

Al-Mulk⁴

- 067:001 Abundantly good is he in whose hands lies all sovereignty⁵ and [who] has power over all things;⁶
- 067:002 who has created death and life⁷ to test you [and to determine] who among you acts better.⁸ He is the Invincible, the All-Absolving;⁹
- 067:003 who created seven heavens in layers.¹⁰ You will not find any anomalies in the

⁴ This chapter is centered around two themes. It speaks of God's lordship over all of creation in refutation of the pagan belief in gods who allegedly control small pockets of the cosmos. It also speaks of the Day of Judgment and the punishment and reward meted out to people on that day.

⁵ The phrase, "in his hands is all sovereignty" is similar to saying that God is "the Master of Sovereignty" (Qur'an 3:26). God praises himself with such an attribute in direct opposition to the pagan belief in multiple lords, each an independent sovereign in his own realm. God has sovereignty over all realms and sovereignty is only his to dispense to whomever he wishes.

⁶ Why does the verse mention sovereignty and power together? 1) Power (*qudrah*) is one of God's essential attributes (*ṣifab dhātīyyah*), which our intellect can perceive in him without conceptualizing anything else. Sovereignty (*mulk*), on the other hand, is one of God's rights over his creatures to do with them as he wishes. It is an abstracted attribute (*ṣifab fi'liyyah*), which we can only perceive if we conceptualize God and his relationship to his creation. In reality, his power is the source of his sovereignty. 2) Mention of his sovereignty speaks to his lordship over his creation in this world, while mention of his power prepares our minds to accept the reality of the resurrection and afterlife. These two themes—his all-encompassing lordship and the resurrection—are the two main themes of this chapter.

⁷ If we construe the verb "to create" literally, death and life must both be *things* created by God. The following tradition from Imām al-Bāqir supports this interpretation: "Life and death are creatures from the creatures of God. If death comes and enters a person, that person will not do anything without life leaving him" (*al-Kāfi* 3.3.96.34). It is also possible to construe the verb "to create" figuratively to mean "to apportion." God says, "We have apportioned death among you, and we shall not be preempted" (*Qur'an* 56:60).

⁸ This verse speaks of one of the reasons why God has doled out life and death: to test us. Life's role in this test is that it provides the playing field for the test. In life, a person faces all sorts of circumstances and must make choices vis-à-vis those circumstances, either in accordance with divine guidance or counter to it. Death, on the other hand, is a constant specter on the horizon reminding the living that this life does not last forever and that they must act with urgency before death comes (see *Tafsīr al-ṣāfi*). Perhaps it is to add emphasis to the imminent specter of death and to encourage us to act before it arrives that the verse mentions the creation or apportionment of death before life.

It is also significant that the verse says, "[to determine] who among you acts *better*," not *more*. In a tradition of Imām al-Ṣādiq we read, "[God] does not mean 'who acts *more*,' rather 'who acts more *correctly*.' Correctness is tantamount to the fear of God, a good intention, and a good act" (*al-Kāfi* 2.1.11.4).

⁹ To absolve someone of an obligation or sin is to release him from the consequences of failing to do the obligation or of sinning, though the obligation or sin remain. This is a step less than forgiveness in which the obligation or sin are completely foregone. These two attributes of God are fitting in the context. God is the Invincible (*al-'azīz*). Thus the outcome of the test to which he subjects us does not affect him in the least. In particular, we cannot harm him by defying him and failing. As for those who strive to win the race to "act better," they must never lose heart because of the vastness of their sins and shortcomings, for God is the All-Absolving (*al-ghafūr*).

¹⁰ We cannot yet say conclusively, what is meant by seven heavens. All we can say is that the *Qur'an* repeatedly mentions that there are seven and that the closest of these seven to us is where the stars exist (note that the verse only says that God adorned the lowest of the heavens with stars, not that all stars are in the lowest heaven as some commentators have suggested). The following sentence, "You will not find any anomalies in the All-Merciful's creation [of them]," seems to indicate that all seven heavens are empirically observable to us, thus they must be material. If this were not the case, then God's challenge to find an anomaly in "the All-Merciful's creation [of them]" would be pointless. However, this argument is not fool-proof, since it is possible that "the All-Merciful's creation" be a reference to all of his creation and not a specific reference to his creation *of them*, i.e. of the seven heavens. Finally, this verse seems to indicate that the seven heavens are in vertical layers one atop another (see *al-Mizān*). However, there is an alternative way to interpret the word *ṭibāqan* to mean synchrony. The beginning of

- All-Merciful's creation [of them].¹¹ So look once again.¹² Do you see any breaches?
 067:004 Then look again and again, and your eyes will turn chagrin and weary.¹³
 067:005 We have adorned¹⁴ the lowest of these heavens with lights,¹⁵ and we have made [from] them things to cast at devils.¹⁶ And we have prepared for them [in the hereafter] the punishment of hellfire.¹⁷
 067:006 And for [all] those who reject their Lord¹⁸ there is the punishment of hellfire.¹⁹ And what an awful destination [it is].

the verse would translate: “who created seven heavens in *synchrony*” (see *Majma‘ al-bayān* and *al-Kāshif*). This meaning seems more appropriate to the rest of the verse and is a viable opinion.

¹¹ We must differentiate between an anomaly (*tafāwut*) and diversity. Of course, as we gaze at the cosmos around us, we will see great diversity of form and function. The cosmos is heterogeneous, not homogeneous. This does not mean that we have discovered anomalies to answer the *Qur‘ān*’s challenge. Rather this diversity is an integral part of the cosmos without which it would not be as it is. The anomalies that the *Qur‘ān* tells us we shall not find are exceptions to the principles upon which the cosmos is created, such that we would be forced to conclude that the cosmos is not one singular integrated system.

¹² You may have looked a million times, but look once again with exactitude to be assured.

¹³ Our eyes have been portrayed as though they are on a reconnaissance mission, searching for flaws in God’s creation. When they are sent out repeatedly to no avail, they return physically weary, and emotionally chagrin at having failed to find anything.

¹⁴ Verses 67:3-4 argued that God’s heavens are free from all defects. 67:5 takes us a step further than negating the negative and speaks of the positive beauty of the heavens.

¹⁵ It is tempting to assume the “lights” referred to are stars. However, the rest of the verse indicates that “lights” refers more broadly to the various luminous and illuminated bodies in the sky. In particular, we are told in other verses that meteors (*shihāb* pl. *shuhub*) are used to ward off jinn who seek to spy on the heavens. For instance, the *Qur‘ān* says, “However, whoever [among them] eavesdrops, a bright meteor pursues him” (15:18 also see 37:10). Accordingly, we must construe “lights” more broadly than just stars.

¹⁶ This phenomenon of jinn eavesdropping and then being driven away by meteors is mentioned several times in the *Qur‘ān*. In *al-Saffāt*, we read, “We have adorned the lowest of the heavens with the ornaments of stars, and we have protected it from every rebellious devil. They do not eavesdrop on the highest council, and they are shot at from every angle as outcasts. And for them [in the hereafter] is an eternal punishment. However, he [among them] who [tries to] eavesdrop, a piercing meteor pursues him” (37:7-10). In *al-Hijr* we read, “We have made towering structures (possibly a reference to the orbits) in the sky and adorned it for those who gaze [at it]. And we have protected it from every outcast devil. However, whoever [among them] eavesdrops, a bright meteor pursues him” (15:16-18). And in *al-Jinn* we read, “And [they said,] ‘We touched the sky and found it to be filled with stalwart guards and meteors.’ And [they said,] ‘We used to sit in it in a place fit for eavesdropping. But whoever [tries to] listen now finds a meteor lying in wait for him’” (72:8-9).

The main problems with these verses are the following: 1) Meteors are physical phenomena that existed before and after the Prophet’s birth, which is the time when the meteors began to be used to drive off jinn. So what about the meteors changed that they are now used for this purpose? 2) What connection exists between jinn travelling into the sky and eavesdropping on angels? In answer to the first question we can say that meteors, like all natural phenomena, are controlled by God’s servants, the angels. It is possible that the angels who have always guided these meteors continue to do so, but with an additional purpose of warding off devils. Thus, to us it seems that there is no difference in the natural phenomenon, but in reality, the same phenomenon serves two purposes. In answer to the second question, we can conjecture that jinn are like human beings in that there is an inverse relationship between their physical strength and their spiritual strength. Human beings may attain spiritual strength through self-deprivation like fasting. Perhaps, jinn strengthen themselves spiritually by travelling into the sky physically, thereby preparing themselves for contact with the realm of angels. Their purpose in doing so was to interfere with guidance or to gather information of the unseen that they could then use for evil purposes (*Ma‘ārif-e Qur‘ān* vol.1 p.295).

¹⁷ Not only do these evil jinn face punishment in this world; in the hereafter, they will be punished with the fire.

¹⁸ This includes those who reject God as their Lord outright as an atheist does. It also includes those who reject his oneness as the polytheist does. It also includes those who believe in him as their Lord, but rebel against him in sin.

¹⁹ The word *sa‘īr* is literally an adjective for the fire meaning “burning.” However, the *Qur‘ān* treats it more like a proper name for hellfire or a particular part of hellfire.

- 067:007 When they are cast into it, they will hear a sucking sound from it as it seethes,
 067:008 [like one] about to explode with rage.²⁰ Whenever a throng is cast into it, its keepers²¹
 will ask them, “Did a warner not come to you?”²²
 067:009 They will reply, “Of course, a warner came to us, but we defied [him] and said, ‘God
 has not revealed a thing. You [and your cohorts] are simply in great error.’”
 067:010 And they will [continue and] say, “If only we had heard [and accepted]²³ or used our
 intellect,²⁴ we would not [now] be among the denizens of hellfire.”

²⁰ The imagery of the sound and fury of hellfire can only be imagined by comparison with other such things. The *shahiq* of the fire is a sucking or gasping sound a person makes when he is struggling to breathe. It might be similar to the sound of water spiraling down a drain or a whirlpool and being sucked in. The seething of the fire can best be experienced in a campfire or woodstove which has reached a roaring blaze. The phrase “[like one] about to explode with anger” indicates that the crescendo of this blaze as its fuel of people and stones increases.

²¹ The keepers of hellfire are angels appointed to manage the fire, dole out punishment to its inhabitants, and guard against their escape. These angels are described in the following verses: “O you who believe, protect yourselves and your families from a [fearful] fire whose fuel is people and stones, over which are [assigned] angels, severe and mighty who do not disobey God in anything he has commanded them [to do], and carry out what they are commanded” (66:6); and “There are nineteen [keepers] over it. We have assigned only angels as keepers of the fire, and we have only made their number [such] to confuse the non-believers, and so that those given the book may be reassured, and so that the faithful may increase in [their] faith...” (74:30-31).

²² i.e. “Did a warner not come to warn you of the consequences of not believing in God, the Lord of all creation?”

²³ Clearly, they do not mean, “If only we had heard,” for hearing is an involuntary act. If they truly had not heard the guidance of God’s warner, they would be vindicated of their sins. However, since these people are obviously condemned for their transgressions, they must have meant that they did not hear *and accept*.

²⁴ Two major obstacles to guidance are repeatedly mentioned in the *Qur’an*: not listening, and not using one’s intellect. In one verse, God says, “Among them are those who [act as though they] listen to you, [O Muḥammad.] Do you wish to make the deaf hear, even if they do not use their intellect?” (10:42). The pagan Arabs would listen to the Prophet’s preaching, without taking what he said to heart. To console the Prophet, God compares these non-believers to deaf people. He asks the Prophet rhetorically, “Do you wish you were able to make the deaf hear, even if in addition to loss of hearing, they have lost their ability to think?” If a deaf person’s intellect is intact, he may decipher what you are trying to communicate to him using his intellect. However, if he has no intellect either, then your hopes for communicating with him are unfounded. Similarly, these non-believers, who pay no heed to what they hear, are as good as deaf. If in addition to their hearing, their intellects are also impaired—since they fail to use them—then your hopes for guiding them are unfounded. (see ITI’s commentary on *Uṣūl al-Kāfi* 1.1.12.1). In another verse he says, “Moreover, do you suppose that most of them hear or use their intellect?” (25:44). The problem with such people is that they do not hear what is said to them. Worse yet, even if they hear, they do not think about what they have heard (*ibid.*).

Similarly, in 67:10, the people doomed for hellfire regret not having done one of two things, either of which would have led to their salvation. First, they could have “heard and accepted.” By this they mean they could have taken what their prophet taught them at face value and obeyed his commandments. This path would not have required them to comprehend those teachings at a high level, but would have been sufficient to save them from God’s wrath. Second, they could have “used their intellect.” The intent here is not to have used their intellect independently of the prophet’s guidance, for the intellect alone cannot lead us to all that we must know and do. Rather, they mean that they should have used their intellect to comprehend the prophet’s teachings at a deep level to know God as he wishes to be known and to believe and act with insight and wisdom. In short, they should have acted on the advice Imam ‘Alī gave Imam al-Ḥasan when he said, “Know, my son, that for me, the dearest things that you can take away from this exhortation are [the following:] to fear God and to suffice yourself with that with which God has charged you; and to lay hold on [the tenets and practices] according to which your ancestors and the righteous from your family have lived, for they never ceased to consider their best interests as you consider, and contemplate as you contemplate. Then the end [result] of all that compelled them to take hold of what they had learned and to hold back from that with which they had not been charged. If [on the other hand] you refuse to accept their knowledge [at face value] without having learned as they learned, then let your pursuit be for understanding and knowledge, not to drown in doubts and excessive argumentation. Begin, before you [even] consider this path, by seeking your Lord’s help and begging him to make you successful, and [by] abandoning every [character] blemish that could cast you into doubt or give you up to misguidance. When you are certain that

- 067:011 Thus do they admit to their sins, so may the denizens of hellfire be cast far [from God's mercy].
- 067:012 [However,] for those who fear their Lord despite his concealment [from them], there is absolution and great reward.²⁵
- 067:013 Conceal your speech or reveal it.²⁶ [It makes no difference to God, for] he is the Knower [even] of what lies in [people's] breasts.²⁷
- 067:014 Is it [conceivable] that he who created, not know,²⁸ while he is the Subtle,²⁹ the All-Aware?
- 067:015 It is he who made the earth tractable for you; so walk [freely] in its various quarters and eat of his provision [therein].³⁰ And [remember all the while that] you shall be resurrected [and returned] to him.³¹

your heart is purified and thus humbled, your mind has regrouped, and thus focused, and your resolve to learn is solid, then consider what I have explained to you. However, if you do not see in yourself what pleases you, like a mind free of worries and ready to think, then know that you will only stumble blindly and be enveloped by the darkness, and a seeker of the religion is not one who stumbles [thus] and is confused. So refraining from the pursuit [altogether] is better" (*Nahj al-balāghah* letter 31).

²⁵ 67:2 mentioned that God "created death and life to test you [and to determine] who among you acts better. He is the Invincible, the All-Absolving." Verses 3,4, and part of 5 outline a convincing argument to assure us that God is the Lord of all the cosmos. From 67:5 to 67:11 we learn of the fate of those jinn and human beings who refused to accept God as their Lord. All the while we are reminded by the mention of God's name, the Invincible, that these sinners do not inflict the slightest harm on God. Finally, in 67:12, after frightening us through a horrifying description of hellfire, God nurtures hope within us by mentioning the fate of those who pass his test. While they may not be perfect, their firm beliefs lead them to fear their Lord without having ever seen him, and God, the All-Absolving, absolves them of their shortcomings and rewards them generously.

²⁶ The preceding verses spoke about God's sovereignty over all parts of the temporal world and his power to be able to resurrect, punish, and reward. 67:13-14 add that he has knowledge of things that are otherwise hidden. The implication is that his punishment and reward are thus just, since they are based on the entirety of a person's beliefs, actions, and thoughts.

²⁷ That is, he knows your speech even when it is but a thought in your heart, thus it makes no difference whether you speak it or conceal it, he knows it just the same.

²⁸ This sentence could alternatively be translated, "Is it [conceivable] that [God] not know him whom he created?"

At first, it seems this argument is incomplete. It could be argued that God need not know the details of my thoughts and my hidden actions *simply* because he created me. The answer is to be found in a correct understanding of God's creation and the true nature of human action. First, God's creation is not like a structure built by a human agent. If a carpenter builds a chair, the chair will remain as he built it even if the carpenter never interacts with it again, even if he dies. This is because the carpenter has not caused the existence of the chair, rather he has simply assembled certain parts that were in existence and will continue to remain in existence indefinitely. God's creation on the other hand is the effulgence of existence into something that otherwise would not exist. When God creates a person, that person's existence remains intrinsically tied to God's continuous act of sustaining that person. If, for even an instant, God ceases to will that person to exist, he would cease to exist; not that he would die, rather his body and soul, the matter and substance of which he is made, would cease to exist. Thus, for God to be our creator means that he is intrinsically tied to every instant of our being's existence. We are ceaselessly the object of his attention, and so he knows the intricacies of our thoughts and actions. Second, human actions, while done of our own free will, are in reality, very much God's act. It is God who gives us the ability to act, the intellect to choose the act, the strength to perform the act, and the will to choose whether to act. After we choose to act, it is God who determines what the effect of our act is and whether our act has its desired effect or not. Thus, while the act is ours, and we can and will be rewarded or punished for it, God is intricately tied into our act such that he knows it as well, in fact better than, we do.

²⁹ He is subtle, in that he knows the intricacies of his creatures, their states, and their actions.

³⁰ In this verse and those that follow it, we revisit a previous theme: that God is the sovereign Lord of all creation. He reminds us that it is he who has made the earth tractable for all sorts of human use, whether it be farming, building, or leisure. Because he has made it such, he invites us to travel freely on it and seek our sustenance with ease.

³¹ There are two ways to interpret the second sentence in this verse. As I have translated it, it is a reminder for us, as

- 067:016 Do you deem yourselves safe from him who is in heaven³²—from him making the earth swallow you up at which it will pulsate [as it closes in above you]?³³
- 067:017 Do you deem yourselves safe from him who is in heaven—from him sending upon you a stone-laden wind?³⁴ [If so,] then you shall come to know how [real] my warning has been.³⁵
- 067:018 Those before them [also] defied.³⁶ And how [real] was my punishment!
- 067:019 Do they not see the birds above them spreading [their wings], and [then] they fold [them]?³⁷ None other than the All-Beneficent holds them up.³⁸ He sees all things.³⁹

we avail ourselves of God’s blessing in the land, to remember that we shall be held accountable for our use of these resources on the Day of Judgment. Alternatively, we could translate it as follows: “And [know that] your resurrection [also] is in his hands.” In this sense, the sentence complements the previous sentence. The previous sentence speaks of God’s lordship (*rubūbiyyah*) over the temporal world. This sentence speaks of his lordship over the hereafter.

³² While verse 67:15 appealed to our sense of indebtedness to God for his vast favors, verses 67:16-17 takes on a more threatening tone, effective for those who did not answer the previous call.

As for the meaning of the phrase “*man fī al-samā’*,” the commentators have offered various interpretations. I believe the phrase refers to God, for the acts that are attributed to “him who is in heaven” are acts most directly attributed to God. In particular, it is God who makes the earth swallow people up, and it is God who sends winds of punishment. In fact, another verse threatens the same two punishments, and in that verse the actor of both is God. The verse reads, “Do you deem yourselves safe from him making the coastland swallow you up, or from him sending upon you a stone-laden wind?” (*Qur’ān* 17:68). Several traditions also support this conclusion and show that it is not uncommon for God to be referred to as “*man fī al-samā’*.” The Prophet Muḥammad said, “*irḥam man fī al-ard, yarḥamka man fī al-samā’*” meaning, “Have mercy upon those on earth, and he who is in heaven will have mercy on you” (*Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh* vol. 4 tradition 5806). In another tradition Imam al-Ḥusayn told a man whose house he visited, “*gharraka man fī al-ard, wa maqataka man fī al-samā’*” meaning, “Those on earth have deceived you, and he who is in heaven is angry with you” (*Mustadrak al-wasā’il* 3.1.8.18.4). In another tradition, the Prophet said about himself, “*ana amīnu man fī al-samā’*” meaning, “I am trusted by him who is in heaven” (*Biḥār al-anwār* 93.1.6 p.70). In all three instances, the phrase in question clearly refers to God. Of course, we know with certainty that God is not somehow contained by heaven or any other entity, for he is immaterial and exalted above all the imperfections of the material world. Perhaps God has used such a phrase to describe himself to communicate his loftiness and his ultimate domination over all his creation, just as one who is above another.

The commentators have entertained other possibilities for this phrase. It could mean “he whose dominion is in heaven,” also referring to God. The following phrase corroborates this possibility. Imam al-Ṣādiq said the following in a prayer when looking at the sky, “*yā man fī al-samā’ mulkubu wa ‘arshubu,*” meaning, “O you whose sovereignty and throne are in heaven” (*Mustadrak al-wasā’il* 4.1.6.11.3). Third, it could refer to God who is literally “in heaven” according to the false beliefs of the non-believers who are the object of this threat. In one tradition, Imam al-Ṣādiq enumerates those who are in hellfire with the murderers of Imam al-Ḥusayn. He mentions Nimrod who said, “I have dominated all on earth, and I have killed him who is in heaven” (*Biḥār al-anwār* 25.2.13.24). Fourth, it could refer to an angel—most likely Gabriel—who is in charge of meting out this punishment at God’s behest.

³³ The word *mawr* indicates a sort of undulation, quaking, or pulsation. In one verse, the sky is said to “pulsate” on the Day of Judgment (*Qur’ān* 52:9). Fakhr al-Rāzī explains this phrase best. He says God will make the earth swallow them up, and then quake and pulsate as it closes in on top of them (*Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*).

³⁴ A *ḥāsib* is a wind so intense that it picks up stones and pelts a person with it. It was the punishment God chose to send upon the people of Sodom and Gomorrah when they defied the Prophet Lot (see *Qur’ān* 54:34).

³⁵ To feel safe from God’s punishment is a grave sin...

³⁶ The address of this verse shifts from the second person to the third in a literary device known as *iltifāt*. The reason for this shift is that those who defy God’s lordship and deem themselves safe from his punishment have made themselves unworthy of God’s direct address. He rather speaks to them indirectly in his address to his Prophet.

³⁷ I have translated the verbs “to spread” and “to fold” as literally as possible because it seems that the *Qur’ān* has purposely used different grammatical forms for each one. “To spread” is used as an adjective (more precisely, a *ḥāl*), while “to fold” is used as a verb. Al-Zamakhsharī has suggested that this usage indicates that the primary action important for flying is the “spreading” of the wings which provides thrust and lift. The folding of the wings, on the other hand, has been mentioned as an afterthought, since it is only incidental to flying. The bird must, after all, bring its wings back to the starting position so that it may flap once more. A looser translation, which ignores this

- 067:020 Furthermore,⁴⁰ who is this who is [like] an army for you,⁴¹ who aids you in place of the all-Beneficent?⁴² The non-believers are simply steeped in deception.⁴³
- 067:021 [And] furthermore, who is this who provides for you, if God withholds his provision? [They offer no answer,] yet they stubbornly persist in [their] defiance [of,] and flight [from, the truth].
- 067:022 Thus, is he who falls on his face as he walks better guided or he who remains upright as he walks on a straight path?⁴⁴
- 067:023 Tell [them],⁴⁵ “He is the one who created you and placed within you hearing, sight, and an intellect.⁴⁶ [But] you hardly show gratitude.”⁴⁷

nuance but is easier to understand, would read, “Do they not see the birds above them as they spread [their wings] and fold [them]?”

³⁸ This sentence is not meant to deny the role of more proximate natural forces whose interplay creates flight. There is the birds will to fly, the physiological processes that allow it to move its wings, and the forces of thrust, lift, and drag, to name a few. While all these proximate causes play a role, the ultimate cause is God, who is the sole independent actor in the cosmos, and thus the root cause of *every* phenomenon. We tend to attribute acts whose proximate causes we know, to those causes. On the other hand, we are prone to attribute acts to God whose proximate cause is not easily known. We might say, “his untimely death was an act of God,” or “the lightning strike was an act of God.” It is in this vein that this verse attributes the mysterious act of flight to God to remind us that he is the root cause.

³⁹ To say he “sees all things” could possibly mean two things in this context. First, it may be a threat to those who fail to see that God is the cause of flight, for God sees them and will punish them for it. Second, it may go hand in hand with his lordship. As Lord of the birds, not a single bird leaves his watchful eye as he carries them safely through the sky.

⁴⁰ The particle *am* here means *bal*, and is used as a transition between one reprimand and another. In particular, the previous verse reprimanded the disbelievers for failing to recognize God as their Lord. This verse reprimands them for taking up other deities as helpers besides God.

⁴¹ In this verse the address shifts again to the second person. Perhaps the reason is to pull them out of their delusion, for they have taken up deities besides God to help them. By speaking to them directly, he God wishes to convince them that he is their only helper.

⁴² This name has been mentioned here to remind them that no one is more suited to helping them than God, the All-Beneficent.

⁴³ Once again the address shifts to the 3rd person. In reality, they have turned away from God, so he turns away from them.

⁴⁴ This verse compares through allegory, the state of non-believers and a believers. The non-believers are like one who walks aimlessly off the beaten path. He constantly stumbles and falls on his face because of the pitfalls and obstacles that he is wholly unprepared to face. All this because the path he has chosen is not a path at all. In this vein, one commentator has suggested that the verse does not mention the crooked path upon which the non-believers tread so as not to dignify it by calling it a “path” (see *Rūḥ al-ma‘ānī*). The believers, on the other hand, are like one who has chosen a clear and straight path upon which they walk without stumbling. Clearly, the latter is equipped to reach his desired destination, while the other is destined to remain blindly wandering, stumbling in the darkness.

⁴⁵ Because of their stubborn defiance of the truth, God refrains from addressing them directly any further. Instead, he commands his Prophet to communicate with them as a sign of his displeasure.

⁴⁶ This verse reminds them of some of the most important blessings God has bestowed upon them. By virtue of their hearing and seeing, they have risen above God’s inanimate creatures and the kingdom of plants (it is true that the senses of taste, touch, and smell are also unique to animals; however, these are not mentioned because they have no significant role to play in a person’s guidance). And by virtue of their intellects (represented by the word *af‘idab* or “hearts”), they have risen above all other animals.

⁴⁷ Gratitude can be expressed in any of three ways, each one more desirable than the previous. First, is the verbal thanks one may offer God in prayer. Second, comes the admission in one’s heart that the blessing is from God. Third, is the correct usage of the blessing in accordance with the wishes of the giver. Those who do not accept God as their Lord fail to thank him on all three levels. However, it is their failure at the third level that is most egregious. In particular, they have failed to use the faculties God has given them to comprehend and accept his guidance. Thus, as one blind, deaf, and foolish, they fall constantly on their faces, according to 67:22; and they are like cattle or worse

- 067:024 Tell [them], “He is the one who created you on earth, and before him shall you [eventually] be gathered.”
- 067:025 They ask, “When is this promised [gathering? Tell us] if you are truthful.”⁴⁸
- 067:026 Tell [them], “This knowledge lies only with God, and I am simply a clear warner.”
- 067:027 And when [it comes to pass and] they have seen that it is near, [their faces]—the faces of those who did not believe—will be contorted.⁴⁹ It shall be said [to them]:⁵⁰ “This is what you used to ask for!”
- 067:028 Tell [them], “Answer me this: ‘If God destroys me and those who are with me or shows us mercy [it shall not affect you,] but who shall give you—who do not believe in him—sanctuary from a painful punishment?’”
- 067:029 Tell [them], “He [to whom I call you] is the All-Beneficent. We believe in him, and upon him do we rely. And you shall [soon] know who [between us] is in clear error.
- 067:030 Tell [them], “Answer me this: ‘If your [source of] water recedes into the earth, who will bring you flowing water?’”

yet, according to 7:179.

⁴⁸ Their question is spoken in a tone of ridicule.

⁴⁹ This is an expression of the terrible confluence of emotions that will overtake these people at seeing what they denied their entire life come to pass. They will taste dread, shame, regret, disbelief, hopelessness, and so many other bitter emotions at once.

⁵⁰ This taunt is most likely spoken by the angels.