



Pakistan Journal of Qur'anic Studies

ISSN Print: 2958-9177, ISSN Online: 2958-9185

Vol. 3, Issue 1, January – June 2024, Page no. 181-212

HEC: https://hjrs.hec.gov.pk/index.php?r=site%2Fresult&id=1089226#journal_result

Journal homepage: <https://journals.iub.edu.pk/index.php/pjqs>

Issue: <https://journals.iub.edu.pk/index.php/pjqs/issue/view/169>

Link: <https://journals.iub.edu.pk/index.php/pjqs/article/view/2650>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52461/pjqs.v3i1.2650>

Publisher: Department of Qur'anic Studies, the Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan



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Received on: 11 March, 2024

Accepted on: 15 June, 2024

Published on: 30 June, 2024

Citation: Tanveer Azmat. 2024. "A Reflection On Surah AL-ISRA'". *Pakistan Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 3 (1):181-212.

<https://journals.iub.edu.pk/index.php/pjqs/article/view/2650>.

Publisher: The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan.



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A Reflection On Surah AL-ISRA'

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Abstract

The reflection on Surah al-Isra' (The Night Journey) is an attempt to show how the surah (chapter) is an integral whole of meaning. Each ayah (verse) of the surah connects with the two main themes of the surah – Meccan polytheists objections to the Prophet's message and God's responses, and the believers' impatience asking for the punishment of the polytheists in the eleventh year of the Prophet's teaching in Mecca. The example of the Children of Isra'il in the surah serves the purpose of informing the polytheists of their coming reward or punishment based on accepting or rejecting the Prophet's message. When we study the surah as a unity of meaning, i.e., all ayat (verses) connect in meaning with each other, the discontinuity in the narrative disappears. For example, ayah 1 is about Isra' (night journey) but then connected with a wa (and) in ayah 2 with the story of Moses. The two subjects have no connection, but a deep connection exists. The difficult circumstance in the eleventh year of the Prophet's preaching required to show the Prophet God's great signs that God was in full control. Therefore, the believers shall remain patient. Whereas the ayah 2 poses a threat to the polytheists by narrating the story of Moses and his followers when they disobeyed. The surah is full of such discontinuities. For each discontinuity, the paper will show the hidden connection. The reflection on the Qur'an then becomes a process of discovering hidden meaning threads among the ayat of the surah. The beauty of a narrative is in its flow of ideas without discontinuities. Further, it fulfills the idea of a surah as a boundary within which certain ideas exist and others excluded based on the principle of making certain key points. Reading a surah as disjointed subjects or unity of subjects drastically impacts its correct understanding.

Keywords: Reflection, Al-Isra, Meccan polytheists objections, Believers' impatience, Idea.

Introduction

The seventeenth *surah*¹ (chapter) of the Qur'an, *Surah al – Isra'* (The Night Journey),² makes some references to Jews.³ For this reason it is also called *Surah – Banu Isra'il* (The Children of Israel, i.e. Jews).⁴ This paper will show the *surah* is only a discourse between Meccan polytheists and the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)⁵ in the eleventh year of his preaching in Mecca. The two references of the Jews in the *surah* are not for the Jews, who lived in Mediana. Rather, their example is used for the polytheists to learn some lessons from their history, who were the previous Muslim *ummah* (community).⁶ The mistaken understanding happens when the *surah* is read as a group of disjointed subjects, instead of reading it as an integrated whole of meaning, where each idea, argument, or discourse is interrelated. The wholistic view of the *surah* revolves around two key points: i) the summary of polytheists' objections to the prophetic message and God's answers to the objections; ii) the prayer of believers (followers of the Prophet) for the punishment of the polytheists, and God's reasons for not yet destroying the polytheists. One of the keys to understand the *surah* is understanding God's remark in *ayah* 1: He was listening and seeing (human affairs).

When we reflect on what God was listening and seeing, the whole *surah* opens as a response to God's listening and seeing. The *surah* was revealed in the eleventh year (621 C.E.) of the Prophet's preaching in Mecca as evident by the mention of *Isra'* in *ayah* 1,⁷ which took place that year. Psychologically and physically, it was a challenging time for the Prophet and believers in Mecca. The Prophet had already lost his two key supporters (his uncle Abu Talib and wife Khadiga), his journey to Taif ended in a disaster, after eleven years there were no more than one hundred fifty believers, most Meccans had rejected the Prophet's call, there was a

¹ I have used transliteration symbols at a minimum to make the text readable. Muslims are familiar with the most basic Arabic terms. For example, instead of writing *Sūrah*, I write *Surah*.

² For detailed discussion see: Asad, Muhammad. *Message of the Qur'an, Translated and Explained*, "Appendix IV: The Night Journey", Gibraltar: (Dar al-Andalus, 1984), 996-98; hence forth *The Message*.

³ *Ayat* 2-8 and 101-104; *Ayat* 23-39 are about Dos and Don'ts that are considered like The Ten Commands of the Old Testament. In the Qur'an, there are eighteen commandments as opposed to ten in the Bible.

⁴ Asad, *The Message*, 417: "most of the classical commentators, however, prefer the title *Al-Isra'*".

⁵ Peace be Upon Him (pbuh), a benediction Muslims use with the name of the Prophet.

⁶ Asad, *The Message*, 417: "The assumption of some authorities that certain of its verses belong to a much later time – namely, the Medina period – is purely conjectural and may, therefore, be discarded"; I agree with Asad's assessment and consider the whole *surah* was revealed in Mecca, and hence not an address to the Jews.

⁷ *Isra'* became a controversial issue in Mecca when the Prophet announced his journey. It was a well-known event and therefore, we can reliably fix the date of the *surah*'s revelation.

persistent threat to the Prophet's life, and polytheists' persistent and severe persecution of the believers. Further, the polytheists were sure of their victory over the believers. They had made the believers' life so difficult that they thought the believers had no choice but to flee Mecca (76),⁸ leaving behind their houses, businesses, and other resources. Under these circumstances, believers prayed for the polytheists' destruction (11).⁹ God's listening and seeing was this situation in Mecca – listening to the believers' prayer for their enemy's destruction and seeing what the polytheists were doing and planning. The situation required to show the Prophet God's greatest signs to strengthen him and believers; to summarize and give final answers to the polytheists' objections; and to mentally prepare the believers for living in a new society by introducing the vision of a just society (23 – 30).

The Methodology of Understanding *Surah al – Isar'*

The Qur'an is a book of guidance. Believers read it for a pragmatic purpose – to live their lives under its guidance. The Qur'an asks its readers to carefully listen to it when recited to get guidance (7:204). Listening to the Qur'an requires reading its text as opposed to reading its exegeses or other books about it that are secondary texts.¹⁰ The secondary texts are understandings of finite fallible human beings in *their* socio-historic contexts. This article uses a methodology¹¹ that

⁸ (76) indicates *ayah* number of *Surah* 17, *Surah al-Isra'*, the *surah* under study.

⁹ *Ayah* 11 speaks of humankind's general propensity to ask for evil instead of good for their enemy. In the context of the *surah*, the *ayah* addresses believers without pinpointing them out, so as not to embarrass them.

¹⁰ The text of the Qur'an is in Arabic. One may ask if someone does not know Arabic then they cannot understand the Qur'an. This is false. Using multiple translations, and English translation of each Arabic word under it, one can understand the meaning of *ayat* and how each *ayah* relates to other *ayat* of the *surah*. Certainly, translation cannot replace understanding based on knowing the Arabic language. However, the essential meaning can be gained through translations. Various software programs are also available that can help to derive nuanced meaning of the Qur'anic verses. The key point is personal engagement with the Arabic text and developing capabilities to understand the Arabic text better as time passes. A reliable website to understand the Qur'an is: <https://corpus.quran.com/>. It allows to find out root letters of an Arabic word. The root letters can then be used to list all the root's derivatives used in the Qur'an at one place. This allows readers to determine the Qur'anic use of the word.

¹¹ This methodology is introduced by Dr. Irfan Khan (d. 2018), a significant Qur'anic scholar. For details, please see Tanveer Azmat's Ph.D. dissertation available at: https://www.academia.edu/30411385/T_Azmat_Quranic_Hermeneutic_of_Irfan_A_Khan_TA_12_10_2016_pdf; a shorter published article by the same author on Dr. Khan's methodology is available at: https://www.academia.edu/37369719/An_Introduction_to_the_Quran_Hermeneutic_of_Dr_Irfan_A_Khan_Islamic_Studies_Vol_56_No_1_2_Spring_Summer_2017_pdf.

attempts listening to *Surah al – Isar* carefully. In its first iteration,¹² it considers the *surah* an integrated whole of meaning,¹³ reads the Qur'an in its literary context,¹⁴ and in the reader's socio historic circumstance instead of the Prophet's socio-historic context.¹⁵ It assumes the *surah* under study is just revealed for the current reader for the first time. It requires to discover the hidden meaning threads underneath its *ayat* (pl. of *ayah*, verse) that hold the meanings of the whole *surah* together.

Paying attention to the Qur'anic text only, does not imply rejecting *hadith* (sayings and actions of the Prophet in written form)¹⁶ nor doubting its authenticity as determined by the principles of *hadith* scholars. When we want to understand the Qur'an to get guidance, we understand it through the pure word of God in **our** socio historic circumstance. Just as the Prophet understood it in **his** socio historic context – the seventh century tribal society of Arabia. When we want to understand *the struggle and life history of our prophet* (his biography or *seerah*), we understand it in **his** socio historic context. Here *hadith* helps us. Thus, before our reading, we must ask if we were reading to get fresh guidance or to learn the history and biography of the Prophet. The paper believes the use of correct methodology is a necessary condition¹⁷ to properly understand the Qur'an.

¹² In its second iteration we read, discuss, and listen to how others understood the *surah* in the past. Past exegesis act as our teacher and guide. However, it is expected students surpass their teachers' understandings. They should critically evaluate their teachers' understanding and adopt a meaning that satisfies their heart from the textual evidence of the Qur'an.

¹³ By an integrated whole I mean each *ayah* of the *surah* has a relationship with its major themes. That is, the *surah* is not a collection of unrelated subjects. Finding the hidden relationships reveals the Realities expressed in a *surah*.

¹⁴ Students of literature know words have meaning in their textual context. That is, the same word can be used to mean two different things depending on the textual context. This applies to the Qur'an as well. For example, *Ruh* in the Qur'an can mean the Qur'anic revelation (16:2, 40:15) or human soul (32:9, 38:72). The context determines the meaning of *Ruh* when used at a certain place. (*Ruh* has other meanings besides the two meanings noted here).

¹⁵ Just as the Prophet understood the Qur'an in his socio-historical context, we understand the Qur'an in our socio-historic context. Only our own socio-historic context is fully available to us. If we understand the Qur'an in the Prophet's socio-historic context, then the Qur'an becomes a primary text for the Prophet's time, and secondary to our socio-historic time. Fresh guidance is needed in changing human circumstances. Therefore, we should read the Qur'an as if it were just revealed for us.

¹⁶ There are six canonical hadith collections. All six collections in English can be found at: <https://sunnah.com/>.

¹⁷ According to the Qur'an, the most important condition to correctly understand the Qur'an is our desire to feel we need guidance. Another Qur'anic condition for correct understanding is our sincerity to understand the Qur'an. If we are looking for guidance, even if we understand incorrectly, God has the power to correct us. There is nobody who can make us understand the Qur'an better than God Himself. One may ask, how do we know if we have understood our reading correctly? The Qur'an tells us we will have satisfaction of the heart (13:28). Thus, reading

Finally, the Qur'an was revealed in the concreteness of life. Besides belief in one God and the Day of Judgment, the Prophet stood up for the rights of weak and confronted corrupt powerful forces of his society. Similarly, when Muslim *ummah* would stand up for justice, command good, and forbid evil, reading the Qur'an would guide them in the concreteness of life. Otherwise, reading the Qur'an becomes reading the stories of some past people.

The concreteness of life puts certain restrictions on what could be understood at a particular time in human history based on our needs, knowledge, life experience, and problems we face. Thus, understanding scripture is a dynamic process and not a one-time static understanding in the past. We will understand the Qur'an better as human history moves forward in the changing dynamic of human life. The Qur'an itself claims that it will show humankind His signs and they will themselves say that the Qur'an is the Truth (41:53).

The first step of the methodology is to understand a *surah* in broad categories of central issues in the *surah* as distinct groups, and then show inter relatedness of the groups. Determining grouping is a subjective process. However, conjunctions, certain repeated words in a *surah*, and continuous reflection help to form the groups. It is a hermeneutical circle of parts verses whole and vice versa. It requires practice and effort. It requires to become a student of the Qur'an and use paper and pen to mark the themes and continue relating the meanings. Finally, we need to understand that each reader is personally responsible for their interpretation. The Qur'an emphasis we are given the abilities of *sama* (listening), *basar* (seeing), and *fu'ad*¹⁸ (thinking and intuiting). We will be asked about them if we do not use them properly (17:36). God, the merciful, gave us all intellectual and spiritual resources to understand the scripture, and we are asked to use them instead of blindly following others.

Out of one hundred eleven *ayat* in *Surah al – Isra'*, thirty-three *ayat* directly speak to the Prophet in first person pronoun. Among these *ayat*, six *ayat* are critical of the Prophet.¹⁹ The six *ayat* challenge the traditional Muslim view of

the Qur'an is a direct communication between God and reader. The author of the Qur'an is not dead, He is internally available and intimately involved in our lives.

¹⁸ Khan, Irfan. *International Journal of Islamic and Arabic Studies*, "Authenticity and Development in Islamic Thought", 4(2): 31-47, 1987, 44: *Fu'ad* is the third source of knowledge "which includes the capacity to think and to intuit. Reflecting, analyzing, contemplating, reasoning and such other mental acts should also be attributed to *fu'ad*".

¹⁹ The thirty-three *ayat* are: 21-22, 24, 26, 28-29, 36, 38-39, 42, 48, 50-51, 53-54, 56, 60, 74-75, 78, 80-81, 84-86, 88, 93, 95-96, 100, 107, and 110-111. The highlighted *ayat* speak critically of the Prophet. The Prophet's criticism in the Qur'an serves a particularly important purpose. It guides the future believers the kind of mistakes they may make in delivering the duty to spread the message of the Qur'an and stand against the powerful responsible for spreading corruption in the world.

considering the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) *ma'sum* (free of fault).²⁰ The Qur'an emphasizes humanness of all prophets.²¹ To deny the humanity of a prophet is to view him as a robot, where God holds a prophet's hand letting him know what to think and how to act.²² A prophet has protection in correctly receiving and delivering the revelation.²³ Thus, with one exception prophets can make mistakes (*zumb*, fault).²⁴ For example, the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah took place four years before the Prophet's death. It is only at this point the Qur'an says, "God might show His forgiveness of thy faults, past as well as future, ..." (48:2).²⁵ The straight path in the *surah* was a path that led the Prophet to the eventual conquest of Mecca. Therefore, we need to let the Qur'an speak instead of our false idealizations – a condition necessary to correctly listen to God.

Like most *surahs* of the Qur'an, *Surah al – Isar'* has a characteristic literary style that is repeated throughout the *surah*. In the *surah* there are fifty-five *ayah* that start with the conjunction *wa* (and) out of one hundred eleven *ayah* of the *surah*. Each *wa* shows a different aspect of the main theme of the *surah* – threatening the polytheists with punishment and strengthening the morale of the Prophet and believers. For example, the first occurrence of *wa* in *ayah* 2 connects it to *ayah* 1, though the subject matters of *ayah* 1 and 2 are very different. The link is God's statement in *ayah* 1 that He was listening and seeing. He was listening to the believers' prayers to destroy polytheists. The time for their destruction had not come in God's calendar. Therefore, there was a need to show the Prophet God's great signs to demonstrate that He was in control and help the believers to remain patient in the difficult situation in Mecca; He was seeing the polytheists were behaving like the Children of *Israel*. Thus, the need to tell the story of Moses and the Pharaoh's eventual destruction. Implying, the polytheists still had time to repent otherwise they would be destroyed like the Pharaoh. Conjunctions play a key role in the understanding of the Qur'an. The *wa* in the *surah* helps to determine distinct groups of meaning unities connected with the main themes of the *surah*. The paper paid special attention to *wa* in reflecting on the *surah*.

Groups/Meaning Unities in the *Surah*

²⁰ They believe all prophets are *ma'sum* (free of any mistake).

²¹ See 16:43 for all prophets; see 17:93 particularly for the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

²² Some Muslims believe whatever the Prophet said was from God. They present 53:3 as their evidence in the Qur'an. When we read the *ayah* in its literary context it only applies to the Qur'anic revelation.

²³ For example, when the Prophet was inclined to compromise with the Meccan polytheists (17:74), God protected him doing so. The polytheists wanted the Prophet to add something to the revelation by his own desire to make the compromise possible (17:73).

²⁴ I have translated *zumb* as fault and not as sin. Faults are done unintentionally where *ism* (sin) is done intentionally.

²⁵ Asad, The Message, 758; all translations are from Sahih International (<https://corpus.quran.com/>), unless noted.

A Reflection On Surah AL-ISRA'

- Group 1: Need for *Isra'* and *Mi'raj*
1 & 60
- Group 2: Warning to Meccans
w²⁶ 2-10
- Group 3: Criticism of the Believers' Attitudes
- i. Do not ask for evil
w 11-22
 - ii. The Prophet is Not a *Wakil* Over Them
w 53-55
 - iii. Beware of the Satan
w 61-66
 - iv. The Prophet's Inclination Towards Compromise
w 73-77
 - v. Believers Should Not Ask About the Nature of *wahy*
w 85-89
- Group 4: Advice to the Prophet w 78-
84 & w 105-109
- Group 5: Ideal Muslim Society – The Social Dimension of *Tawheed*
w 23-39
- Group 6: Meccan Objections and God's Responses
- i. Angels are God's Daughters
40
 - ii. Deities are God's Associates
w 41-48
 - iii. Dead Bones Cannot Come Back to Life
w 49-52 & 99
 - iv. Deities Can Remove Pain
w 56-58
 - v. True Prophets Show Miracles w
59 & w 90-93
 - vi. An Angel Should be God's Prophet
w 94-99
 - vii. The Prophet is a Magician
w 101-104
- Group 7: Final Response to The Prophet and Meccans
w 105-111

²⁶ “w” in front of the *ayah* numbers indicates the *ayah* starts with a *wa*, indicating another theme of the main subject of the *surah*.

Group 1: Need for *Isra'* and *Mi'raj* – 1 & 60

Ayah 1 of the *surah* mentions *Isra'* (night journey) from Masjid al Haram (Mecca) to a farthest mosque (The Temple Mount, Jerusalem), and *ayah* 60 mentions a dream the Prophet saw. The purpose of *Isra'* was to show the Prophet some great signs of his Lord (1);²⁷ the purpose of the dream was to show the Prophet his Lord had full control over humankind, and to make the dream a test for humankind (60). The farthest mosque must be the Jewish Temple Mount, as Masjid al Aqsa did not exist at that time.²⁸ In his dream, the Prophet saw a cursed tree (*sajarah almalouna*). It was shown so that humankind fear God's punishment (60). The cursed tree is mentioned three times in the Qur'an.²⁹ It is in the Hell and called Zaqqum. Since Zaqqum exists in Hell, we can conclude the dream must be about the Prophet's travel in heavens. Muslim tradition calls it *Mi'raj* (ascension).³⁰ The Qur'an does not call the dream *Mi'raj*. For convenience the paper will use the name *Mi'raj*, instead of calling it the dream. The tradition considers *Mi'raj* part of *Isra'*, i.e. journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, Jerusalem to the heavens, and return to Mecca in the same night.

According to Muslim tradition, *Isra'* took place physically with the body and soul of the Prophet. *Isra'* was a particular type of journey in Arabia that took place at night only. The Qur'an did not use dream for *Isra'*. Therefore, it is safe to assume that *Isra'* was the Prophet's journey with his body and soul. *Isra'* is miraculous as the round trip between Mecca and Jerusalem could not be taken in one night at that time.³¹ For some reason, Muslim tradition hotly contests if *Mi'raj* was a bodily travel or a travel in dream only, despite the *ayah* clearly calls it a journey

²⁷ Muslim tradition mentions many events that took place in Jerusalem. The Qur'an does not mention any except the Prophet saw some great signs of his Lord. Since the Qur'an does not mention the details, there is no need to go after them. However, we may ask why the Prophet was shown great signs in the eleventh year of his preaching in Mecca. This point is explained throughout the *surah*.

²⁸ Masjid al-Aqsa was built by the fifth Umayyad Calip, Abd al-Malik (d. 705 C.E.), between 685 C.E. through 715 C.E.; the *ayah* calls the Temple Mount a *masjid*. Thus, a *masjid* can be any place of worship where God is praised by humankind. The Qur'an asks Muslims not to destroy monasteries, churches, synagogues, where the name of God is raised (22:40).

²⁹ See 37:62, 44:43, and 56:52.

³⁰ The word *Mi'raj* is not used in the Qur'an for the Prophet's heavenly journey. However, Muslim understand *Mi'raj* as the heavenly journey (physically or in a dream). The Qur'an calls the heavenly journey took place in a dream, therefore, my use of *Mi'raj* is meant to be heavenly journey in the Prophet's dream. Muslim tradition mentions conflicting details about what the Prophet saw in the heavens. Since the Qur'an does not mention the details, for our purpose, i.e. to get guidance, we need not know details.

³¹ The round trip between Mecca and Jerusalem is 2,800 miles. At that time, it was impossible to complete the round trip in one night.

in dream.³² Therefore, this paper believes that *Mi'raj* was the Prophet's journey in dream.

According to *ayah* 60, the reasons for taking the Prophet on *Mi'raj* were: i) to show him God encompassed humankind. The polytheists may think they were powerful but power belonged to God as humankind was in God's grip. They could not escape God except for the time God granted them on the earth. Therefore, believers should not think the polytheists could overcome them except with God's permission; ii) to make the news of his heavenly travel a test for present and future readers of the *surah*, including believers. The present and future believers who may be weak in faith may also question the impossibility of *Mi'raj*. Further, the polytheists had been asking for miracles (91-93). *Isra'* and *Mi'raj* were miracles; iii) in addition to *Isra'* and *Mi'raj*, the mention of the cursed tree in Hell is meant to be a test for humankind. The polytheists did not believe in life after death. How could they believe in a cursed tree that would be their food in Hell? According to the *ayah*, the purpose was to instill fear of what awaited them after death. Unfortunately, it had an adverse effect, they became even greater transgressors.

Group 2: Warning to Meccans – 2-10

Ayat 2-10 speak about Jews but are meant for Meccan polytheists and believers in the context of this *surah*. Prophet Ibrahim established two centers of God's worship, one in Jerusalem and one in Mecca. His son Ishaq and his progeny (the Jews) inherited the center in Jerusalem, and his elder son Ismail and his progeny (Meccan Arabs) inherited the center in Mecca. By the time of the Prophet, both centers were off from the true teachings of Ibrahim. As a lesson to Meccans, these *ayat* tell the story of the Jews when they followed and did not follow the Book (the Torah). The same fate awaited the Meccans depending upon their behavior.

The Torah was given to prophet Moses as the Book of guidance for the Jews (the Children of *Israel*) (2). It commanded, "Do not ascribe to any but Me the power to determine your fate (2)."³³ The *ayah* implies, they were ascribing others to determine their fate (e.g. their religious scholars). Further, the Children of *Israel* were those descendants of prophet Noah who were saved from the destruction of

³²Maulana Mawdudi in *Tafheemul Qur'an*, mentions all the details and different points of views about the *Mi'raj*. See https://archive.org/details/002AlBaqarah_201903/017%20Bai%20Israil/page/n1/mode/2up accessed 3-5-2024.

³³ Asad, *The Message*, 418: *wakil* in the Qur'an when applied to God is used in four main senses: i) "guardian" as in 3:173; ii) "defender" as in 4:109, when used with the phrase '*ala kulli shay'in*, depending on the context as iii) "the one who has everything in His care", as in 6:102 or 11:12; iiib) "God's elusive power to *determine the fate* of any created being or thing", as in the present *ayah* as well as in 39:62.

the flood (3). Meaning they were the progeny of righteous people. Righteous people like Noah were thankful servants of God (3). Similarly, the Jews were expected to be thankful to God. With the coming of the Prophet, Meccans were given the Book (the Qur'an), and they were also pious descendants of Noah. Hence, the Meccans should be thankful to God for these two blessings. The thankfulness now was to follow the Qur'an.

God decrees nations how they will be tested. For example, it was made known to the Children of *Israel* they would spread great corruption on the earth two times (4). If they repented and changed their behavior, they would be forgiven and blessed. The implied purpose of the *ayah* 4 was to threaten the polytheists with a coming punishment about which they did not know what was decreed for them. After the first corruption, sever punishment came to the Jews at the hands of Babylonians in 587 B.C. Jerusalem was destroyed and they were taken as slaves to Babylonia. The Qur'an does not name Babylonians or the exact date of destruction or their becoming Babylonian's slaves. We learn this from the Bible or secular history. The Qur'an only mentions about the first punishment: "We [God] sent against you [the Jews] servants of Ours - those of great military might, and they probed [even] into the homes" (5). An interesting point to note is that Babylonians killed and plundered Jerusalem, but the Qur'an calls them "servants of Ours". This implies among many ways in which God's punishment comes, God punishes one group of people with another group of people to eradicate corruption on the earth (2:251).

Secular history tells us after about forty-nine years of slavery in Babylon, the Jews returned to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. as free people. God "reinforced" them "with wealth and sons and made" them "more numerous in manpower" (6). The moral of the story is, "If you do good, you do good for yourselves; and if you do evil, [you do it] to yourselves" (7). Their second promised punishment came when they rejected Jesus as the prophet of God, who was sent to them from among themselves, i.e., he was no stranger to them and hence there was no possibility of miscommunication. He performed great miracles, but their transgression increased. Finally, after seventy years from Jesus' time, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. The destruction was like the first destruction, i.e., it "sadden your faces" and "enemy entered the *masjid* (The Temple Mount) in Jerusalem" and destroyed everything (7). This is also a lesson for the current readers of the Qur'an. If they turn their back on the Book, they will be severely punished unless they establish the Book in their lives.

Ayat 8-10 sum up divine *sunnah* (persistent God's behavior towards humankind). Its first principle is if one repents "Lord will have mercy upon you. But if you return [to sin], We [God] will return [to punishment]". The punishment will not be in this world only but also in the Hereafter where Hell is prepared as a prison for the disbelievers (8). Thus, repentance is possible. God has no interest in punishing humankind. Rather, He is a merciful Lord. He understands

humankind's shortcomings. In other words, humankind is prone to sin but as soon as they realize they have sinned, they can ask for forgiveness.

Ayah 9 emphasizes the Qur'an's one essential feature. It provides guidance leading to a straight path. The straight path is the shortest distance to Heaven. Polytheists and believers should understand the Book has not come to make their life difficult. Rather, it is a book that gives glad tidings to the believers who do good works. God appreciates good works. He will give believers great reward in the Hereafter. As far as those who do not believe in life after death (*akhira*), there will be great punishment (10). The choice is ours to make.

Group 3: Criticism of the Believers' Attitude

Though the eleventh year of preaching in Mecca was difficult, God critiqued believers being impatient and making prayers for Meccan polytheists' destruction. In the following, the paper will review God's critiques and reasons for not yet punishing the polytheists.

i. Do Not Ask for Evil – 11-22

Ayah 11 critiques believers indirectly under the guise of humankind's general attitude of asking evil (*shar*) for their enemies instead of praying for their good (*khayr*). The literary context of *ayah* 11 is the struggle between the believers and polytheists. The believers were agitated by the polytheists to the point that they were praying for their destruction. God disliked this call. *Ayat* 12-22 explain several reasons for not sending punishment to the polytheists.

Ayah 12 explains the first reason through the example of night and day. Night forever follows a day and vice versa. Night is dark, and day is bright. There is wisdom in this complementarity. Further, they follow a fixed schedule. No one can change the destined time of this change. The day with its brightness allows humankind to find God's blessing on the earth to sustain them as opposed to night allows them sleep and rest. Another benefit of the change is to "know the number of the years and the reckoning" that is bound to come, i.e. the Hereafter.³⁴ These contrasts similarly apply to good and evil. They are both necessary. Both have a destined time when good replaces evil and vice versa. Only God determines the destined time based on His knowledge and wisdom. Humankind's hastiness cannot change its destined time. Therefore, the believers shall remain patient.

Ayah 13 explains if believers think polytheists will not be punished, they must know every human being's fate is fastened to their neck. This fate consists of a record book about each person's works in the life of this world. On the Day of Judgment, they will find their book opened to be read by them (14). Each person will be ordered to read their book. No third-party witness or a judge will be necessary. The reading will be sufficient to reckon them against themselves. They will be a witness against themselves to what they did in their life on the earth, and

³⁴ Droge, A.J. *The Qur'an: A New Annotated Translation*, Sheffield, UK: (Equinox, 2013), 176.

they themselves will acknowledge the truth of their written record. In God's system of justice there may be a delay, but humankind's eventual reckoning is guaranteed. Therefore, the believers shall not think that polytheists will not be brought to account for their actions.

Ayah 15 brings another perspective to the existing discussion. Believers are not responsible if anyone does not accept the prophetic message. The reason is God's *sunnah*: "Whoever is guided is only guided for [the benefit of] his soul. And whoever errs only errs against it. And no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another". Therefore, the believers shall concern themselves with their salvation and remain patient, letting God decide the fate of the polytheist. Further, God's *sunnah* is not to punish any nation till a messenger is sent to them. It is not God's *sunnah* to destroy a nation without giving them ample chances to correct themselves.

Ayah 16 explains the last stage after which God's punishment comes. The stage consists of a (final) warning (*amr* or command) given to the community's *mutrafir* (affluent and influential people of the community). They reject the warning and continue behaving wickedly. By this time the truth is fully revealed to them, but they continue to be wicked. Then God's punishment comes, and the community is destroyed (except the prophet and the believers). The polytheists were about to reach this stage. The implication for the believers was to remain patient till God's decision came down.

In *ayah 17* God presents humankind's history as witness to the above phenomenon. The Arabs knew God destroyed many generations starting with Noah. He lived among his people nine hundred fifty years and preached for about nine hundred years (29:14). After preaching for so long, Noah and his followers did not become impatient and continued their preaching duty. God knew the sins of His servants, in this case the polytheists. Meaning He did not need the believers' prayers to call God's attention towards their misdeeds, and hence their destruction. Further, He alone was sufficient to deal with them, i.e. their increasing strength and wickedness meant nothing to God. Therefore, the believers needed not worry.

Ayah 18 starts with another God's *sunnah*. People who intend worldly pleasures only, God hastens giving them the pleasures. Though not all lovers of the world get equal share. Some get more and some get less (based on God's knowledge and wisdom). They are allowed time to enjoy this world. This *sunnah* was another reason for not punishing the polytheists yet. As far as the Hereafter was concerned, their place in Hell was guaranteed. In it they will be roasted, feeling condemned and rejected. An implication exists in the *ayah* for the believers. If they wanted hasty victory to get worldly rewards, God could grant them, but then they should remember they would have no reward in the Hereafter except the Hell.

Ayah 19 presents a mirror image of *ayah 18*. Those who intend for the Hereafter should strive for it and exert the required effort, and believe, God will accept their

effort with full appreciation in the Hereafter. Therefore, believers should not worry about their reward. It is safe with God. *Ayah* 20 removes a common misunderstanding. Irrespective of one who intends and works for the life of this world or the Hereafter, God provides blessings to both groups in this world. This means God nourishes, provides, and loves the whole humanity in this world. However, the case will be different in the Hereafter. Only believers with good works will be taken care of. Therefore, if believers saw polytheists enjoying luxuries of this world, it was in God's plan. The believers' desire for polytheists' destruction and their victory could not trump God's *sunnah*. No one can stop God's blessings for anyone in this world.

Ayah 21 presents another dimension of *ayah* 20. Believers should reflect how God blessed polytheists differently in terms of His favors (worldly power, wealth, beauty, influence, etc.) in this world. If God was so benevolent to His servants who rejected Him, the believing servants should know how high "ranks of honor and favor" were reserved for them in the Hereafter. The point is polytheists' worldly success should not delude the believers and make them think they were winning.

Ayah 22 sums up the above discussion. Believers should not take another god besides God. One may wonder who could be the other god as no other god was mentioned in the above discussion? In the context of the *ayat* from 11-22 and the whole *surah* in general, it was the god of desire that commanded the believers for asking hasty punishment of polytheists and quick victory for them. The believers should make their will follow God's Will. If they did not, then their real god was their desire. Therefore, if they did not change their desire, they would become condemned and forsaken. Current readers of this *ayah* shall understand their desires for their enemies shall remain good instead of asking evil for them. They shall remain patient till God's decision about the matter is decreed. They shall pay attention to their job to spread the Word of God.

ii. The Prophet is Not a *Wakil* Over Them – 53-55

Ayah 53 addresses believers and their duties before mentioning the Prophet and his duties. They are asked to focus on the task at hand – deliver God's message to polytheists. To achieve this goal, they should say the best things to polytheists. Saying anything less than the best could create "discord" between them. When there is discord, conveying the message to the other becomes difficult. According to the *ayah*, creating discord leads to fights between them. This was Satan's strategy. The believers should remember Satan had nothing good for humankind. He was their clear enemy. Therefore, believers should perform their job in the best way.

Ayah 54 delivers the message of *ayah* 53 in a more concrete way to the Prophet. It explains, the Prophet was responsible only to deliver the message. He was not sent as a guardian over polytheists. The Prophet's overwhelming concern was his belief to feel responsible for the polytheists' conversion. The *ayah* explains God

had the best knowledge if someone deserved His mercy or deserved His punishment.³⁵ Present readers of the *ayah* must understand that Islam is not a missionary religion. It is not their mission to convert others. Their duty is only to convey the message in the best and most effective way. They should not have enmity towards the other. Enmity creates hindrance in delivering the message.

It is God's *sunnah* to bless different degrees of honor among *all* His creation. This does not mean God has His favorites or He discriminates among His creation. It is a necessity for the progress and growth in the universe and in human society. The key point is to actualize one's God given potential by acting within the potential. Failure is the loss of actualizing one's potential – the afterthought of what I could have been. According to the *ayah* 55, God knows who the best among persons is³⁶ – angels and *jinn*s (invisible beings)³⁷ in heavens and human beings on the earth. Similarly, God selected human beings to be His messengers, and gave them differing ranks, e.g. prophet David was distinguished by receiving the Book, Zaboor, and was assigned *jihad* (not only intellectual and spiritual but also in battlefield).³⁸ The Prophet also received the Book, the Qur'an, and *jihad* in battlefield that distinguished him. David was given a kingdom to rule. The Prophet also achieved dominion on the earth. The implication in the context of these *ayat* is that the Prophet was expected to show patience and strength according to his rank. Therefore, he must not feel losing against the polytheists, who seemed to be winning when these *ayat* were revealed.

iii. Beware of the Satan – 61-66

Ayat 61-66 remind believers of Satan and his modus operandum. We may ask why believers are reminded of Satan and his modus operandum? The polytheists were behaving like Satan. They wanted to intimidate (*yastafizz*) the believers so that they would flee Mecca (76). Satan also intimidates (*yastafizz*) humankind (64). God advised the believers not to fear Satan as God was their guardian and protector.

God mentions humankind's creation story to explain the reason for the above-mentioned Satan's enmity towards them in *ayat* 61-63. According to the story, God commanded angels and Satan to accept humankind's moral superiority over

³⁵ The Qur'an claims only God can give guidance (28:56). No one in humankind can get guided unless God allows it. It is so because He is the best knower. He even knows the secrets of heart.

³⁶ *Biman* in the *ayah* refers to persons and not things. The Qur'an talk about three persons: angels, *Jinns*, and humankind. A person is someone who has the knowledge of good and bad and who can make a choice between them and act accordingly. Please see Irfan A. Khan, *Reflections on the Qur'an: Understanding surah al-Fatiha and al-Baqarah*, Markfield, UK: (The Islamic Foundation, 2009), 42-43.

³⁷ Asad, *The Message*, "Appendix III: On the Term and Concept of Jinn", 994-995.

³⁸ al-Hassan, Maulana Mahmood (trans.), Shabir Ahmad Usmani (*tafsir*), Urdu, *Al-Quran al Kareem*, Madina, Saudia Arabia: (Ministry of 'Uqaf: 1993), Shah Wali Ullah's note, p. 381.

them.³⁹ All the angels accepted except Satan. He believed Adam was inferior to him (61). In his estimate, Adam was so weak of moral character that he could easily make him obey him instead of God. Satan used the word *akhtina* (follow blindly) to explain humankind's weak character. *Liakhtina* is form VII of verb *hanak*. Literally, "to put a rope around the lower jaw (*hanak*) [of a horse]", (62).⁴⁰ The horse turns whichever direction the rope is turned, i.e. it blindly follows the command. Satan asked for God's respite till the Day of Judgement to prove his point. God granted the respite.⁴¹ From that point on, God declared whoever followed Satan would end up in Hell with him (63). In a way, Satan believes humankind destroyed his glorious future, now he wants to make sure humankind's future is destroyed when they follow him.

Ayah 64 explains how Satan tempts humankind. He either puts false fears or entices them (or both). He creates gradually increasing fear through his voice⁴² (propaganda) leading them to intimidation (*yastafizz*); through (psychologically) attacking them with his cavalry and infantry, meaning with all his might; through becoming their partner in sin related to matters involving their wealth and children;⁴³ and finally, through false promises. *Ayah* 65 explains only those who believe in God and follow His commands would not fall in Satan's deceptions. God was their guardian (*wakil*).⁴⁴ Satan had no command over them. For them God was the source of relieving fear and providing blessings. Therefore, the believers should not be fearful and trust God. As far as polytheists were concerned, despite their pride and transgression, merciful God provides them provisions as for example through sea trade (66). Therefore, they should reconsider their rebellion against God.

iv. The Prophet's Inclination Towards Compromise – 73-77

The Qur'an points out the Prophet's concern and worry about Meccans not accepting his message at many places.⁴⁵ Maybe he thought he was not delivering the message correctly, i.e., there was some personal short coming in him or in his

³⁹ God required angels and Satan to prostrate Adam (2:34) which meant they both accept humankind's moral superiority over them.

⁴⁰ Asad, *The Message*, 428-29, note 76.

⁴¹ God giving respite to Satan till the Day of Judgment means that God will allow Satan and his progeny to misguide human beings. This is the cause for the existence of evil in the human world. When human beings follow Satan, they do evil things. Therefore, till human beings live in the world, evil will exist. However, on and after the Day of Judgment evil will not exist.

⁴² One may ask how human beings hear Satan's voice. We hear him in our heart and from other human followers of Satan through our ears (114:5).

⁴³ Asad, *The Message*, 429.

⁴⁴ See 7:201: "Indeed, those who fear Allah - when an impulse touches them from Satan, they remember [Him] and at once they have insight".

⁴⁵ Froe example, 18:6: "Then perhaps you would kill yourself through grief over them, [O Muhammad], if they do not believe in this message, [and] out of sorrow"; also 26:3.

methodology, or it was his duty to convert Meccans. The Prophet's concerns and believers' adverse situation in the eleventh year of preaching might have led him to consider a compromise with the Meccan polytheists: "Indeed they were near to seducing thee from that We revealed to thee, that thou mightest forge against Us another [possibly a Meccan god], and then they would surely have taken thee as a friend [*khalil*]"⁴⁶ Fortunately God intervened, "And if We had not strengthened you, you would have almost inclined to them a little". The Prophet inclined a little (*shayan qalilan*) but for God it was important, "We would have made you [the Prophet] taste double [punishment in] life and double [after] death. Then you would not find for yourself against Us a helper" (75).⁴⁷ *Ayah* 76 explains another dimension of *ayah* 75. Assuming, if the Prophet were successful in becoming the polytheists' friend, it would not have helped the Prophet. Their real intention was to frighten the Prophet "so much as to drive" him out from Mecca (76). If they were successful in this effort, the polytheists were decreed to live a little and then destroyed. Why? It was God's *sunnah*: when a messenger (*rusul*) was sent to a people, and they drove him out then they would be destroyed (77). Current believers shall take a lesson from this event. They cannot compromise on God's message when preaching. They need to present it as the revelation states.

v. Believers Should Not Ask About the Nature of *wahy* – 85-89

They ask the Prophet about *al-Ruh* (divine revelation, i.e. the Qur'an) (85). It is not clear who they are. Generally, Muslim exegetical tradition takes "they" as Meccan polytheists, who inspired by the Jews of Madina, ask the Prophet about *al-Ruh*.⁴⁸ The assumption was the Prophet would not know the answer and proved a false prophet. This understanding does not agree with the context of the *ayah*. The *ayat* before this *ayah* advise the Prophet and the believers to read the Qur'an as it cures moral sicknesses (82). A common sickness is humankind's behavior: when God blesses them, they tend to forget God, but when some evil touches them they lose all hope (83). This is childish behavior. In the difficulties of the eleventh year of preaching, God was not happy with believers' childish behavior of asking destruction for polytheists instead of remaining patient and wait for God's decision about the polytheists. God threatens the believers if they continued this behavior, God had power to take away what was revealed to the Prophet (86). *Ayah* 85 says, "They ask you about *al-Ruh* ..." I understand "they" as believers who asked the Prophet about *al-Ruh*. Why would the believers ask about *al-Ruh*

⁴⁶ Arberry: <https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=17&verse=73> accessed 1-7-2023.

⁴⁷ There is an important lesson for the current Muslims. They should not incline against the Qur'an when delivering the message of the Qur'an. They need to present it as the Qur'an says which may sometimes be against their personal desires or national interests.

⁴⁸ See Maulana Mawdudi's discussion in *Tafheemul Qur'an* discussion at: https://archive.org/details/002AIBaqarah_201903/017%20Bai%20Israil/page/n1/mode/2up accessed 3-5-2024.

(meant to be Qur'anic revelation and explained later in the paper why *al-Ruh* here means Qur'anic revelation)? The believers' concern in this context was why God did not send revelation for polytheists' destruction or why the Prophet did not force the process of revelation to have such revelation come. They considered it was about time God's help came and punished the unjust.

Muslim exegetical tradition mostly believes *al-Ruh* in *ayah* 85 as human soul, while some others believe it to mean Qur'anic revelation. *Al-Ruh min al-amr* (the revelation from God's command) in *ayah* 85 is used at two more places in the Qur'an – 16:2 and 40:15. At both places it refers to God's revelation sent to His select prophets. If the meaning of *al-Ruh* as human soul is forced on *ayah* 86, one cannot understand the sudden question about human soul. The word *Ruh* when meant as human soul comes in the Qur'an as *min Ruhi Rabbi* (human being's soul from his Rabb)⁴⁹ (Q 32:9 & 38:72). The Qur'an uses *al-Ruh* for Arkangel Gabrail (Q 16:2, 26:193, etc.). However, it never uses the term *al-Ruh min amr* for Gabrail. Thus, *al-Ruh minal amr* can only mean the Qur'anic revelation in the *ayah*.

The second part of *ayah* 85 informs humankind is given a little knowledge of God's revelation. Meaning the Prophet (and believers) cannot fully understand the timing of the revelation's coming down. If they insisted knowing the reason, God instead of giving the knowledge had ability to take away what was revealed already to the Prophet. In that case the Prophet would find no protection against God (86), except as a mercy from Him. Indeed, His favor was great on the Prophet, i.e. God would not deal with the Prophet harshly (87). Lastly, the Qur'anic revelation was such that if humankind or all *jinn*s or the two together tried making similar revelation like the Qur'an, they would fail. In the context, implication is that the Prophet cannot make revelation about the destruction of polytheists and satisfy believers' demand (88). The discussion concludes, God explained the Qur'an with repeated similitudes of every kind to the humankind, but most refuse to understand and continue their disbelief (89).⁵⁰

Group 4: Advise to the Prophet – 78-84 and 105-109

Ayat 78-81 directly address the Prophet. *Ayah* 78 commands him to get closer to God through prayer (*as-salat*) and reading the Qur'an. The first part of the *ayah* points to two prayers (*Maghrib* and *'Isha'*). *Maghrib* is prayed at sunset and *'Isha'*

⁴⁹ Some people take *min Ruhi Rabbi* as something from God's soul put into humankind. This goes against the basic teaching of the Qur'an, according to which, God is other (112: 1-4). If we believe something from God's soul is in humankind, then it would be the worst kind of pantheism (everything has God in it). Therefore, the expression should be understood as from human being's soul (*min Ruhi*) his (Adam's) *Rabb* in Adam.

⁵⁰ It is one of the unique features of the Qur'an that God being God does not just give a command but explains it with several reasons why the command was given. The whole Qur'an is but a discourse trying to convince humankind to change their attitude towards religion.

is prayed when night's darkness prevails. The second part of the *ayah* points to a third prayer, the early dawn prayer, i.e. *fajar*. The text separates the first two prayers and the third prayer to emphasize reading sizable portions of the Qur'an in the *fajar* prayer because it is witnessed. The *ayah* does not say who witnesses it. According to Muslim tradition, angels witness it. Why do angels have to witness the prayer? Probably, the angels give their witness to God on behalf of the believers that they prayed at night, went to sleep, and woke up early to start a new day with prayer. In addition to the three prayers, the Prophet is commanded a special prayer called *tahajud* (79). *Tahajud* is prayed after sleeping some time at night, waking up, and praying for a good amount of time. The *ayah* emphasizes to read and reflect upon the Qur'an in it. God promises the Prophet, praying *Tahajud* would raise him to a high praised rank of *Mahmood*, the praised one. Meaning the prayer would not only strength him to deal with the current demanding situation in Mecca, but also it would raise his ranks in God's eyes. We may conclude from this the Qur'anic prescription to get closer to God is through prayer (*slat*) and spending time with the Qur'an in and outside the prayer.

Ayah 80 does not make much sense unless it is read in the context of this *surah*. The Prophet is commanded to say, "My Lord, cause me to enter a sound [*sidq*] entrance and to exit a sound exit and grant me from Yourself a supporting authority (*sultan*)." The conflict between the Prophet and polytheists in the eleventh year of preaching reached a stage where the polytheists made life so hard for believers that they should contemplate leaving Mecca (76). The polytheists saw two benefits in this strategy: i) they would not have to kill their own brothers and relatives who joined the movement, and ii) their flight would leave the believers without their homes, businesses, and tribal support which may lead to their eventual demise. The believers, on the other hand, saw no solution but to ask God for the polytheists' destruction. Leaving Mecca was out of question for them as they did not perceive successful survival in a foreign land without tribal support. God was listening and seeing this situation (1). In *ayah* 80 God showed the Prophet a way out. The Prophet should pray to have God create circumstances in which they had good exit from Mecca and a good entrance in a new place. Also, the Prophet should pray to have political dominance (*sultan*) in the new land with God's support. This would be better for the Prophet and believers instead of asking the destruction of the polytheists. God had not lost hope in some Meccans to join the prophetic movement.⁵¹

⁵¹ This is like the situation when Moses was sent to Pharaoh. God had hope that Pharaoh may accept Moses' message. Therefore, God advised him to gently speak with Pharaoh (20:44) with the hope the Pharaoh may accept his message; Three years later in the Battle of Uhud selected staunch polytheists were killed in the Battle. Giving another chance to rest of the Meccans to join the movement. This happened in year 630 C.E. when Mecca was conquered, and all Meccans accepted Islam.

In *ayah* 81 the Prophet is commanded to declare the Truth (*al-Haq*) had won over falsehood (*batil*) because in the end falsehood is always bound to pass away. The polytheists would have mocked the Prophet on this declaration because they were sure the prophetic movement was almost defeated. The declaration was God's decision in the divine world against the staunch polytheists. However, God's decisions in the divine world take time to unfold in human world. It took another nine years to overcome the polytheists with the conquest of Mecca. The *ayah* also addresses believers and gives them the good news of a coming victory.

Ayah 82 reminds the believers to hold the Qur'an strongly. The Qur'an is the prescription that heals hearts and brings mercy upon believers. In the context of the above discussion, the disease was the weakness of the believers to get scared by polytheists and ask for their destruction, instead of asking for God's help to create a way out of the difficult situation.⁵² As far as unjust oppressors (*zalimoon*) were concerned, the Qur'anic revelation would increase their losses.

God makes a final comment on the above discussion in *ayah* 83. When God blesses humankind, it turns away from God and distances itself – the case of polytheists' behavior; when God *touches* humankind, it despairs – the case of believers in the current evil situation in Mecca. From God's perspective, both (the believers and polytheists) chose wrong paths. Therefore, only God knew who between them was the best guided to the correct path (84).

Group 5: Ideal Muslim Society – The Social Dimension of *Tawhid* 23-39

Ayah 80 asked believers to pray for migration to another land from Mecca, where Muslims would have political domination, and where they would eventually defeat the Meccans, though God did not disclose where to migrate. *Ayat* 23-40 prepared believers to live together as a community when the migration took place. The *ayat* explain the foundational principles upon which a Muslim society is constituted.

The first and the most important principle in a Muslim society is to accept God's sovereignty, where human beings act as God's servants (*aboud*) (23). In political theory, the first question is to whom sovereignty belongs? The *ayah* explicitly commands that humankind or other things (idols, nature, etc.) cannot claim sovereignty under any circumstance. In running the affairs of a Muslim society, human beings can act as God's viceregents or trustees on the earth but not as Sovereigns. However, God as a physical sovereign is not available in human world. God's sovereignty in the human world is expressed through God's commands and boundaries (*hadud*) established the Qur'an. For example, God forbids alcohol. Therefore, if all citizens of a Muslim country desire to make it

⁵² It is like prophet Yousuf praying for jail over the sexual advances of his master's wife. His prayer was accepted, and he ended up in jail. Had he asked God to make a way out for him from that situation, God may have provided a better solution without sending him to jail.

permissible, they cannot do so. The rest of the *ayat* inform the social dimension of *Tawhid* (oneness of God)⁵³ except *ayat* 39-40, that explain the consequences of not accepting God as the Sovereign in a Muslim society.

There are ten Dos and eight Don'ts – a total of eighteen commandments in *ayat* 23-38.⁵⁴ The Dos include: i) worship one God, ii) treat parents in a good manner (especially in their old age), iii) give rights of relatives, iv) give rights of orphan, v) give rights of *miskin* (poor who cannot help themselves),⁵⁵ vi) give travelers their right, vii) keep promises, viii) give full measure, ix) weigh with an even balance, and x) make decisions on knowledge instead on conjecture. The Don'ts include: i) do not squander wealth (e.g., to show off), ii) do not be a miser or irresponsible generous (be balanced in spending money), iii) do not kill your children for the fear of poverty (including abortion), iv) do not commit adultery, v) do not kill another human being except when justice requires it, vi) don't be dishonest when a property is given under your trust, vii) don't pursue things about which one has no knowledge, and viii) don't behave insolently (exultant, rude, arrogant, or disrespectful). The Qur'an mentions the above Dos and Don'ts clearly because the evil (*sayyiah*) in them is hateful in the sight of God (38).

If we compare the above eighteen commandments of the Qur'an with the Ten Commandments of the Bible,⁵⁶ we find an overlap of four commandments - two Dos (worship God and honor your parents) and two Don'ts (do not kill unjustly and do not commit adultery). There are six commandments in the Bible that are not mentioned in the above Qur'anic *ayat*: i) Don't make graven images, ii) Don't steal, iii) Don't give false witness, iv) Don't covet, v) Don't take God's name in vain, and vi) keep Sabbath day Holy. Five (ii, iii, iv, and v) of the above six commandments are mentioned at other places in the Qur'an. The Qur'an makes Friday a holy day instead of Sabath. The Bible's Ten Commandments emphasize Don'ts (seven out of ten commands), and the Qur'an emphasizes Dos (ten out of fourteen commands).

The above and other social commandments of the Qur'an are understood by the late Irfan Khan (d. 2018) as the social dimension of *Tawhid*.⁵⁷ It requires, "there should be no lordship of man over man, because all human beings are just one family of the servants or '*ibad* of one God [*Rabb*]."⁵⁸ Lordship is the prerogative of God only which is expressed in Lord-servant (*Rabb- 'abd*)

⁵³ Irfan A. Khan (d. 2018) coined the term: the social dimension of *tawhid*; more details to follow.

⁵⁴ I combined Dos and Don'ts under their respective title in these *ayat*.

⁵⁵ Helping the poor is emphasized to reduce the gap between haves and have nots. It is the moral responsibility of the haves to help the have nots.

⁵⁶ <https://www.reporter-times.com/story/lifestyle/faith/2021/12/10/understanding-10-commandments-and-their-relevance-today/6457925001/> accessed May 22, 2023; see The Bible, Exodus 20: 2-17, 34: 10-26, and Deuteronomy 5: 6-21.

⁵⁷ See Irfan A. Khan, *Reflections on the Qur'an ...*, 225-230.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

relationship.⁵⁹ Thus, a genuine Muslim society cannot allow lordship of man over man, woman over woman, man over woman, or woman over man. Only God can have lordship over humankind. Let us explore the above commandments in detail.

- i. In human world after God, the most important social relation is between parents and children (23). If a family is not at peace, it negatively impacts society's peace. *Ayat* 23-25 detail the intricacies of this relationship. God *decrees* (*qada*) that children treat their parents with goodness (*ihsan*) throughout parent's life. Particularly, when one or both "reach old age (while) with you, say not to them (so much as), "uff," [fie] and do not repel [*tanhar*, scold] them but speak to them a noble (*karim*) word (23)." Further, children "lower to them [the parents] the wing of humility (*dhul*) out of mercy and say, 'My Lord, have mercy upon them as they brought me up (when I was) small'" (17: 24). However, if unintentionally or due to human weakness children break this decree, they should ask forgiveness from God. God knows the secrets of hearts. Meaning if children are sincere and make a mistake, God will forgive them. Further, children should not consider taking care of old parents a burden on them. Their parents took care of them when they were young, it is only fair they take care of their parents.
- ii. *Ayat* 28-30 establish moral obligations on Muslims to take care of near relatives, poor (*miskin*), and traveler. The basis of obligation is explained in *ayah* 30: "Surely thy Lord outspreads and straitens His provision unto whom He will; surely He is aware of and sees His servants."⁶⁰ Meaning, God has His own measures to limit or expand the provisions of each human being based on His knowledge and wisdom. Consequently, His decision will result in some people being rich, others poor, and some in between. Provisions come from God.⁶¹ Humankind searches and finds them. Meaning, humankind does not create provisions.⁶² Therefore, rich have a duty to help the poor. Further, they shall not squander money. Their squandering is like becoming the brothers of Satan. Being Satan's brother implies thanklessness (27). When the rich squander their wealth it creates jealousy in society, resulting in

⁵⁹ Ibid., 38-42.

⁶⁰ Arbury Translation, <https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=17&verse=30> accessed 4-30-2023.

⁶¹ God provides provisions: 2:212; 3:27; 3:37; 10:31; etc.

⁶² God gave human beings capabilities to make money. Without the capabilities human beings could not make money.

unrest. Helping needy is so important that if believers must turn away helping needy but they were hoping to receive God's financial blessing in (near) future, they should say gentle words to the needy (and promise to help them at that time). Further, believers shall not go to the other extreme and become misers (29). They should traverse a balanced path in financial matters.

- iii. *Ayat* 31 and 32 discuss two related major sins – parents killing their children for the fear of poverty and fornication. *Ayah* 31 explains, killing children for the fear of poverty is a big mistake because God is responsible for providing sustenance to the parents and their children. The second major sin is fornication (*zina*). The two sins are related as fornication sometimes leads to pregnancy and often to abortion. God detests fornication so much that He not only forbids it but commands not to even get close to it (32). The *ayah* provides two reasons for forbidding fornication – it is an indecency (*fahisha*) and an evil (*saa*) path. The evil of the act does not end at fornication. Rather, it is an evil path that leads to other evil things (such as killing, jealousy, breaking up of families, etc.). As we noted in *ayat* 23-25 above, the Qur'an is particularly interested in peaceful relations within a family and have strong family bonds. Fornication hits hard the institution of marriage. It breaks trust between spouses in the case of adultery and provides other sexual outlets that diminishes the need for marriage. Both implications of fornication result in weakening families.
- iv. *Ayah* 33 points out another major sin. God gave human life sanctity that must not be violated except for a just cause. Further, if an innocent person is killed, the next of kin (heir or ally of the killed) is given authority (*sultan*) to decide the killer's punishment. In Arab society of the time, and since then in Muslim societies, the next of kin can demand the death of killer (*Qisas*), forgive him/her, or take blood money (*Diya*). It is important to note that state authority determines guilt but the next of kin has the right to determine punishment (33). However, the *ayah* reminds the next of kin not to be excessive in demanding punishment, e.g. asking for an unreasonable amount of blood money. If excessive retaliation is asked, God provides help to the other party and gives it authority to negotiate the punishment.
- v. *Ayat* 34-35 command some basic orientations and moral responsibilities of a Muslim in society. Society must take care of

orphans.⁶³ Anyone who assumes the custody of orphan children must not take their money for personal benefit. They must use orphans' money or property responsibly for the orphan's benefit. When orphans become adults, the caretaker should fulfil promise and return orphans' assets. Know that God will for sure take account of promises (34). *Ayah* 35 commands to give full measure when something is measured and to use balanced scale when something is weighed. Proper measuring and weighing are better and fairer eventually (35).

- vi. *Ayat* 36-37 relate to some weaknesses of human character. The first among them is to blindly follow assumptions without having "proven knowledge" about a matter. God gave human beings hearing, sight and "the capacity to think and intuit" (*fu'ad*, heart)⁶⁴ to investigate and find truth before acting upon it. If these facilities are not used or improperly used, human beings will be questioned on the Day of Judgement. *Ayah* 37 commands not to walk in insolence. Displaying such behavior will not "tear the earth open" nor it will make you reach the heights of mountains. Meaning human beings are finite and they shall act humbly.
- vii. *Ayat* 38-39 are final comments on the social dimension of *tawhid*. First, if the commands in the above are not followed it is evil (*saa*) and hateful (*makruh*) in the sight of God (38). Therefore, keep the commands. Second, the above are matters of wisdom that are inspired by God, and not from the Prophet. Third, breaking them is as if making partners with God. As discussed above, God's sovereignty in the human world is expressed by following His commands. When the commands are not followed, it is as if the commands of some other sovereign(s) are followed (e.g. human baser self, society, customs, Satan, etc.). Fourth, if humankind does not keep the above commandments, then they will be sent to Hell, "reproached and rejected" (39).

⁶³ Besides being without a father, mother, or both, an orphan could mean "all the alienated or marginalized sectors of our society" (Irfan A. Khan, *An Exercise in Understanding the Qur'an* An outline study of the last thirty Divine Discourses (Surah 85 – Surah 114), 2nd Revised Edition, Leicestershire, UK: (The Islamic Foundation, 2013); Orphan may have money and property, but they lack protection. Therefore, the term can be applied to the alienated and marginalized members of a society.

⁶⁴ Khan, Irfan A., *International Journal ...*, 44: 'Fu'ad is the third source of knowledge "which includes the capacity to think and to intuit. Reflecting, analyzing, contemplating, reasoning and such other mental acts should also be attributed to fu'ad.

Group 6: Meccan Objections and God's Responses

In the following, a summary of Meccan's objections to the Prophet's preaching and God's responses to them are discussed. God's hope is the polytheists may reconsider their beliefs.

i. Angels are God's Daughters – 40

Most of polytheists' deities were female gods like Lat, Manat, Izza, etc. They believed in angels but considered them God's daughters (the Qur'anic angels have no sex or gender). *Ayah* 40 mocks them and asks rhetorically, "Has your Lord distinguished you with sons and taken (for Himself) females from the angels"?⁶⁵ The assumption was so absurd that a rhetorical response sufficed. However, the polytheists should not take it lightly. What they say is monstrous.

ii. Deities are God's Associates – 41-48

In *ayah* 41 a repeated Qur'anic claim is mentioned: God explains His signs, warnings, promises, etc. in many ways so that listeners of the Qur'an may reflect upon them. Instead, they increase in aversion (41). *Ayat* 45-48 explain reasons for the aversion.

The most fundamental point of contention between the Prophet and Meccan polytheists was the polytheists' association of God with other deities. They believed there were smaller gods who shared God's powers. The polytheists accepted the Prophet's God (Allah).⁶⁶ They believed Allah created the heavens, the earth, the sun, the moon, and them. He was the owner of the creation. He "had sovereignty (*malakut*) over everything"; "He was the protector against whom no protection could be given".⁶⁷ Therefore, Meccans were not atheist. The issue was polytheism (*shirk*), i.e. making partners with God in His Command (*amr*).

God asks a logical question. If lesser deities shared powers with God, there would be a power struggle between them (42). Meaning polytheists would see signs of this struggle in universe. Instead, the universe is at perfect peace. Everything works as it should. Thus, God is Glorified and Exalted above the falsehood they assign Him (43). His status is so high that the seven heavens, the earth, and all person (*man fi hina*) who are in them glorify Him. In fact, *everything* glorifies Him with His praise. However, humankind does not understand their glorifying (44). Despite people's low assessment of God, He is Ever-Forbearing and Oft-Forgiving. The door of His forgiveness was still open for the polytheists.

As noted in the above (41), God explains Qur'anic subjects repeatedly in many diverse ways, but the polytheists aversion continued to increase. This happens for

⁶⁵ Droge, *The Qur'an: ...*, 178.

⁶⁶ Crone, Patricia. *The Qur'anic Pagans and Related Matters: Collected Studies in Three Volumes*, Vol. 1, Leiden: (Brill, 2016), 55.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

two reasons: they lose the ability to understand the Qur'an, and when they listen, their listening is for creating mischief and not for understanding. The root cause of the first reason is their disbelief on the Day of Judgement (45). When one does not believe in final accountability, one gets lost in pursuing the temptations of baser self or adopting an irresponsible attitude towards life. The *ayah* consoles the Prophet not to blame himself if they were not accepting his message (also 18:6). The second part of *ayah* 45 explains people who do not believe in the Hereafter, God places a hidden barrier between the Quranic revelation and them. *Ayah* 46 explains two prong nature of the barrier: i) a type of covering over their hearts that prohibits revelation's understanding, ii) a heaviness (causing spiritual deafness) does not allow revelation entering in their heart for understanding. The two barriers take away their capacity to understand revelation. One may object, if their ability to understand revelation is taken away, why should they be blamed? The Qur'anic position is, after a prolonged process of rejecting revelation's call, finally the ability to understand the Qur'an is taken away (7:179). The *ayah* ends with the strange behavior of such people. When the Qur'an mentions God's sovereignty alone, they turn their backs towards the Prophet and run away. Probably, they do not want to offend their gods by listening such revelations about them.

A third reason polytheists do not understand the revelation is due to having no intention of understanding it. *Ayah* 47 explains, God was aware of their purpose of listening when they listened. It was to conclude the revelation could not be true. After listening, they gathered in secret meetings to discuss what the Prophet meant. They would reach the conclusion that the Prophet must be under spell. Meaning what the Prophet said made no sense. It was so absurd that a sane person could not say such things. With this assessment of the Prophet and his message, God consoles the Prophet by explaining it was impossible for them to accept his message. The reality of the matter was they had gone so far astray they could not find the right path anymore (48).

The Meccans were not the only people who concluded their prophet was bewitched. For example, this was exactly what Pharaoh concluded when Moses showed him nine clear signs (miracles). Moses told the Pharaoh the signs were shown to him to understand they were from the Lord of the heavens and the earth, and that he understood their truth. Now that the truth had dawned upon him, if he rejected the revelation he would be destroyed. The Pharaoh had devised the same tactic which Meccan polytheists were employing – scare the believers so that they run away from Mecca, in the Pharaoh's case from Egypt. The Pharaoh failed in his plan. He and his army drowned. After that the Children of *Israel* inherited land and enjoyed God's blessings, e.g. lived a long time under Soloman and other prophets in Palestine.

From the above story, Meccans were made aware a similar fate awaited them. If they rejected the Prophet, they would be destroyed. If they followed the Prophet a bright glorious future awaited them. The choice was theirs to make.

Ayat 41-48 explained in detail reasons for polytheists not accepting the prophetic message. Believers also understood the polytheists would not accept the message and asked God for their destruction. Shall we ask if believers were justified in asking for the polytheists' destruction? God's answer was in negative. God's point was that the believers should have asked God to safely get them out of their current situation. This would keep the possibility for some polytheists (e.g. silent majority) to accept the message sometime later. Implying, it was God's prerogative to decide when punishment should come to a group of people based on His wisdom and knowledge.

iii. Dead Bones Cannot Come Back to Life – 49-52; 97-100

Polytheists in their private meetings concluded the Prophet was bewitched as a sane person could not say something like that (47). An example was the Prophet claim the bones and fragments of dead bodies would come back to life as a new creation (49). In response, God retorted, if the bone became stones, iron, or anything that they could think of more difficult to resurrect, God had the power to resurrect it. Did they not ponder God created them first time (with mud and then with semen) (50). He could do it a second time. The polytheists mockingly asked when this (implausible) event would take place. God said that no one knew the time of that event except God. As far as polytheists were concerned, they should consider it was near (51). For an individual, when their time of death comes, the resurrection becomes near. It is so because on the Day of Resurrection when they rise, they will think they died not long ago (52).

Ayah 97 consoles the Prophet and believers. It explains another reason some of the polytheists would never believe in the prophetic message. The reason was guides comes from God only. If God misguided someone there was no one who could guide them. To guide or misguide is not a random decision. Rather, it is based on God's knowing and seeing the behavior of humankind. Today, the believers found the polytheists powerful and demanding miracles but on the Day of Resurrection they will fall on their faces blind, dumb, and deaf. Their permanent abode will be the Hell that will be blazed every time it subsides. They deserve this punishment because they said when dead bodies became bones and fragments, human beings could not come back to life as a new creation (98).⁶⁸ The polytheists had a hidden implication in the *ayah*. According to them, many people died before the polytheists but none of them resurrected yet. God responds to the two objections and asked the polytheists, had they considered if God could create such vast heavens and the earth, did He not have the power to recreate

⁶⁸ The exact same words are repeated here as in *ayah* 49: when dead bodies became bones and fragments, human beings would come back to life as a new creation.

small beings like them (99)? Especially, when the creation of the heavens, and the earth is bigger (*akbar*) than the creation of human beings (40:53). As far as why no one is resurrected yet from the past, *ayah* 99 explains that the time of human resurrection was fixed. Humankind will be resurrected all together at one time. There is no doubt of its happening. The *ayah* ends calling the polytheists thankless for not accepting the message despite clearly stated arguments. *Ayah* 100 answers another hidden objection of the polytheists. Meccan polytheists used to object why prophethood was given to a lesser wealthy and powerful tribe of Banu Hashim instead of richer and powerful tribes of Mecca.⁶⁹ Further, in Banu Hashim an orphan, i.e. the Prophet, was made prophet instead of some influential person of Banu Hashim. The *ayah* says if God gave them (the powerful tribes of Mecca) His storehouse of mercy (i.e. the Qur'an), they would hold it back and fear the storehouse of mercy might become reduced if they shared it with others (or make the other more powerful than them). This was not the case with the Prophet, and hence he qualified to be a prophet. God knows the hidden secrets of human beings and His decisions are based on wisdom and knowledge.

iv. Deities Can Remove Pain – 56-58

Meccan polytheists believed that their deities could help them when they were afflicted. *Ayah* 56 asks them if this were true, they should call them to see if they responded. They would never respond. In *ayah* 67 God reminded them when they were in sea taken over by a storm whom they called, Allah or their deities. At that time, they called Allah only. Thus, in their inner being they believed their deities had no power to remove affliction or transfer it (to others) (56).

Polytheists considered angels God's daughters (40). In human relationships the father-daughter relationship is closer than the relationship with relatives. *Ayah* 57 exclaims polytheists' attitude about whom they call (angels), themselves seek someone closer to God to gain access to Him. The angels hope for God's mercy and fear His punishment. This is the correct attitude as they are aware of their Lord's chastisement (57). The point is angels themselves look for access to God, how could such beings provide the polytheists access to God.

Ayah 58 provides God's *sunnah* about the accountability of each city (*qarya*). The *sunnah* is that each city will be accounted for its collective behavior *in this world* before the Day of Judgement. This is God's firm decision written in God's book. It is as if each human community were like a crop. It comes into being, grows, produces its fruit (good or bad), and then cut down to make space for the next generation of crops. According to the *sunnah*, when time for a city's judgement comes, it is either destroyed, or it is put in severe punishment with the hope they

⁶⁹ For example, Banu Umayyah and Banu Makhzum were the wealthiest and most powerful Meccan tribes. They posed severest opposition to the Prophet. Most of their people accepted Islam only after the conquest of Mecca.

may correct themselves. In both cases, every city's fate is eventual destruction (58). Human history bears witness to this fact. As opposed to this, individuals will be judged as an individual on the Day of Judgement (19:95,80). In the context of the *surah*, Meccan polytheists are threatened with their near destruction if they continued aggression against believers. When the believers conquered Mecca in 630 C.E., most of Meccans accepted Islam and Mecca survived its destruction. Though a time will come when it will be destroyed.

v. True Prophets Show Miracles – 59, 90-93

Approximately, one-third of the Meccan Qur'an is filled with Meccan polytheists' demand for miracles. In late Antiquity, when the Prophet was active, people believed a true prophet showed miracles. God's reason for not showing the polytheists miracles was the history of prophets. Arabs were familiar with this history e.g. the nations of Ad, Thamud, etc. Many miracles were shown to them, but they rejected God's message. Instead of believing, seeing a miracle made them more rebellious. *Ayah* 59 reminds the polytheists the story of a she-camel sent to the nation of Thamud.⁷⁰ God showed them the she-camel as a clear sign and a test for them. The nation rejected and sinned against it. In the end they were destroyed except for believers. The *surah* under study presents three miracles: i) *Isra'*, ii) *Mi'raj*, and iii) the Qur'an (its impossibility to be created by humans, or *jinn*s, or both together). As expected, these miracles created more controversy than recognizing God's powers and believing the revelation.

Ayat 90-93 mention some specific miracles polytheists demanded. They wanted the Prophet i) broke ground and a spring gushes forth from it, ii) possessed a garden of palm trees, vines, and a river abundantly gushing forth among all the trees, iii) made sky fall on them in pieces, iv) brought Allah and angels before them face to face, v) owned a house with gold ornaments, or vi) ascended to sky and brought a book for their reading. God told the Prophet to proclaim he never claimed to be a miracle worker. He was just a human being like them (with no claim to any divinity). He was only God's messenger who was bringing God's revelations to them. Hence, unless God desired, he could not show any miracle.

vi. An Angel Should be God's Prophet – 94-99

In response to the Prophet's claim of being a human except that he received revelations, polytheists objected and demanded an angel should be a prophet (94). This would allow them to see miraculous things. *Ayah* 94 comments on their illogical demand. Their demand was not new. Many people in the past demanded angels as prophets. *Ayah* 95 suggests it would be logical if angels lived on the earth to send an angelic prophet; when human beings lived on the earth, it made sense to send a human prophet. Possibly, their demand implied an angelic prophet's witness of God was more reliable than a human prophet's witness. *Ayah* 96 asked the Prophet to proclaim that God was a sufficient witness to be a reliable

⁷⁰ For the story of Thamud see 7:73-79; 26:155-156; 54:17-28; and 91:11-15.

witness between the Prophet and polytheists. He knew these were petty excuses for not accepting the Truth. In the context of the *surah*, we can also understand the *ayah* to mean, God knew and saw the Prophet's eleven years efforts to convey the message. The Prophet faithfully delivered his duty, answered their questions. Now, it was up to them to accept or reject the prophetic message.

vii. The Prophet is a Magician – 101-104

One of polytheists' beliefs was that the Prophet was bewitched (47). This was not a new objection in the history of prophets. For example, when Moses showed nine clear miracles to the Pharaoh, the Pharaoh called Moses bewitched (101). If the polytheists did not know about this event, they should ask the Children of Israel who knew about it. Moses told the Pharaoh that he knew in his heart the miracles were from the Lord of the heavens and the earth. They were sent for him to understand the Truth brought by Moses. Moses told the Pharaoh after the revelation of the Truth, if he disbelieved, he was about to be destroyed (102). Just like Meccans had decided to drive away the Prophet from Mecca, the Pharaoh had decided to drive away the Jews. The Pharaoh failed in his intention. He and his army drowned in the sea (103). The Children of Israel lived peacefully for a long time after that. When the Day of Judgment comes, they and the Pharaoh's party will be brought together for a final and permanent judgment (104).

The above story of Moses and the Pharaoh was mentioned as a threat to the polytheists. After eleven years of preaching, the Truth was clearly revealed to the polytheists. If they still rejected God's message, their fate would be the fate of the Pharaoh and his party, while believers would live peacefully and victorious. Similarly, on the Last Day the believers and polytheists will face each other once again for final and permanent judgement.

Group 7 Conclusion – 105-110

Ayat 105-110 sum up discussion of the whole *surah*. Polytheists demanded miracles and the believers asked for the destruction of the polytheists in the eleventh year of the Prophet's preaching. Further, the polytheists had made life unbearable for the Prophet and believers in Mecca and hoped they fled Mecca. *Ayah* 105 answers both demands. The polytheists were told, the Qur'an was the greatest miracle. It was brought down to the earth from on high. Meaning no one (e.g. Satan) meddled falsehood in it.⁷¹ Similarly, in truth it was revealed to the Prophet. Meaning the Prophet received and delivered the Qur'an without any mistake. Thus, the purpose of the Prophet was to receive and deliver the message correctly, and to inform people of the coming good reward and warn them of coming doom (105). The Prophet should do his duty and let God decide when to punish the polytheists.

⁷¹ Satan can meddle in the reception of revelation. Please see 22:52-53.

When the Prophet claimed his visit to the heavens in his dream, the polytheists argued they would believe the Prophet's experience if he brought down a book from sky that they could read and understand themselves (93). To this demand, God explains the structure of the Book in *ayah* 106. First, the Qur'an is divided into intervals (*surahs*, and within *surahs* various discourses) for *the humankind* to make it easy for understanding; second, it was revealed to the Prophet in "gradual unfolding", according to the events during the discourse between the Prophet and the polytheists as it progressed. This process of gradual unfolding allowed *the polytheists* to understand it in the concreteness of their life. Meaning though the polytheists were seeing the revelation as disjointed parts and not as a serial book, the whole Qur'an is one integral whole when compiled between the two covers as it exists in our hands today. The implication is the Qur'an is not disjointed parts in its sequence of compilation, as opposed to its sequence of revelation. Therefore, we shall pay full attention to the literary context of the *ayat* in a *surah*, and between the *surahs* in their sequence of compilation as a book.⁷²

Ayah 107 asks polytheists if they had any doubt about the Qur'an as God's true revelation, they should ask the people of knowledge among the Jews, i.e. Jewish scholars of previous scripture.⁷³ If the polytheists believe in the Qur'an or not, the fact remains when Jewish religious scholars hear the Qur'an "they fall upon their faces in prostration. And they say, 'Exalted is our Lord! Indeed, the promise of our Lord has been fulfilled (108)'. And they fall upon their faces weeping, and the Qur'an increases them in humble submission" (109). The promise of our Lord refers to God's promise he made with the Jews to send a last prophet for the guidance of the whole humankind till the Day of Judgement.⁷⁴

Ayah 110 responds to the polytheists' final objection about the Qur'an. They believed in Allah as the highest God. The Qur'an, in addition to Allah, uses al-Rahman as the proper name of God at more than fifty places.⁷⁵ The polytheists accused the Prophet of being a non-monotheist, believing in Allah as well as al-Rahman. The Qur'an responds to this accusation by explaining all good names (*al-asmau al-husna*)⁷⁶ belonged to God. If anyone called God Allah or al-Rahman, it did not matter as it was the same God. The second part of the *ayah* asks the Prophet to keep a medium voice when he prayed. The polytheists' objection of calling Allah al-Rahman and advice to the Prophet are connected through a *wa* (and) in *ayah* 110. The polytheists used to get annoyed when they

⁷² Maulana Hamidudin Farahi (d. 1930) emphasized this notion and termed it *Nazm* in the Qur'an; for details please see <https://www.australianislamiclibrary.org/farahi-school-of-thought.html> accessed 3-1-2024; also see <https://hamid-uddin-farahi.org/> accessed 3-1-2024.

⁷³ *Utul ilm* is only used for Jewish religious scholars in the Qur'an.

⁷⁴ The promise in Deuteronomy xviii, 15 and 18; See Asad p.436 note 131; also see Asad's note 33 in *Surah* 2 of the Qur'an.

⁷⁵ Droge, *The Qur'an ...*, 237 note 69.

⁷⁶ Asad, *The Message*, 436 note 132.

heard the name al-Rahman in the Prophet's prayer when he prayed loudly. Probably, hearing al-Rahman they said terrible things about the Prophet and his God al-Rahman. Therefore, God asked the Prophet to recite the Qur'an in a medium voice during prayer. The Qur'an advises believers not to say terrible things about other people's gods as in return they may say terrible things about their God (6:108).

The last *ayah* (111) of the *surah* summarizes the three types of dependencies polytheists attributed to God. It negates all three attributions. First, God does not need any child because human beings need children and consider them a source of strength, especially in Arabian tribal system; second, He does not have any partners in his sovereignty; and third, He does not have any weakness that may require supporters for His protection.

In conclusion, the above analysis shows every *ayah* of the *surah* relates to the subject matter of the *surah*. If we do not relate *ayat* with each other, we can very easily misunderstand. Understanding a *surah* is a process of deep and continuous reflection on the *ayat* in the *surah* under study. When we understand hidden connections of meanings in *ayat* vs. the *surah* hermeneutical circle, we find depths of meanings.