Within Its Depths:
How the Canonical
Recitations Affect the
Meaning of the Qur'an

Basil Farooq

بِشْمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

WITHIN ITS DEPTHS:

How the Canonical Recitations Affect the Meaning of the Qur³ān

by

Basil Farooq

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Recite With Love

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Author: Basil Farooq Editor: Saaima Yacoob

Cover Design: Khadija Musa





Reviews for the Book

Ustādh Basil has put together a unique work, comprising a brief introduction to the <code>hurūf</code> and <code>qirā</code> and their basis, followed by select examples via an oft-recited chapter which bring forth the beauty of the Divine Word. This concise and well-researched work should be read by students of the Qur'ān, wherever they are in their journey. – <code>Ustādha Sulma Badrudduja</code> — Teacher of Qirā'āt, USA

For many Muslims, the subject of $qir\bar{a}$ $i\bar{a}t$, or the various modes of Quranic reading, can be daunting. In this accessible monograph, Qārī Basil Farooq provides a glimpse into the diverse functions of the $qir\bar{a}$ $i\bar{a}t$ tradition that goes beyond the technical details often associated with a topic of this nature. By walking the reader through the riveting stories of $S\bar{u}rat$ al-Kahf, Qārī Basil demonstrates how the different Quranic readings can enrich our understanding and appreciation of Allah's beautiful words. **Mufti Muntasir Zaman** — Qalam Institute, USA

Qārī Basil has written a wonderfully accessible work and addition to the English literature on the $qir\bar{a}$ (canonical recitations). The Qur'ān is a divine book of guidance and a source of inspiration since its revelation - this is in part due to the Arabic in which it was revealed and in how it is recited (the $qir\bar{a}$ 'āt), which has been faithfully transmitted to us across the generations - as concisely explained in Ustadha Saaima's introductory chapter - and one of the means through which the Qur'ān has been preserved.

Qārī Basil has done a masterful job in conveying a particular aspect of the $qir\bar{a}$, with his study of a sūrah (al-Kahf) which will

be familiar to many Muslims across the world who recite it regularly. I hope his work will thus serve not only to introduce these additional layers of meaning to a wider English-reading audience, but also build upon other excellent, focused exegetical works on surah al-kahf, such as Shaykh Abu al-Hasan Ali Nadwi's Faith versus Materialism.

The Qur'ān constantly encourages us to reflect and contemplate, and Qārī Basil's work, despite its brevity (which makes it all the more accessible), makes us do just that exploring and intertwining aspects of language, history, exegesis and more within his central theme of the $qir\bar{a}$ 'āt. – **Dr. Shameq Sayeed,** Teacher of Qirā'āt, UK

All praises are due to Allāh $Ta'\bar{a}l\bar{a}$ who has honored us with the $qir\bar{a}'\bar{a}t$. Salutations and blessings be upon the greatest Qārī, Sayyidunā Muhammad . The Qur'ān is beautiful, and its beauty is enhanced with the $qir\bar{a}'\bar{a}t$. The benefits of the $qir\bar{a}'\bar{a}t$ are many, but one particular benefit which allows us to truly appreciate the $qir\bar{a}'\bar{a}t$, and thereby the Qur'ān, is the effects it has on the meaning. The effect on the meaning plays a great role in understanding the Qur'ān, a dear message from Allāh $Ta'\bar{a}l\bar{a}$. The differences in the meaning do not contradict each other but rather complement or provide other perspectives. This is from the $i'j\bar{a}z$ of the Qur'ān.

The study of the differences in the meaning resulted by the variants in the *qirā'āt* is a science which has been abandoned by most. It brings great joy to see Qāri'ah Saaima Yacoob and her student, Qārī Basil Farooq, revive this field. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first book of its kind in the English language. As I perused the book, I was intrigued by the smoothness and simplicity of this work. The content is well-

researched and beautifully organized and presented. I pray that Qār³iah Saaima and her students will continue this series or perhaps others will be influenced by her and continue this.

May Allāh Taʿālā crown this work with acceptance and make it a source of benefit and ṣadaqah jāriyah. May He keep the authors and myself devoted to the service of His Book and its people. – **Mufti Muajul I. Chowdhury**, Director Darul Iftaa, New York

Within Its Depths is a much-needed book that explains the nuances of when (and if) there is a difference in the meaning of words within verses due to the qirā'āt. The author brilliantly points out these meanings using stories from Sūrah al-Kahf, an often-recited chapter in the Qur'ān. What makes it even more beautiful is the subtle change of the word that points to another layer in the meaning of a verse, almost like decoding something hidden. This is an important text to have for teachers and students alike who are diving into the ocean of Qur'ān learning, which is limitless. – Ḥāfiṇah Suzane Derani, Muslim Chaplain and Qur'ān teacher, USA

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Editor's Foreword

All praise is due to Allah, our Creator and our Sustainer, who revealed the Qur'ān in seven aḥruf upon His beloved Prophet and honored us by making us a part of his ummah. May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon His beloved Messenger , his family, and his companions ...

The idea for the project before you, Within Its Depths: How the Canonical Recitations Affect the Meaning of the Qur'ān, was born in the month of the Qur'ān, Ramadan 1443 AH. Alḥamdulillah, as I was blessed to study the ten canonical recitations of the Qur'ān under my teacher, Mufti Mohamed-Umer Esmail , I was invited by the Rahmah Foundation in California to recite at their online women's qiyām program. They requested that I recite in the canonical recitations of the Qur'ān (qirā'āt).

I remember carefully choosing selections of the Qur'ān where the differences in the canonical recitations did not include any change in vowel markings. This is because, for most Muslims, hearing someone recite the Qur'ān differently than what is written in their copies of the Qur'ān is an extremely jarring experience. It is our immediate reaction, as it should be, to assume that the reciter has made a mistake, and the meaning of the Qur'ān has been altered. Realizing that this might be the first time that many of those attending had even heard of the $qir\bar{a}$ 'āt, I felt it would be wise to spare them this experience.

However, last year, I felt that the attendees would benefit from being introduced to those differences in the canonical recitations that included changes in vowel markings. As I was reciting the various readings, a copy of the Qur³ an was shared on the screen, making it obvious to the attendees that I was reading

some of the vowel markings seemingly incorrectly. After I completed my recitation, I went through the differences with the audience. I explained how even though the vowel markings had changed on some of the words, the meaning did not change at all. However, in a couple of places, there was a change in meaning. I explained what that change in meaning was, and how, rather than altering the meaning drastically, the canonical recitations created layers of meaning in the same verse, with one strengthening our understanding of the other.

The reaction was better than I expected. Not only was the anxiety that the attendees felt lifted, but many of them asked if there was a place where they could read more on this issue in English. My answer, unfortunately, was that although there has been an amazing effort by Shaykh Fadel Soliman in translating the canonical recitations of the Qur'ān into English through the Bridges' translation, there is no resource that I could think of where these differences are explained in more detail.

I can completely empathize with this desire to know more. It is difficult to truly understand something without seeing multiple examples of it. Muslims often hear that the canonical recitations do not cause a change in meaning, or they may hear that they do not change anything regarding the rulings of what is considered <code>halāl</code> and what is <code>harām</code>. However, for English speaking Muslims, there are very few examples of this. There is just the jarring experience of hearing someone read the Qur'ān with different vowel markings, and no explanation as to why they are not incorrect. Seeing that there was a need for such examples, I asked my student, Qārī Basil Farooq, to begin working on a project that would allow people to access more of these discussions. I am very grateful to Allah, Most High, for blessing me with a talented and hard-working student like Qārī

Basil, and for opening his heart towards this writing project, and for bringing this project to completion.

Within Its Depths: How the Canonical Recitations Affect the Meaning of the Qur'ān begins with a chapter that gives an overview of what the $qir\bar{a}$ 'āt are. I have written this chapter in a way that Muslims who are not familiar with the technical terms of this science will still be able to follow the discussion. It is then followed by Qārī Basil Farooq's explanation of how these differences add nuances in meaning in Sūrah al-Kahf, a sūrah that many Muslims read or listen to on Fridays. We have intentionally not included any discussions that are related to the development of the science of $qir\bar{a}$ 'āt, names of the ten major reciters, etc. but rather, have chosen to approach the subject in a more general way, with the hopes of making it more accessible.

It is our hope that this short work will help Muslims in the English-speaking world to access the canonical recitations of the Qur³ān, and to give them a better understanding of how the meaning is affected by these various readings. I ask Allah to reward the author for his amazing effort, and to grant this work an immense acceptance, and to make it a door for many Muslims to enter the awe-inspiring world of the canonical recitations of the Qur³ān.

With a request for du'ā's,

Saaima Yacoob February 2023/Rajab 1444 AH

بِسْمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحْمَانِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

Introduction

All praise is due to Allah alone, our Maker, our Sustainer. He is the most Merciful and most Wise. He revealed the Qur³ān to provide us—in the darkness and confusion of this world—with the light and clarity of truth. We ask Allah Almighty to send His blessings and salutations upon His noble Messenger, Muḥammad ** , and upon his family, his companions ** and those that follow them in righteousness until the Day of Judgment. $\bar{A}m\bar{i}n$.

As Muslims, the Qur'ān forms the bedrock of our lives. We strive to learn its teachings and engage with its various dimensions, with the ultimate goal of improving our relationship with Allah . One of the great wonders of the Qur'ān is its endless supply of meanings and wisdoms. Oftentimes, one may even feel overwhelmed by the awe experienced when gazing upon this ocean without shores.

One of the methods of engaging with the Qur'ān is to understand and experience its multiform nature—to dig into the phrases which have multiple "words" packed into one. What meanings do each of these readings provide individually? And what is the overall meaning understood from the $\bar{a}yah$ considering all the readings? What are some types of differences in meaning a single phrase can hold? These are some of the questions we attempt to explore in this work, by the permission of Allah $\frac{1}{8}$.

An apt metaphor for the canonical readings is that of a prism. The prism, in this case the phrase, receives light. Depending on the angle from which the light hits the prism, it may continue straight through as a single light beam, the

metaphorical equivalent of a Qur³ānic translation; or the light can come from a different angle and disperse a beautiful array of colors and gems that had been hidden only moments prior. As I outline below in my methodology, we have been blessed to have as our predecessors, generations of the most intelligent, Godloving thinkers—scholars who spelled out where to direct our light and what angle to approach the prism from to get maximum dispersion. They even told us all the colors that will come out of the other side, and how to use these colors to fill our understanding of the Qur³ān.

I have been working on this project for almost a year, and the purpose is to present in English some of the depths of meaning provided by the canonical recitations. The main focus is to make the content accessible, and we chose to explore Sūrah al-Kahf so that these discussions can be kept in mind while reciting or listening to the sūrah every Friday. Islamic literature on the Qur³ānic Sciences in English is still in its infancy and that provides a most beautiful opportunity for us all: to organically discover the intricacies of the Qur³ān together and to interact with them in a personal way. The further along I went, the more spiritual and personal this journey became for me.

In an age of mass confusion and seemingly unlimited access to information on the internet, there are many unwarranted claims made regarding the $qir\bar{a}\dot{a}t$. My hope and prayer is that Allah will allow some of these confusions to be lifted for us, as we discover the method and approach of the early generations, those most familiar with the Qur'ān, its language and the $qir\bar{a}\dot{a}t$.

For the work that went into this project, I—first and foremost—thank Allah soft for his immense faḍl and blessing. I myself am a nobody, but Allah makes us means for whatever

He **S** Wills. I ask Allah **S** to make this work a means of goodness. All benefit in this book is solely attributed to Allah **S**.

The process of writing this book was a group effort, and the biggest acknowledgement, after Allah , is for my teacher Ustādha Saaima. Although her name may not be on the cover of this book, she gets all the credit for it. She had the insight to realize the need for this project, initiated the idea, and oversaw the process from beginning to end, before publishing it through Recite with Love. In addition, she graciously wrote a foreword and introductory chapter for the book. May Allah bless her infinitely in the dunyā and ākhirah for her immense sacrifices and for allowing me to partake in this project. May Allah accept this project in her book of deeds and allow me to continue learning under her guidance. Āmīn.

I would like to thank my parents, who always instilled in us the importance of the Qur'ān and encouraged us to pursue Qur'ānic education as a lifelong endeavor. I am immensely grateful to my wife, Hira, for her constant love and support. I find myself thanking Allah every day for making her a part of my life.

I would also like to thank all the reviewers who provided invaluable comments, which led to the improvement of the quality of this work manyfold. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the feedback on the initial draft and idea provided by Dr. Zaid Adhami. The first complete draft of this work received detailed feedback from my teacher, Mufti Muntasir Zaman, and Ustādh Shameq Sayeed and a content check by Ustādha Sulma Badrudduja. I am immensely grateful to them for the time they took out to go through the work in depth. Finally, I would like to appreciate Ustādha Suzane Derani and Mufti Muajul Chowdhury for their reviews and comments about the project.

I began my research for this work by collecting all the isolated phrases (furūsh) that have multiple readings in Sūrah al-Kahf. For this I primarily relied on the summaries provided in al-Budūr al-zāhirah fī al-qirā'āt al-'ashr al-mutawātirah of Shaykh 'Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Qāḍī (d. 1982 CE) and Ghayth al-naf' fī al-qirā'āt al-sab' by Imam 'Alī al-Ṣafāqusī (d. 1118 AH). The differences between the qirā'āt are explained in the genres of scholarship known as Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān¹ and Tawjīh al-Qirā'āt,² as well as Tafsīr.³ I consulted several authoritative works from each of these genres in my research. These are listed out below:

Maʿānī al-Qurʾān.

- Maʿānī al-qurʾān of Imam al-Farrāʾ 🙈 (d. 207 AH)
- Maʿānī al-qurʾān wa iʿrābuhū of Imam al-Zajjāj 🙈 (d. 311 AH)
- Maʿānī al-qurʾān of Imam al-Naḥḥās 🙈 (d. 338 AH)
- I'rāb al-qur'ān of Imam al-Nahhās 🙈 (d. 338 AH)

Tawjīh al-qirāʾāt:

- Al-Kashf 'an ma'ānī al-qirā'āt al-sab' of Imam Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib al-Qaysī
 (d. 437 AH)
- Fatḥ al-waṣīd of Imam ʿAlam al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī 🙈 (d. 643 AH)
- Ibrāz al-maʿānī of Imam Abū Shāmah 🙈 (d. 665 AH)
- 'Ināyāt-e reḥmānī of Qārī Fatḥ Pānīpatī 🙈 (d. 1987 CE)

¹The name of this genre can be roughly expressed as "meanings of the Qur'ān," which includes discussions of difficult vocabulary, grammar and narrations related to the Qur'ān.

² The goal of this genre is to "understand the $qir\bar{a}$ ' $\bar{a}t$ (canonical recitations)" from a linguistic and semantic (meaning) perspective.

³ The topic of this genre is to "understand the Qur³ān."

Tafsīr:

- Jāmi^c al-bayān of Imam al-Ṭabarī 🙈 (d. 310 AH)
- al-Muharrar al-wajīz of Imam Ibn 'Atiyyah 🙈 (d. 541 AH)
- Zād al-masīr of Imam Ibn al-Jawzī 🦀 (d. 597 AH)
- Mafātīḥ al-ghayb of Imam al-Rāzī 🙈 (d. 604 AH)
- Al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-qur'ān of Imam al-Qurtubī 🙈 (d. 671 AH)
- Al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ of Imam Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī (d. 754
 AH)
- Al-Taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr of Imam Ibn ʿĀshūr 🙈 (d. 1973 CE)

Most of the explanations of the differences given by the scholars of *tafsīr* could be traced back to the early *qurrā*²-linguists Imam al-Farrā², Imam al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ, Imam al-Zajjāj, Imam al-Naḥḥās and Imam Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib ... This is a testament to the depth of knowledge and access to primary sources that these early giants of our *ummah* had.

The basic English translation I provide for each verse is taken from Quran.com and consists of either the translation of Dr. Mustafa Khattab or that of Professor Abdul Haleem. Out of the two, I chose, for each $\bar{a}yah$, the translation which conveyed the meaning of the phrase with multiple readings in a more literal manner, to allow the reader to follow the impact on the translation by the canonical $qir\bar{a}^{\bar{i}}at$.

Of the works in English, I am most grateful to Shaykh Furhan Zubairi for the extensive research and work he has done in his *tafsīr* work, *In the Company of the Quran*. I benefitted immensely from his book, and his explanations provided much clarity to me throughout my journey of writing this work. Those interested in learning more about the general meanings of this *sūrah* should refer to his work.

I am also indebted to Qārī Fatḥ Pānīpatī's * explications of several grammatical concepts in Urdu in his encyclopedic work, 'Ināyāt-e reḥmānī. Oftentimes a concept, when expressed only in Arabic, is difficult to process as you pass it by swiftly, without realizing the depth of the discussion. Qārī Fatḥ's detailed discussions were crucial to my processing of the meanings presented by the early qurrā'-linguists and essential to my ability to render this material into English.

Where I required further clarification regarding a particular word or concept, I referenced standard dictionaries and reference works of Arabic grammar and rhetoric to get a deeper understanding. These works are listed in the bibliography at the end of the work.

The $\bar{a}y\bar{a}t$ (verses) containing multiple readings of the Qur'ān are presented at the top of every page according to the narration ($riw\bar{a}yah$) of Imam Ḥafṣ & from the reading system ($qir\bar{a}^{2}ah$) of Imam 'Āṣim A, and the $\bar{a}yah$ numbers are according to the Kūfan verse enumerations. The $\bar{a}yah$ is followed by the translation. After that, there is a table summarizing the various readings and their meanings. This is followed by a brief discussion regarding the meanings and some discussion points related to them. I intentionally left out discussions regarding which specific $qurr\bar{a}^{2}$ recited in a particular reading, to allow the discussions to be focused on the differences in meaning. This methodology is adapted from Imam Ibn Khālawayh A in his work al-Ḥujjah fi al- $qir\bar{a}^{2}\bar{a}t$ al-sab'.

⁴ Qārī Fatḥ Pānīpatī & was a master scholar of *tajwīd* and *qirā* 'āt. He was born in 1904 CE in Panipat, India and passed away in 1987 in Madinah. To read more about his life and works, see Saaima Yacoob, *Qari Fath Muhammad Panipati: A Brief Biography*.

The field of the Explanations of the $Qir\bar{a}^{i}\bar{a}t$ ($tawj\bar{\imath}h$ $al-qir\bar{a}^{i}\bar{a}t$) is one that has existed from the earliest generations, often intertwined with the fields of $tafs\bar{\imath}r$ and $qir\bar{a}^{i}\bar{a}t$. The scholarship in this area is extensive in the Arabic language, but there is not much published in English yet. It is my humble prayer that this lowly work opens a path of intrigue and exploration for people, and that it grants us a window into a different dimension of connecting with and understanding the Word of Allah .

I ask Allah $\frac{48}{5}$ to forgive me for my shortcomings and to accept this work in His court, the only court where acceptance matters. $\bar{A}m\bar{n}n$.

I ask Allah % to grant all my teachers, and their teachers, the highest levels of Jannah. I would like to humbly request the reader to make $du'\bar{a}$ for my grand-teacher Mufti Umer-Esmail %, whose legacy we are hoping to continue in the Qur'ānic Sciences. May Allah reward him infinitely for his sacrifices and struggles, and may He allow us to meet him in Jannah in the company of our Beloved %. $\bar{A}m\bar{n}n$.

Basil Farooq March 10th, 2023/18 Sha^cbān, 1444 AH

THE CANONICAL RECITATIONS OF THE QUR'ĀN

Saaima Yacoob

The Canonical Recitations of the Quroan

The canonical recitations of the Qur'ān, also referred to as the qirā'āt, are an integral part of the life of Muslims around the world. For example, a copy of the Qur'ān printed anywhere in the world will have a small phrase etched somewhere on its cover or within it, that states that it has been published according to a particular canonical recitation. Reciters in North and West Africa recite the Qur'ān differently than the reciters in the two Holy Mosques in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The reciters of Sudan and Yemen recite in yet another way, which differs from both the regions mentioned before.

In addition to these various readings being part of the devotional practice of Muslims globally, Allah has brought forth people throughout Islamic history who have dedicated their lives to reciting, teaching, and producing scholarship on these canonical readings. This scholarship is not only available to us today, but it remains a living tradition. It lives in Qur'ān classrooms throughout the world, and through scholarship produced in multiple languages.

Nevertheless, many Muslims are unaware of the existence of these readings, and justifiably feel very uncomfortable with the notion of the Qur'ān having 'multiple versions.' This chapter briefly explores the evidence for the canonical recitations of the Qur'ān and some important details regarding them.

Established from the Hadith

There are many narrations from the beloved Prophet # that verify the existence of the canonical recitations and show that the Prophet # taught different companions different readings of specific words or verses. One of the main narrations that supports the existence of these canonical readings is the hadith where the Prophet # states that "The Qur'ān has been revealed in seven aḥruf (modes). So, recite it in a way that is easy for you out of these." The Prophetic narration of the Qur'ān being revealed in seven aḥruf has been reported by a multitude of companions of the Prophet , to the point that it is considered widely transmitted (mutawātir).

'Uthmān, while addressing the believers from the pulpit, requested all the companions who had heard that the Qur'ān is revealed in seven aḥruf to stand. So many companions stood up that it was difficult to count them. While these details prove that the Qur'ān was revealed in seven aḥruf, scholars have differed as to what the meaning of the seven aḥruf, or modes, is.

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⁵ Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi^c al-ṣaḥīḥ*, hadith nos. 2419, 4991, 4992.

⁶ This narration is found in Abū Yaʻlā's al-Musnad al-kabīr. See Aḥmad b. Abī Bakr al-Būṣīrī, Itḥāf al-khiyarah al-maharah, hadith nos. 7954-7955; Nūr al-Dīn al-Haythamī, al-Maqṣad al-ʿalī fī zawāʾid Abī Yaʻlā al-Mawṣilī, hadith no. 1216; al-Haythamī, Majmaʻ al-zawāʾid, hadith no. 11627; Usmani, An Approach to the Qurʾānic Sciences, 105-106; Muajul Chowdhury, al-Rawḍah fī al-Qirāʾāt al-ʿAshr, 1:104.

Seven Ahruf

While some scholars have interpreted the seven *aḥruf* to mean that the Qur³ān was revealed in the dialects of seven specific Arab tribes, other scholars have said that the number "seven" alludes to the idea that there are multiple modes of recitation, and this narration does not necessarily mean that that are exactly seven modes of recitation. Each of these interpretations has been refuted by other scholars for various reasons. However, the most prevalent understanding is that the term "seven *aḥruf*" represents seven categories of differences. In other words, all the differences among the various transmitted readings of the Qur³ān can be categorized into seven categories. Ibn al-Jazarī has explained them as follows: 8

1. A change in vowels that does not lead to a change in meaning or in the skeletal outline of the word, e.g.,

2. A change in vowels that leads to a change in meaning, but not in the skeletal outline of a word, e.g.,

3. A change in letters that leads to a change in meaning but not in the skeletal outline of a word, e.g.,

⁷ These varying interpretations and responses to them can be further explored in Usmani, *An Approach to the Qur'ānic Sciences*, 106-117.

⁸ Ibn al-Jazarī, al-Nashr, 1:33; Anīs Aḥmad Khan, al-Fawāʾid al-mukammilah, 25-26.

4. A change in letters that can lead to a change in the skeletal outline but not in its meaning, e.g.,

5. A change in the letters, meaning and skeletal outline of a word, e.g.,

6. A change in the order of words, e.g.,

7. The addition or omission of a letter, e.g.,

Other scholars such as Imam Mālik , Imam Abū al-Faḍl al-Rāzī and Ibn Qutaybah have also stated that the seven aḥruf refer to seven categories of differences, although their categorizations are somewhat different. As we can see from the above, all ten of the canonical recitations that we have today fall into what the Prophet referred to as the seven aḥruf.

Benefits and Wisdoms Behind the Canonical Recitations 10

Scholars have presented the following reasons among others for the existence of the ahruf. Firstly, the Qur'ān was revealed in Arabic, and Arabic was a diverse language with many dialects that differed from tribe to tribe. Because each tribe was accustomed to their particular ways of pronouncing certain letters, such as bending an *alif* more towards a $y\bar{a}$, or reading a hamzah more lightly than other tribes, it was very difficult for

⁹ Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr*, 1:33-34; Usmani, *An Approach to the Qur³ānic Sciences*, 114-115.

¹⁰ Najm al-Ṣabīḥ Thānwī, Tārīkh 'ilm-e tajwīd o qirā'āt, 131-134.

them to alter their dialect when reciting the Qur³ān. For some, such as young children and the elderly, it may have been impossible to do so. Allah, Most High, allowed for the Qur³ān to be recited in different modes of recitation to create ease for all the Arab tribes, and this is reflected in a Prophetic narration in the Ṣaḥīḥ of Imam Muslim reported by Ubayy b. Kaʿb 🍇 in which the Prophet states that when he was commanded to recite the Qur³ān to his ummah in one mode (ḥarf), he asked Allah for pardon and forgiveness and stated that his people would be unable to do this. Allah, Most High increased the number to two, then three, and then eventually, seven. 11

Secondly, Allah, Most High, challenged the Arabs of the time to produce a linguistic miracle like the Qur³ān. ¹² However, if the Qur³ān had only been revealed in one mode, according to one dialect of Arabic, the other tribes could have made the excuse that they were unable to produce something like the Qur³ān because it had not been revealed in their dialect. However, since the canonical recitations of the Qur³an incorporate multiple Arabic dialects, this extends the challenge to all the Arab tribes and prevents them from making such an excuse.

Thirdly, the canonical recitations are a proof of the Qur'ān truly being the word of Allah. Through the canonical recitations, the Qur'ān incorporates layers of meaning, with one supporting or explaining the other, and expanding our understanding of Allah, Most High's message, without contradictions. No other text has layers of meaning within one verse or sentence in such a manner. These layers of meaning add depth to the exegesis of various $\bar{a}y\bar{a}t$ as well as strengthen the understanding of jurists

¹¹ Muslim, al-Musnad al-ṣaḥīḥ, hadith no. 821.

¹² Sūrah Yūnus, āyah 38.

when they derive rulings from Qur'ānic verses. Although it is not within the scope of this work to explore how the canonical recitations affect the derivation of juristic rulings from the Qur'ān, this work will present multiple examples of how the canonical recitations add depth and nuance to the meaning of the Qur'ān.

The Nature of Differences Between the Canonical Recitations

The existence of the various readings of the Qur'ān does not mean that every word in the Qur'ān can be recited in multiple ways. Rather, we can say that there are two types of words in the Qur'ān, those that are agreed upon and are always recited in one way, and those which may be recited in multiple ways. The first type of words have been recited in only one way by the ṣaḥābah. The second type of words are those which the ṣaḥābah read in various ways. Both these types of words were revealed by Allah, Most High, and taught to the ṣaḥābah by the beloved Prophet .13

One of the main types of differences that a person can hear between the canonical recitations are those that do not have any effect on the meaning of the Qur'ān. These are norms from various dialects of Arabic as it was spoken during the time of the Prophet , and the Qur'ān can also be recited in them. For example, one may hear that the sound of the long vowel "ā" sounds more like "ay" in certain readings, or one may notice that the "L" sound is thicker and more heavy sounding in one reading over another. Although these differences do not have any effect on the meaning of the Qur'ān, they are governed by documented

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¹³ Anīs Aḥmad Khān, al-Fawā'id al-Mukammilah, 22-23.

rules and principles, and can only be applied according to those rules. The reciter cannot apply them according to his/her own volition, but rather must follow the way of reading that has been preserved through oral chains of transmission.

The second type of difference is in those words which were revealed in different ways and may add a nuance to the meaning. It is important to note that although the meaning changes somewhat, one canonical recitation does not make something unlawful that another has made lawful. Rather, they add layers of meaning to a single detail or concept that Allah, Most High, has mentioned. These are the kinds of differences that will be explored further in this book, *in shā' Allah*.

SŪRAH AL-KAHF

Basil Farooq

Sūrah al-Kahf and its Virtue

Sūrah al-Kahf is a *sūrah* that has many virtues assigned to it. Since the virtues are not the focus of this book, I will suffice by mentioning a few hadith narrations related in this regard, to obtain the blessings of beginning the work with the words of our Beloved .

Abū al-Dardā⁷ anarrates that the Prophet said: "Whoever memorizes the first ten verses of Sūrah al-Kahf will be protected from the trial of the Dajjāl." Another narration mentions the last ten verses. ¹⁴

Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī anarrates that the Prophet said: "Whoever recites al-Kahf on Friday, a light will be illuminated for him until the following Friday." ¹⁵

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¹⁴ Muslim, al-Musnad al-ṣaḥīḥ, hadith no. 809.

¹⁵ Al-Bayhaqī, *al-Daʿawāt al-kabīr*, hadith no. 526; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaghīr*, hadith no. 8910; al-Khaṭīb al-Tabrīzī, *Mishkāt al-masābīh*, hadith no. 2175.

The Story of the Cave

There are four stories mentioned in Sūrah al-Kahf, and each of them represents one of the difficult trials we as human beings face in life. The first story, regarding the companions of the cave (aṣḥāb al-kahf), is a lesson in overcoming the trial (fitnah) of faith. A group of young men had their faith tested and we learn what they did to safeguard it.

Living in a corrupt society, these young men realized that they could not remain true to their beliefs in that society. Thus, they fled and took refuge in a cave, where Allah protected them with a miracle: putting them to sleep for a very long time. After they woke up, they realized that the society they had fled from had become believers within those years.

The means that gave them protection from their trial was their conviction in belief, a concern for their spiritual well-being and righteous companionship. ¹⁶

 $^{^{16}}$ Zubairi, In the Company of the Quran, 7.

Verse 17

وَتَرَى ٱلشَّمْسَ إِذَا طَلَعَت تَزَورُ عَن كَهْفِهِمْ ذَاتَ ٱلْيَمِينِ وَإِذَا غَرَبَت تَقْرِضُهُمْ ذَاتَ ٱلشَّمِينِ وَإِذَا غَرَبَت تَقْرِضُهُمْ ذَاتَ ٱلشَّمِيلِ وَهُمْ فِي فَجُوَةٍم مِّنْهُ أَذَٰلِكَ مِنْ ءَايَلْتِ ٱللَّهِ مِنْ مَن يَهْدِ ٱللَّهُ فَهُوَ ٱلْمُهْتَدِ لَا اللَّهِ مَن يَهْدِ ٱللَّهُ فَهُوَ ٱلْمُهْتَدِ لَلَّهُ وَلِيًّا مُّرْشِدًا ١

And you would have seen the sun, as it rose, inclining away from their cave to the right, and as it set, declining away from them to the left, while they lay in its open space. That is one of the signs of Allah. Whoever Allah guides is truly guided. But whoever He leaves to stray, you will never find for them a guiding mentor.

Reading	Meaning
tazzāwaru	
tazāwaru	to incline or turn away
tazwarru	to be taken away 17

In this $\bar{a}yah$, Allah is describing the cave in which the young men were sleeping. There are three readings of the word which conveys the angling of the sun relative to the mouth of the cave. The first two of these have the same meaning and are two options of saying this word in Arabic. Some of the scholars of tafsir and $qira^{i}at$ have said that the third reading has a slightly different shade to it, but upon deeper reflection, we can see how the two meanings are addressing the same idea. ¹⁸

¹⁷ This reading conveys a more emphatic inclining; or shows the large number of times this inclining took place.

¹⁸ Al-Farrā', Maʿānī al-qur'ān, 2:136-137; Ibn ʿAṭiyyah, al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz, 15:577-578; Ibn ʿĀshūr, al-Taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr, 15:278.

When the sun rose, it was inclined at an angle away from them, to keep them in the shade and not cause them any harm from the sunlight. This inclining away was so much that it was as if the sun had been taken away from them. Looking at it from the other perspective, the sun had been taken away from them, so that means that it was inclined away from the mouth of the cave. ¹⁹

¹⁹ Makkī, al-Kashf, 2:57.

وَتَحْسَبُهُمْ أَيْقَاطًا وَهُمْ رُقُودٌ وَنُقَلِبُهُمْ ذَاتَ ٱلْيَمِينِ وَذَاتَ ٱلشِّمَالِ وَكَلْبُهُم بَاسِطً ذِرَاعَيْهِ بِٱلْوَصِيدِ لَوِ ٱطّلَعْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ لَوَلَيْتَ مِنْهُمْ فِرَارًا وَلَمُلِعْتَ مِنْهُمْ رُعْبًا ۞

And you would have thought they were awake, though they were asleep. We turned them over, to the right and left, while their dog stretched his forelegs at the entrance. Had you looked at them, you would have certainly fled away from them, filled with horror.

Reading	Meaning
muli [,] ta	you would have been filled
	with fear
mulli ^{>} ta	you would have been
	overflowing with fear

After describing the stay of the sleepers in the cave, Allah addresses the Prophet . This is a Qur³anic mode of communication known as an *i'tirāḍ* (parenthetical), where Allah pauses the story and addresses the reader directly, in the middle of a passage, to highlight something. This entire $\bar{a}yah$ is an interjection in the middle of the story, where Allah is speaking to the Prophet and by extension to all of us, to make sure we understand the intense awe associated with the situation.

 $^{^{20}}$ See Al-Hāshimī, Jawāhir al-balāghah, 203; al-Jārim & Amīn, al-Balāghah al-wāḍihah, 250; Ibn ʿĀshūr, al-Tahrīr wa-l-tanwīr, 15:280.

In this $\bar{a}yah$, the word mentioned above has two readings. According to many of the early $qurr\bar{a}^{7}$ and grammarians, 21 these two words mean the same thing and are exchangeable expressions. However, the classical scholars of $tafs\bar{i}r$ point out that while the core meaning of "filling" remains the same, the second reading communicates more emphasis on how many times over the "filling" of fear would be. This subtle shade can be expressed in English using "overflowing" instead of simply "being filled" with fear. ²²

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²¹ Al-Farrā³, Ma^cānī al-qur³ān, 2:137; Makkī, al-Kashf, 2:57.

²² Several *tafsīrs* mention that this has more emphasis and shows filling multiple times. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi*^c *al-bayān*, 15:195; Ibn ʿAṭiyyah, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz*, 15:582-583; al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, 21:102-103; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi*^c *li-aḥkām al-qur*^aān, 13:234-235; and Ibn ʿĀshūr, *al-Tahrīr wa-l-tanwīr*, 15:281-282.

وَلَبِثُوا فِي كَهْفِهِمْ ثَلَاثَ مِائَةٍ سِنِينَ وَٱزْدَادُوا تِسْعًا ٥

They had remained in their cave for three hundred years, adding nine.

Reading	Meaning
thalātha mi'atin sinīna	for three hundred, in years
thalātha mi ^{>} ati sinīna	for three hundred years

At the end of the story of the sleepers, after Allah discusses some debates people have regarding the number of sleepers and how long they were asleep for, He tells us, definitively, that the sleepers remained in their cave for three hundred years—according to the solar calendar—and 309 years—according to the lunar calendar. The two readings in this $\bar{a}yah$ convey no difference in meaning, but they demonstrate a subtle difference in how it is expressed.

The first reading says that they slept for three hundred, then clarifies that these are not three hundred days nor even three hundred months. In fact, they are three hundred years. ²³ The second reading is another eloquent, yet less common way of expressing the same idea: they slept for three hundred years. ²⁴

This example serves to demonstrate an important principle: sometimes different expressions can convey the exact same meaning. There may still be subtle reflections on the precise construction of each expression, but those remain reflections

 $^{^{23}}$ Al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ al-ghayb, 21:113; al-Qurṭubī, al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-qurʾān, 13:252-253.

²⁴ Makkī, al-Kashf, 2:58; Ibn ʿĀshūr, al-Taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr, 15:301.

and do not detract from the main message. Looking at the classical works of $tafs\bar{\imath}r$ and $qir\bar{a}^{\dot{\imath}}\bar{a}t$, one notices that they are working from a starting point of $qir\bar{a}^{\dot{\imath}}\bar{a}t$ agreeing in meaning until there is evidence otherwise. Just as there is one extreme where people claim that $qir\bar{a}^{\dot{\imath}}\bar{a}t$ never impact meaning, the opposite extreme of always trying to find a difference is also not a practice that is widespread in our classical tradition.

Say, (O Prophet,) "Allah knows best how long they stayed. With Him (alone) is (the knowledge of) the unseen of the heavens and the earth. How perfectly He hears and sees! They have no guardian besides Him, and He shares His command with none."

Reading	Meaning
wa-lā-yushriku fī ḥukmihī	and He shares his
aḥadan	command with none
wa-lā-tushrik fī ḥukmihī	and do not make anyone a
aḥadan	partner in His judgment

In this $\bar{a}yah$ Allah # gives all those thinking about the number of years spent by the sleepers in the cave, a lesson to take away. Instead of fighting with each other over meaningless facts, say "Allah # knows best" about the details, and He # will surely give us the information we need for our salvation. Arguing and fighting over minor details is not the essential point of the Qur³ān. Rather, the essential point is for us to take lessons from it and grow in our relationship with the Almighty #.

This $\bar{a}yah$ ends with a phrase that has two readings. The first reading negates the possibility of anyone influencing Allah's # judgement, while the second reading is addressed to the Prophet #, ²⁵ and by extension all of us, ²⁶ telling us that we should never

²⁵ Al-Qurṭubī, al-Jāmi^c li-aḥkām al-qurʾān, 13:254.

²⁶ Makkī, al-Kashf, 2:58-59; Ibn ʿĀshūr, al-Taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr, 15:302.

think that anyone else - in their speculations and argumentation - can ever influence Allah's is judgment. In this context, this is talking about people who continue to speculate over things that Allah is has clearly told us about (or told us to avoid delving into). After Allah's igudgment, it is not anyone's place nor ability to have any impact on anything without Allah's ignermission.

The Story of the Two Gardens

The second story, regarding the owner of two gardens and his friend, is a lesson in overcoming the trial (*fitnah*) of wealth and worldly possessions. It tells the story of an extremely rich man who became blinded by his love for this world. His attachment to material possessions went to such an extreme that he lost all belief in the hereafter.

When his companion, who was not as wealthy, reminded him that these blessings were from Allah and ingratitude will lead to them being taken from him, he simply ignored his pleas. Then Allah taught him a lesson and brought destruction upon his source of wealth: his two gardens.

The way to protect ourselves from the trial of wealth and worldly attachments is by realizing their truly fleeting nature and understanding that everything in this life is from Allah $\frac{1}{8}$ alone. If we show gratitude and patience, we will be able to attain the ultimate felicity that we all strive for. ²⁷

 $^{^{27}}$ Zubairi, In the Company of the Quran, 7.

Verses 34 and 42

and so he had abundant fruit. One day, while talking to his friend, he said, 'I have more wealth and a larger following than you.'

And so it was: his fruit was completely destroyed, and there he was, wringing his hands over what he had invested in it, as it drooped on its trellises, and saying, 'I wish I had not set up any partner to my Lord.'

Reading	Meaning
thumurun/thumurihī	variety of weelth
thumrun/thumrihī	variety of wealth
thamarun/thamarihī	fruits

When describing the state of "the owner of the two gardens," Allah tells us that this man had accumulated wealth due to his gardens. The early authorities all understood that the general conception being conveyed by the three readings are similar but differed on what each of them meant specifically. Some of them said that the first two readings refer to either wealth or abundant fruit, while the third reading refers to fruits, specifically. Both meanings are talking about the same idea

²⁸ Al-Farrā', Ma'ānī al-qur'ān, 2:144; al-Zajjāj, Ma'ānī al-qur'ān, 3:285; Makkī, al-Kashf, 2:59-60; al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ al-ghayb, 21:126; Ibn 'Āshūr, al-Taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr, 15:318-319.

because the fruits were one of the sources of this man's wealth. Some of the *mufassirīn*—²⁹ on the other hand—comment that the word is referring to the trees, not the fruits. This is because the intent is not that the fruits were destroyed with the trees remaining, rather the fruits were destroyed due to the trees being destroyed. And with the destruction of the fruits, the owner's wealth—to be sold for gold, silver and other valuables—is also destroyed.

There is a narration from Ibn 'Abbās explaining that this word is referring to gold, silver and other wealth, which again does not conflict with the previous meanings as they are communicating the same idea. The owner of the two gardens had several fruit trees which were part of his assets and wealth. When he became arrogant and prideful due to this wealth, Allah took it away from him.

An additional point of discussion that the first two readings bring up is you do not necessarily need multiple readings of a word to have multiple meanings coming from it. In fact, picking up any classical $tafs\bar{\imath}r$ book shows the opposite to be true: often an $\bar{a}yah$ with one reading can have multiple layers of meaning built into it as well. Multiple readings being transmitted for pronouncing a word is simply one of several reasons for multiple meanings emanating from a single $\bar{a}yah$. The Qur'ān is a boundless ocean of wisdom and meaning, and we hope to get an appreciation of some of this depth by looking at the $qir\bar{a}$ ' $\bar{a}t$.

²⁹ Makkī, al-Kashf, 2:60; Ibn ʿAṭiyyah, al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz, 3:606-607; Ibn al-Jawzī, Zād al-masīr, 851-852.

Verse 36

nor do I think the Hour will (ever) come. And if in fact I am returned to my Lord, I will definitely get a far better outcome than (all) this."

Reading	Meaning
minhā	(a better place) than this
minhumā	(a better place) than the two
	(gardens)

Amidst the man's conversation with his friend about his wealth and material possession, the man reaches the peak of ingratitude and arrogance, where he thinks that the worldly things he possesses will never perish. Instead of thanking Allah for his blessings, he became entitled and felt that he received these blessings because Allah must be pleased with him. Such was his delusion that he said that if there truly were a Day of Judgment (which he did not believe in), Allah would surely give him better than what he had on earth, since Allah must be pleased with him. In moments of ease in our lives, how many of us become neglectful of the Generosity and Love of Allah, which allowed us to enjoy them in the first place?

In the first reading, the sentence says that the man believes he will find something better than **this**, i.e., better than the garden he is standing in. This is generally considered by the scholars of *tafsīr* to be a reference to his wealth which includes both gardens. The second reading has a pronoun that refers explicitly to the two gardens, which were his sources of wealth

in this world. Both readings have the same general meaning and correspond to the two skeletal outlines of this word in the Uthmanic codices.³⁰

This brings us to another inherent flexibility in the Qur³ān. When the Companions completed the Uthmanic Qur³ān Compilation Project, they sent codices to several regions of the Muslim lands. Because the Uthmanic codices did not include diacritics for letters or vowels, the skeletal outlines of words could incorporate multiple readings. However, in the few places where this was not possible, like the example in this section, the companions distributed such differences throughout the codices. In this particular case, it was the codices sent to Iraq (Kufah and Basrah) that had "minhā," and the codices sent to Makkah, Damascus and the ones that remained in Madinah that had this word written as "minhumā." 31, 32

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³⁰ Al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ al-ghayb, 21:127; Ibn ʿĀshūr, al-Taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr, 15:321; Zubairi, In the Company of the Quran, 66-67.

³¹ See al-Qāsim b. Fīrruh al-Shāṭibī, 'Aqīlat atrāb al-qaṣā'id, l. 90.

³² To learn more about the science that preserves the Uthmanic skeletal outlines, refer to Mufti Mohamed-Umer Esmail, *Tashil al-Rusum*; and Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-Aʿzamī, *History of the Qurʾānic Text: From Revelation to Compilation*.

هُنَالِكَ ٱلْوَلَٰيَةُ لِلَّهِ ٱلْحُقِّ ۚ هُوَ خَيْرٌ ثَوَابًا وَخَيْرٌ عُقْبًا ١

At this time, support comes (only) from Allah—the True (Lord).

He is best in reward and best in outcome.

Reading	Meaning
al-walāyah	assistance and protection
al-wilāyah	authority and dominion
	•
Reading	Meaning
al-ḥaqqi	the power of protection rests
	with Allah, the True (God)
al-ḥaqqu	the true power of protection
	rests with Allah.

At the end of the story of the two men, Allah makes a clear statement that people may live in their delusions for a time, but at certain junctures in life, all those claiming authority, power or the ability to assist others will see the truth. In those moments, He manifests His protection and generosity for His friends and manifests His humiliation for those who chose ingratitude.³³

In this passage we find two words with multiple readings. The first is the word *al-walāyah/al-wilāyah*, where the first reading means that in such moments it becomes clear that there is no assistance nor protection except in the hands of Allah . The second reading tells us that authority and dominion

³³ This is one of the possible meanings of this $\bar{a}yah$, as explained by Imam al-Rāzī &. See al-Rāzī, $Maf\bar{a}tih$ al-qhayb, 21:130.

exclusively belong to Allah . All illusions of others possessing these qualities in any limited sense disappear.

The second word with multiple readings gives us an interesting type of multiplicity. According to the first reading the adjective "true" is describing Allah , while according to the second one, it is describing the power, authority and assistance. Together, both readings tell us that true and perfect authority belongs to Allah , who is the True God, and all those besides him make false claims to authority or assistance. Imam Ibn 'Āshūr mentions an insightful comment here regarding why the adjective "True" is used here for Allah instead of other descriptions. He says that at these junctures in life it becomes apparent to a person that all other than Allah have no true reality to them (i.e., no permanence). 35

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³⁴ Al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ al-ghayb, 21:130.

³⁵ Al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ al-qhayb, 21:130; Ibn ʿĀshūr, al-Taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr, 15:328-329.

Epilogue to the Story of the Two Gardens

After the second story concludes, there is a set of verses, from 45 to 59, which discusses some additional topics that flow from the content of the story. In verses 45-46, we see Allah giving us a vivid image to help us understand how temporary the world is. After understanding the reality of this world, Allah then tells us about the Day of Judgment in verses 47-49, which will come after this fleeting existence ends. Then in verses 50-53 we return to the beginning of humanity, with the story of Adam and Satan. The section then concludes by discussing some issues related to faith and the Qur'ān. 36

 $^{^{36}}$ Zubairi, In the Company of the Quran, 77.

One day We shall make the mountains move, and you will see the earth as an open plain. We shall gather all people together, leaving no one.

Reading	Meaning
nusayyiru al-jibāla	We shall make the mountains
	move
tusayyaru al-jibālu	the mountains are made to
	move

Allah sompleted telling us the story of the owner of the two gardens, and how his blessings were taken away, as a means for us to take heed. After this, He followed it up by creating an image of the Day of Resurrection to show what comes after that ruin.

On that Day, Allah $\frac{1}{8}$ will set the mountains in motion. There are two readings here, which essentially mean the same thing. In the first reading Allah $\frac{1}{8}$ says: "We³⁷ shall make the mountains move," while in the second reading He $\frac{1}{8}$ says, "the mountains will be set in motion," using the passive voice. Imam al-Rāzī $\frac{1}{8}$ comments on this saying that since it is not possible for anyone other than Allah $\frac{1}{8}$ to have set the mountains in

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³⁷ In the Qur'ān, Allah ﷺ often uses the pronoun "We" to refer to Himself. This usage of "We" is similar to the royal "we" found in English and other languages.

motion, then there is no doubt that the message conveyed by both readings is the same. 38

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 $^{^{38}}$ Ibn ʿAṭiyyah, al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz, 15:615; al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ al-ghayb, 21:133; Ibn ʿĀshūr, al-Taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr, 15:335.

هُمَّا أَشْهَدتُهُمْ خَلْقَ ٱلسَّمَاوَتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَلَا خَلْقَ أَنفُسِهِمْ وَمَا كُنتُ مُتَّخِذَ ٱلْمُضلِّينَ عَضُدًا ۞

I did not make them witnesses to the creation of the heavens and earth, nor to their own creation; I do not take as My supporters those who lead others astray.

Reading	Meaning
mā ashhadtuhum	I did not make them
	witnesses
mā ashhadnāhum	We did not make them
	witnesses

Reading	Meaning
wa-mā kuntu	and I do not take as My
	supporters those who lead
	others astray
wa-mā kunta	and you are not to take as
	your supporters those who
	lead others astray

In this $\bar{a}yah$, Allah is is talking about the disbelievers primarily, and all of creation in general. The first word with multiple readings has no bearing on the meaning and shows two ways in which Allah is refers to Himself in the Quran: using the first person singular "I," and the royal "We." We find similar usages

³⁹ Ibn ʿAṭiyyah, al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz, 15:620-621; al-Qurṭubī, al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-qurʾān, 13:304.

in many language contexts such as English.⁴⁰ In other words, Allah sidd not make the disbelievers, nor any of the creation witnesses to the creation of the heavens and earth.

The second word has a slight change (only in voweling), yet the meanings are quite distinct. In the first reading Allah is informing us about His Ability, and that He is takes no support in His Ability (qudrah) nor in His Assistance (nuṣrah) from those who lead others astray. It is not befitting of the Divine Perfection, the source of guidance, to take as aides those who lead others astray. On the other hand, the second reading is a prohibition from Allah is directed at the Prophet that you are not to take those who lead others astray as supporters. It can also be understood as a statement from Allah is that He is has prevented the Prophet from ever relying on those who lead people astray.

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⁴⁰ See footnote 37.

⁴¹ Ibn 'Āshūr, al-Tahrīr wa-l-tanwīr, 15:343-344.

⁴² Al-Zajjāj, Ma^cānī al-qur²ān, 3:294; al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ al-ghayb, 21:139; Ibn ^cĀshūr, al-Tahrīr wa-l-tanwīr, 15:343.

⁴³ Abū Ḥayyān, al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ, 7:191.

And (beware of) the Day He will say, "Call upon those you claimed were My associate-gods." So they will call them, but will receive no response. And We will make them (all) share in the same doom.

Reading	Meaning
yawma yaqūlu	(And remember O
	Muḥammad,) 44 on the Day
	He will say
yawma naqūlu	On the day We will say

In this $\bar{a}yah$, Allah $\frac{1}{8}$ tells us that on the Day of Judgment, He (Allah) $\frac{1}{8}$ will say to those who associated partners with Him $\frac{1}{8}$ in the world: "Call those who you claimed as my partners," and none will bring any benefit. The two readings here do not impact the meaning. The first reading refers to Allah $\frac{1}{8}$ using the third-person pronoun "He", and this is understood from the context. On the other hand, the second reading uses the first-person royal pronoun "We." 45

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⁴⁴ Makkī, al-Kashf, 2:65.

⁴⁵ Ibn ʿAṭiyyah, al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz, 15:621; al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ al-ghayb, 21:140; al-Qurṭubī, al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-qurʾān, 13:306; Abū Ḥayyān, al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ, 7:191; Ibn ʿĀshūr, al-Tahrīr wa-l-tanwīr, 15:345.

employed to show the non-divinity of all other beings, by showing us their inability to bring any benefit. If a so-called "god" cannot bring any benefit to the ones who worshipped it, like saving them on the Day of Judgment, then how is that thing claiming to be a "god." This argument personifies the disappointment and despair of the polytheists from achieving salvation.

And nothing prevents people from believing when guidance comes to them and from seeking their Lord's forgiveness except (their demand) to meet the same fate of earlier deniers or that the torment would confront them face-to-face.

Reading	Meaning
qibalan	face-to-face
qubulan	several types (of
	punishment) one at a time

In this $\bar{a}yah$, we get the real truth about why people don't believe. The language employed is rhetorically beautiful. It says that the only thing that prevents them from believing when guidance comes to them is that they are waiting for the same punishment that befell the earlier generations. This is an eloquent way of saying, there is nothing preventing them from following the truth and seeking forgiveness from Allah from the outside. The only obstacles they have are internal. Their arrogance and pride, while holding onto falsehood, is the issue. Even when the proofs and understanding are delivered on a silver platter, they refuse it. This was the path that some of the earlier generations followed and all that awaited them was loss. 46

In this $\bar{a}yah$, there are two readings that describe how the punishment will come to them. The first reading means that

⁴⁶ Al-Naḥḥās, I'rāb al-qur'ān, 547; Ibn 'Āshūr, al-Taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr, 15:351-352.

they will not believe until the punishment of Allah is is suddenly right in front of them, face-to-face. This is generally understood to mean the punishment in the hereafter. The second reading means that they will not believe until several types of punishments come upon them one by one. This is understood to mean the various difficulties and trials in this life. 47

Reflecting on this, we see that oftentimes in our own lives we have certain struggles, where we know what the correct approach is and what we ought to be doing, yet we don't do anything about it. This is one of the wisdoms that scholars discuss about difficulties in this life, that they give a shock to our systems and allow us to evaluate what we are doing from an objective perspective.

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⁴⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, Jāmiʿ al-bayān, 15:301; al-Zajjāj, Maʿānī al-qurʾān, 3:296-297; Makkī, al-Kashf, 2:64-65; Ibn al-Jawzī, Zād al-masīr, 462, 858; Ibn ʿAṭiyyah, al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz, 15:624-625; al-Rāzī, Mafātiḥ al-ghayb, 21:142; al-Qurṭubī, al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-qurʾān, 13:311; Abū Ḥayyān, al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ, 7:194; Ibn Juzayy, al-Tashīl, 3:35; Ibn ʿĀshūr, al-Tahrīr wa-l-tanwīr, 15:352.

Verse 59

وَتِلْكَ ٱلْقُرَىٰٓ أَهْلَكُنَـٰهُمْ لَمَّا ظَلَمُوا وَجَعَلْنَا لِمَهْلِكِهِم مَّوْعِدًا ١

Those (are the) societies We destroyed when they persisted in wrong, and We had set a time for their destruction.

Reading	Meaning
li-muhlakihim	We set for Our destruction of
	them an appointed time
li-mahlakihim	We set for their destruction
	an appointed time
li-mahlikihim	We set their time of
	destruction as appointed

In this $\bar{a}yah$ there are three readings. All three of them convey the same general idea: Allah had set a time when the polytheists will face destruction. There is some discussion among the early scholars of grammar and $qir\bar{a}^{\bar{a}}$ regarding what each of these readings can and cannot mean, based on their knowledge of and interaction with the Arabs who spoke the Arabic of the Our $^{\bar{a}}$ n.

According to one group of early scholars, the three readings contain a word from the same root: *h-l-k*, which is why the meanings are so similar, however, the voweling on the word changes the exact point of emphasis. The first and second readings, "*li-muhlakihim*" and "*li-mahlakihim*," refer to "destruction" as a concept but differ on whether it is emphasizing the One destroying them or those being destroyed. This is rendered above as "Our destruction of them" and "their destruction." The third reading, "*li-mahlikihim*," has a form that

refers to the time or place something happens, which in this case is referring to the time of their destruction. In addition to the shades of emphasis provided by each reading, this discussion gives us a window into the development of Arabic grammar and shows us how closely it ties into *tafsīr* and *qirā'āt*.⁴⁸

The early scholars 49 were living in a time before the writing of formal rules of syntax (nahw) and morphology (sarf). They were working from the ground up to identify patterns in a very vast language, hoping that these patterns could be used to aid in learning the Qur³an and its meanings. These scholars were engaging in transmitting the wording of the Qur'ān (qirā'āt) and its understanding (tafsīr), while attempting to facilitate its learning for the next generations. The grammatical rules that they developed—and we study the simplified versions of these today—were not divinely revealed. They would fit sometimes and other times there would be exceptions. This is the reality of language; it is understood and taken from the native speakers of the time and often one word or expression can have an array of meanings it conveys, often overlapping with other similar expressions. This explains why the early scholars differed on the exact nuances communicated by each of the readings in a verse. Having a range of meanings and a plethora of explanations of the shades is only a natural consequence of these sciences being a scholarly effort to understand the Divine Word.

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⁴⁸ Al-Farrā', Maʿānī al-qurʾān, 2:148-153; al-Zajjāj, Maʿānī al-qurʾān, 3:297-298; Makkī, al-Kashf, 2:65-66; al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ al-ghayb, 21:143; Abū Ḥayyān, al-Baḥr al-muḥīt, 7:195-196; Ibn ʿĀshūr, al-Tahrīr wa-l-tanwīr, 15:358.

⁴⁹ Such as Imams al-Kisā¹ī, al-Farrā¹, al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ, al-Zajjāj, al-Naḥḥās and others ♣.

The Story of Mūsā 🙊 and al-Khaḍir

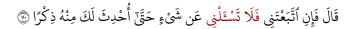
The third story, regarding Mūsā and al-Khaḍir, is a lesson in overcoming the trial (fitnah) of knowledge. It tells the story of one of the greatest prophets struggling with this, and we, being of no comparison to him and, must always remain in pursuit of knowledge and never feel that we know enough, while continuing to traverse the path with patience.

When Mūsā was asked who the most knowledgeable person on Earth was, he—not knowing anyone else having more knowledge—replied that he was. So, Allah informed him that there was someone else who was more knowledgeable, and Mūsā set out to find him. This story describes his journey to finding al-Khaḍir and the three encounters where he witnessed the great knowledge that al-Khaḍir had been granted by Allah .

The way to protect ourselves from the trial of knowledge is to be humble and patient while seeking it, and to continue pursuing it no matter how much we may feel we have acquired. 50

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⁵⁰ Zubairi, *In the Company of the Quran*, 7-8.



He responded, "Then if you follow me, do not question me about anything until I (myself) clarify it for you."

Reading	Meaning
fa-lā tas'alnī	do not question me
fa-lā tasʾalannī	do not question me at all

After Mūsā reaches the wise man, al-Khaḍir, he asks to follow him so that he can learn from the knowledge that Allah has blessed him with. Al-Khaḍir initially says that it will be quite difficult for Mūsā, and that he will not be able to be patient with al-Khaḍir, for he may do things that Mūsā finds illogical, irrational, and even impermissible. Once Mūsā showed his eagerness, he convinced al-Khaḍir to take him along with him. At this point, al-Khaḍir said the statement mentioned in this āyah, "If you will follow me, then don't question me about anything until I mention it to you."

Both readings in this $\bar{a}yah$ have the same meaning, i.e., don't question my actions, because Allah $\frac{1}{80}$ has blessed me with knowledge of the unknown by which I am being guided. The second reading has an additional particle of emphasis (the $n\bar{u}n$ of emphasis), conveying how strict this command was from al-Khaḍir: "don't question me at all, no matter what you see, until I give you the opportunity to ask." ⁵¹

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⁵¹ Makkī, al-Kashf, 2:67-68; al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ al-ghayb, 21:154; Ibn ʿĀshūr, al-Taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr, 15:374.

So they set out, but after they had boarded a ship, the man made a hole in it. Moses protested, "Have you done this to drown its people? You have certainly done a terrible thing!"

Reading	Meaning
li-tughriqa ahlahā	to drown its people
li-yaghraqa ahluhā	so that its people drown

On their first adventure, Mūsā a asks al-Khaḍir about the hole he made in the ship and why he made it. In this $\bar{a}yah$, there are two readings.

Some of the scholars mention that the first reading could have two possible meanings: either "did you intend to drown its people?" Or "did you do something that would unintentionally lead to their drowning?" The second reading has only one possible meaning: "did you do something that would lead the people to drown (without you intending it)." ⁵²

There are many scholars who say that the two readings are two expressions of the same meaning emphasizing different parts of the event. The first reading emphasizes al-Khaḍir's involvement, and the second reading emphasizes the drowning of the people. Whether the first reading can have two possible meanings or not depends on a grammatical discussion on the meanings of the particle "li-." See Ibn ʿAṭiyyah, al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz, 15:636; al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ al-ghayb, 21:155; al-Sakhāwī, Fatḥ al-waṣīḍ, 1073; al-Qurṭubī, al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-qurʾān, 13:329; Ibn Hishām, Mughnī al-labīb, 3:177-179; al-Suyūṭī, al-Itqān, 363-364.

When we look at these readings together, we know that the question was about why al-Khaḍir would do something that could cause people harm consequently. This is immediately clear when we see the second reading. A subtle benefit seen in the first reading is that the question is directed at al-Khaḍir, and Mūsā is trying to hold him accountable. This is because if the people were to drown, even unintentionally, it would be as a result of his actions. The person who makes a hole is in essence then causing the drowning. 53

⁵³ Al-Ṭabarī, Jāmi^c al-Bayān, 15:337; Makkī, al-Kashf, 2:68; Ibn ʿĀshūr, al-Taḥrīr wal-tanwīr, 15:375.

So they proceeded until they came across a boy, and the man killed him. Moses protested, "Have you killed an innocent soul, who killed no one? You have certainly done a horrible thing."

Reading	Meaning
nafsan zakiyyah	completely innocent soul 54
nafsan zākiyah	innocent soul

After getting off the ship, Mūsā and al-Khaḍir started walking until they saw a young boy playing. Al-Khaḍir walked up to him and killed him. Despite Mūsā's repeated pledge to not ask questions, he objected vehemently: "Have you killed an innocent soul, who killed no one? You have certainly done a horrible thing."

Mūsā had walked with al-Khaḍir to the boy and had not seen him commit any crime, let alone a crime deserving of a capital punishment. There are two readings of the word used in the objection to al-Khaḍir. According to many scholars of $tafs\bar{i}r$ and $qir\bar{a}^{3}\bar{a}t$, 55 these two readings mean the exact same thing, but a few scholars distinguish the morphological patterns and say there is a slight degree of additional emphasis in the first

 $^{^{54}}$ This is one of the possible meanings, as explained below.

⁵⁵ Al-Farrā', *Maʿānī al-qurʾān*, 2:155; al-Naḥḥās, *Maʿānī al-qurʾān*, 4:271; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 15:340-342; Makkī, *al-Kashf*, 2:68; (one of the views presented by) Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, 863; Ibn ʿAṭiyyah, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz*, 16:638-639; Ibn ʿĀshūr, *al-Tahrīr wa-l-tanwīr*, 15:378.

reading.⁵⁶ To understand the difference highlighted by these scholars, the second reading would be understood as "an innocent soul," while the first reading would be "a completely innocent soul."

Some other scholars took a position where they created a more meaningful distinction between the two readings. They say that the first reading means a soul that had sinned but repented since. On the other hand, the second reading means a soul that has never committed any sins to begin with. $^{57, 58}$

In this example, we see that often our scholars of $tafs\bar{i}r$ and language will have different perspectives on the shades of meaning being offered by the $qir\bar{a}\dot{a}t$; however, the overall message of the $\bar{a}yah$ is the same: Mūsā was objecting to al-Khaḍir's killing of an innocent boy. In such situations we see some of the later scholars, like Imam al-Rāzī and Imam al-Qurṭubī in this $\bar{a}yah$, choosing to present several possibilities and not showing a preference.

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⁵⁶ Qārī Fath Pānīpatī adopts this opinion from al-Kisā'ī, Imam al-Qurṭubī relays it from Tha'lab and Imam Abū Ḥayyān takes a similar position. See al-Qurṭubī, al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-qur'ān, 13:330; Abū Ḥayyān, al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ, 7:208; Pānīpatī, 'Ināyāt-e reḥmānī 2:626-627.

⁵⁷ This is the position of Abū 'Amr b. al-'Alā' relayed by several *tafsīrs*. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 15:340; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, 863; al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-qhayb*, 21:156; al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-qur'ān*, 13:330.

⁵⁸ There are also other positions regarding the difference between these two readings such as one attributed to Abū ʿUbaydah by Ibn al-Jawzī: *zākiyah* is purity related to the body, while *zakiyyah* is purity related to the religion. See Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, 863.

Another position mentioned by Imam Makkī is that *zakiyyah* means the boy had not reached an age for him to be accountable yet; and *zākiyah* means the boy had committed no sin. See Makkī, *al-Kashf*, 2:68-69.

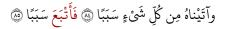
The Story of Dhū al-Qarnayn

The fourth story, regarding Dhū al-Qarnayn, is a lesson in overcoming the trial (*fitnah*) of power and authority. It tells the story of one of the greatest and most powerful rulers in history. We see a person who was given knowledge and authority, and he chose to use it to spread justice in the world.

Dhū al-Qarnayn traveled the world with his armies, spreading goodness and fighting corruption. In this section, three of his journeys are recounted. Through these journeys we learn many lessons. Allah says gave him the blessing of power and knowledge, and he used this blessing selflessly and sincerely to serve others. 59

 $^{^{59}}$ Zubairi, In the Company of the Quran, 8.

Verses 85, 89 and 92



Surely, We established him in the land, and gave him the means to all things. So, he travelled a course,



Then he travelled a (different) course

Reading	Meaning
fa-ittaba ^c a / thumma ittaba ^c a	Then he followed a course
fa-atba ^c a / thumma atba ^c a	Then he followed the means

In the story of Dhū al-Qarnayn, he visits three places, and before he goes to each one of these places, Allah stells us that "he travelled a course" or path to arrive there. This is the meaning of the first reading. The second reading says that he followed the means that Allah provided for him, 60 looking hard to use his vast resources to establish justice all over the world.61

Imam al-Rāzī as explains that Allah se gave Dhū al-Qarnayn the means to achieve whatever he wanted to. So, whenever Dhū al-Qarnayn decided to achieve something (or go somewhere), he

⁶¹ Al-Ṭabarī, Jāmi^c al-bayān, 15:372-373; al-Qurṭubī, al-Jāmi^c li-aḥkām al-qurʾān, 13:368-369; Pānīpatī, ʿInāyāt-e reḥmānī, 2:630-632.

⁶⁰ Some scholars of *tafsīr* mention that the second reading conveys the intensity and diligence with which Dhū al-Qarnayn went about following these paths using his resources. In English an idiom that seems apt is "he left no stone unturned," establishing justice for the sake of Allah **36.** See Ibn 'Aṭiyyah, *al-Muharrar al-wajīz*, 16:654.

would follow the path required to achieve it. 62 Ibn cAbbās 🚓 says that Allah 🕷 had granted Dhū al-Qarnayn the knowledge of how to take each thing to its objective. 63

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⁶² Al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ al-ghayb, 21:166.

⁶³ Al-Ṭabarī, Jāmiʿ al-bayān, 15:371; al-Suyūṭī, al-Durr al-manthūr, 5:449-450.

until he reached the setting (point) of the sun, which appeared to him to be setting in a spring of murky water, where he found some people. We said, "O Dhū al-Qarnayn! Either punish them or treat them kindly."

Reading	Meaning
ḥami'ah	murky
<u></u> ḥāmiyah	hot

As Dhū al-Qarnayn set out, he reached a place towards the west, where the sun seemed to be setting into a spring. Here there are two readings, each conveying a different description of the spring. The first reading tells us that the spring was murky and dark, mixed with mud, while the second reading tells us that it was hot. ⁶⁴

At this place, Dhū al-Qarnayn found the first group of non-believers. Here Allah % gave him an option: either punish them for their disbelief or deal with them kindly, inviting them to the truth and teaching them about submission to Allah %. He chose this second option which was an expression of Dhū al-Qarnayn's justice. The mention of his fairness continues into the next $\bar{a}yah$.

⁶⁴ Makkī, al-Kashf, 2:73-74; al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ al-ghayb, 21:167; al-Qurṭubī, al-Jāmi^c li-ahkām al-qurʾān, 13:369-370; Ibn ʿĀshūr, al-Taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr, 16:25-26.

⁶⁵ Zubairi, *In the Company of the Quran*, 138-139.

There is an incident narrated by the scholars of tafsīr related to the multiple readings in this āyah. Ibn 'Abbās heard Mu'āwiyah reciting the verse with the word ḥāmiyah, and Ibn 'Abbās read it as ḥami'ah. When they asked 'Abd Allah b. 'Umar, he said that he read it the same way as Mu'āwiyah. 66 This incident shows that multiple readings have been read from the time of the companions. These were the readings that were taught and approved by the Prophet , and these readings were later systematized into what we know today as the ten canonical qirā'āt.

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⁶⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, Jāmiʿ al-bayān, 15:375; Tafsīr ʿAbd al-Razzāq 2:344-345; al-Suyūṭī, al-Durr al-manthūr 5:450-451. Also see al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ al-qhayb, 21:167.

وَأَمَّا مَنْ ءَامَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَـٰلِحًا فَلَهُ و جَزَآءً ٱلْحُسْنَى ۖ وَسَنَقُولُ لَهُ و مِنْ أَمْرِنَا يُسْرًا ١

As for those who believe and do good, they will have the finest reward, and we will assign them easy commands."

Reading	Meaning
jazāʾan al-ḥusnā	they will have the best as
	reward
jazāʾu al-ḥusnā	they will get the reward of
	their belief and good deeds

As Dhū al-Qarnayn lays out the principles of a just society, he explains the outcome for those who believe and do good, righteous actions individually and in society. There are two readings of the phrase here that play into the meanings found in the āyah. The first reading tells us that such people will receive the best, in this world—a good life—and in the hereafter: Jannah. The second reading specifies that the goodness they receive is as recompense for their belief and actions. The scholars of tafsīr say that the ultimate goodness a person can receive is Jannah and that is what is being referred to here. 67

Imam al-Qurṭubī adds that there are two possibilities on whether this reward is from Allah 36, with Dhū al-Qarnayn conveying it; or if it is from Dhū al-Qarnayn, meaning "I will give to such a person and be generous with them" (a'ṭaytuhū wa

⁶⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi* 'al-bayān, 15:379-380; Makkī, al-Kashf, 2:74-75; Ibn 'Aṭiyyah, al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz, 16:656-657; al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ al-ghayb, 21:169. The evidence for the word al-ḥusnā referring to Jannah is its usage in āyah 26 of Sūrah Yūnus. See Ibn 'Āshūr, al-Tahrīr wa-l-tanwīr, 16:27.

atafaḍḍalu ʿalayhi). Taking both meanings together, those who believe and do good deeds will be rewarded by Allah in this life and in the next. They will live a good, happy worldly life and ultimately end up in Jannah. Part of the reward in this life is through Dhū al-Qarnayn establishing a just and fair society that everyone can contribute to and live peacefully in.

However, this type of society is only possible with both wings of justice, where the reward of righteous good citizens is in this $\bar{a}yah$. The other part was discussed in the previous $\bar{a}yah$: those who are unjust and cause chaos will be punished by Dhū al-Qarnayn (or the leaders of a just society) in this life, and Allah will surely take them to account in the hereafter.

then, when he reached a place between two mountain barriers, he found beside them a people who could barely understand him.

Reading	Meaning
yafqahūna	who were almost unable to
	understand anything said
yufqihūna	whose speech was almost
	unintelligible (to others)

After his encounters with the people in the west and the east, $Dh\bar{u}$ al-Qarnayn arrived at a location between two mountains. Here he encountered a people that he found difficult to communicate with. The difficulty was compounded due to there being two layers of unintelligibility. This is conveyed by the two readings in this $\bar{a}yah$.

The first reading tells us that when others spoke to them, the people could barely understand their words. The second reading tells us that when they spoke to others, they were barely able to get the message across. Imam al-Ṭabarī summarizes the combined message by saying: "the language of these people was so isolated that they had trouble understanding the languages spoken by other people, just as other people had difficulty understanding their tongue." 68

⁶⁸ Makkī, al-Kashf, 2:76; al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ al-ghayb, 21:171; Ibn ʿĀshūr, al-Taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr, 16:31-32.

Bring me blocks of iron!" Then, when he had filled up (the gap) between the two mountains, he ordered, "Blow!" When the iron became red hot, he said, "Bring me molten copper to pour over it."

Reading	Meaning ⁶⁹
ātūnī	Come to me with
ītūnī	Give me

After Dhū al-Qarnayn agrees to help the people who are being oppressed by Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj, he tells them that he will not accept any financial compensation but would like them to assist him in building the structure by bringing him pieces of iron. Then once the large pieces of iron filled the gap between the two cliffs, and the iron was molten, He asked them to bring molten copper for him to pour on top.

This āyah has two instances of the word "ātūnī"/"ītūnī," which has been translated here as "bring." This is one of the interesting places where the distinct meanings provided by the two readings in Arabic can be covered by one word in English. The first reading means "come to me with such and such," while the second reading means "give me such and such." The single phrase in English "bring me such and such" seems to cover both meanings in a concise and accurate manner.

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⁶⁹ Makkī, al-Kashf, 2:79-80; al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ al-ghayb, 21:172; Ibn ʿĀshūr, al-Taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr, 16:36, 38.

قَالَ هَـٰذَا رَحْمَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّي ۗ فَإِذَا جَآءَ وَعْدُ رَبِّي جَعَلَهُ و دَكَّآء ۗ وَكَانَ وَعْدُ رَبِّي حَقًّا ۞

He declared, "This is a mercy from my Lord. But when the promise of my Lord comes to pass, He will level it to the ground. And my Lord's promise is ever true."

Reading	Meaning
dakkan	He will level it to the ground
dakkā [,]	He will make it a flat level
	land

After Dhū al-Qarnayn built the structure to hold back these two vicious tribes, he made sure to attribute its success and value to Allah by saying, "This is a mercy from my Lord." Quickly following up with words of wisdom that this structure will only last as long as Allah wills, just as all of creation lasts as long as our Lord wills.

There are two readings in this $\bar{a}yah$, which convey very close meanings. The first reading means "the act of flattening completely" something after it had previously been raised, so in other words Allah is saying that when He wills, He will flatten this structure completely. The scholars mention that the word in the second reading refers to a humpless camel ($n\bar{a}qah \ dakk\bar{a}$). So, the meaning based on that reading is that whenever Allah wills, He will make the barrier flat like the back of a humpless camel.

Makkī, al-Kashf, 2:81; al-Ṭabarī, Jāmi^c al-bayān, 15:412; al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ al-ghayb, 21:173; al-Qurṭubī, al-Jāmi^c li-aḥkām al-qur³ān, 13:390; Ibn ʿĀshūr, al-Taḥrīr wa-ltanwīr, 16:39.

To better understand the usage of "humpless camels," it is imperative to recall that the primary receivers of the Divine Revelation were Arabs for whom camels provided transportation, companionship and a source of nourishment. Camels were an everyday reality that were woven through Arab society at every level. Understanding this context gives us a better grasp of this vivid language communicating the same overall idea: 71 Dhū al-Qarnayn built this magnificent barrier that was holding up a large group of people, yet even this informidable structure can become flattened to dust when Allah wills.

With this we have to come to the end of our discussion, and Allah sknows best regarding each and every one of the interpretations and explanations mentioned above.

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⁷¹ This is a type of metaphor known in the science of rhetoric and eloquence as *al-tashbīh al-balīgh*, where both the particle of comparison and the mode of similarity are omitted. See al-Hāshimī, *Jawāhir al-balāghah*, 238; al-Jārim and Amīn, *al-Balāghah al-wādihah*, 26-30.

Conclusion

As we come to the end of the $s\bar{u}rah$, I would like to thank you, the reader, for coming on this journey as we explored some of the depths of meaning provided by the canonical recitations. The $qir\bar{a}$ have been my tether and main connection to the Quro for many years. My journey with the $qir\bar{a}$ gave me continuous hope through times of difficulty, and overflowing joy during times of ease. What leaves me in awe of the Mercy of Allah is that there was a time when I did not even know of their existence.

Whether this is your first interaction with the $qir\bar{a}$ $\bar{a}t$, or you have dedicated your entire life to them, I pray that you were able to connect with the Qur $\bar{a}n$ on this journey. I pray that this journey has ignited a spark in you to find an aspect of the Qur $\bar{a}n$ that you develop a personal connection with. And I pray that this connection allows you to appreciate and fall in love with the Qur $\bar{a}n$. $\bar{A}m\bar{i}n$.

This work was completed today, Thursday, February 23, 2023, in San Jose, California by the Mercy, Grace and Permission of Allah 3. I ask Allah 3 to accept my humble efforts and to reunite us with the beloved readers and all our teachers and loved ones in Jannah in the company of our Beloved 3. 4.

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Basil grew up in the UAE and Northern California. He studied Arabic starting at a young age and completed his memorization of the Quran at the age of 14. Later, he completed his study of the ten canonical qirā'āt of the Quran and received authorization (ijāza) to transmit and teach them at Recite with Love. He completed BAs in Economics and Applied Mathematics from UC Berkeley in 2019 and works full-time as an economist in the antitrust litigation industry.

He has been pursuing higher Islamic education for over 5 years and is working towards a 'Alimiyyah degree at Qalam Institute in Dallas. He is also completing his Quranic Studies education at Recite with Love. His research is currently focused on a variety of topics within Quranic Studies and Tafsīr, under the guidance of his teachers.

