failed you. And I had no authority over you, save that I called you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me, but blame yourselves. I cannot respond to your cries for help; nor can you respond to my cries for help* (14:22).

21 This is similar to 16:73: *And they worship, apart from God, that which has no power over any provision that may come for them from the heavens*

sion? Nay, but they persist in insolence and aversion. ²² Is one who walks with his face stooped down more guided, or one who walks upright upon a straight path? ²³ Say, "He it is Who brought you into being and endowed you with hearing, sight, and hearts. Little do you give thanks!" ²⁴ Say, "He it is Who multiplied you upon the earth, and unto Him shall you be gathered." ²⁵ And they say, "When will this promise come to pass, if you are truthful?" ²⁶ Say, "Knowledge lies with God alone, and I am only a clear warner." ²⁷ And when they see it close at hand, the faces of those who disbelieved shall be stricken, and

and the earth, nor are they capable [of such]. That God is the provider of all sustenance is a constant theme of the Quran. Human beings are thus enjoined to recognize that nothing truly belongs to them and to spend in charity from what God has provided them.

²² *One who walks with his face stooped down* is seen as a metaphor for disbelievers, who do not look at the path ahead, to the right, or to the left in this life (Q, Ṭs) and thus do not consider the full reality of their state; rather, they are focused only upon petty desires and immediate concerns. It is also seen as a reference to the state of disbelievers in the Hereafter; as 25:34 says, they are *those who are gathered upon their faces to Hell, their place is worse and they are further astray from the way*. In contrast, believers are said to walk upright, so that they see and are not beset by afflictions that would cause them to go astray.

²³ Cf. 23:78; 32:9. The gifts of hearing, sight, and heart are mentioned together in several verses, and human beings are exhorted to reflect upon these gifts (see 16:78); in 17:36 it is said that these three gifts *will be called to account*, meaning that one will be held accountable for their proper or improper use. The ingratitude stems from an illness in human beings' hearts, for *truly it is not the eyes that go blind, but it is hearts within breasts that go blind* (22:46).

²⁴ God has distributed human beings throughout the various regions of the earth and given them different languages, colors, shapes, appearances, and forms (IK). Other verses also call upon human beings to reflect upon the diversity of races and tribes (see 5:48; 49:13). And although God

has spread human beings, with their different creeds and colors, throughout the habitable earth, He will gather them all together on a single plain on the Day of Judgment, which is also known as *the Day of Gathering* (64:9).

²⁵ Cf. 10:48; 21:38; 27:71; 34:29; 36:48; see 36:48c.

²⁶ That knowledge of the end of time lies only with God is mentioned in several Quranic verses (see 7:187; 31:34; 33:63; 41:47; 43:85; 79:42–46) and in Biblical passages such as Mark 13:31–32: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." In this vein, the Prophet is told to say, *I am only a clear warner*, in several verses (22:49; 29:50; 38:70; 46:9; also see 27:92), while in other verses God addresses the Prophet, *Thou art but a warner* (13:7; 79:45), and *Thou art naught but a warner* (35:23).

²⁷ It refers to the Final Hour or to the Day of Judgment. Their *faces* will be *stricken* because *the evils of that which they have earned will appear unto them, and that which they used to mock will beset them* (39:48). *That for which you called* is the promise of Judgment that they questioned in v. 25 and that they sought to hasten (Ṭ). Several other passages indicate that those who do not believe in the punishment seek to hasten the Judgment; e.g., 42:18: *Those who do not believe in it would seek to hasten it* (see also 6:57–59; 10:48–51; 26:200–207; 27:71–72; 29:53–54; 46:22–24; 51:12–14). In this vein, it is said that Qatādah related v. 27 to 8:32: *And [remember] when they said, "O God, if this be the truth from Thee, rain*

it shall be said, “This is that for which you called.” ﴿28﴾ Say, “Have you considered whether God destroys me and those with me or has mercy upon us? Who will protect the disbelievers from a painful punishment?” ﴿29﴾ Say, “He is the Compassionate; we believe in Him and trust in Him, and you will soon know who is in manifest error.” ﴿30﴾ Say, “Have you considered? Were your water to vanish into the ground, then who would bring you flowing water?”

down stones upon us from the sky, or bring us a painful punishment” (T).

28 The command *say* at the beginning of each of the last three verses (vv. 28–30) is taken by most as a command to the Prophet. Here it is as if to say, “How is it that you seek to hasten the punishment, when I and those with me will not be destroyed, but none will save you from the punishment?” (T).

29 This verse is read by the vast majority of commentators as a declaration of faith contrasting the manner in which believers trust in the Compassionate to the manner in which disbelievers trust in the things of this world. The verse can also be understood as an answer to the previous verse, meaning that the only one who can protect the disbelievers is *the Compassionate*. It is said that when the Judgment comes, the disbelievers will realize that they had been wrong. Of this event 26:96–97 states, *They will say, as they dispute with one another therein, “By God, indeed we were in manifest error.”*

The translation *you will soon know* follows that of most schools of recitation, *sata‘lamūn*. But in the school of *al-kisā‘i*, it is read *saya‘lamūn*, meaning “soon they will know,” in which case what the Prophet is commanded to say stops after the second instance of “Him.”

30 *Flowing* translates *ma‘īn*, which is understood by some to mean “clear” or “sweet” (T). In many verses, that water is sent down from the sky is used as an allusion to blessings from God (e.g., 35:27; 39:21; 41:39); in others the manner in which God brings forth life through water is cited as a sign for those who believe (e.g., 2:164; 6:99; 7:57; 80:25–30); and 21:30 says, *We made every living thing from water*. God’s removal of water (cf. 56:68–70) can thus be taken as an allusion to God’s removing His blessings or the gift of life; for the place of water in the *Qurān*, see also 21:30–31c; 24:45c.