

Sura 67: Al-Mulk (The Sovereignty)

In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy

1. *Blessed is He in whose hand is the sovereignty, and He has power over all things.*
2. *He who created death and life, that He may test which of you is best in deed; and He is the Eminent, the All-Forgiving;*
3. *He who created the seven heavens one above another. You will not see a flaw in what the Lord of Mercy creates. So look again, can you see any rifts?*
4. *Then look again and yet again, your sight will return to you weak and exhausted.*
5. *And we have adorned the lowest heaven with lamps, and We have made such (lamps) (as) missiles to drive away the devils, and have prepared for them the torment of the blazing fire.*
6. *And for those who disbelieve in their Lord there is the torment of Hell; wretched is the destination.*
7. *When they are flung therein they hear its roaring as it boils up, as it would burst with rage.*
8. *Whenever a host is flung therein the wardens thereof ask them, "Did not a warner come to you?"*
9. *They will say, "Yes indeed; a warner came to us, but we denied him and said, 'God never sent down any (Message); you are only in a great error.'"*
10. *They will say, "Had we listened or reasoned, we should not be among the companions of the blazing fire."*
11. *They will then confess their sins; but far will be (forgiveness) from the companions of the blazing fire.*
12. *As for those who fear their Lord in secret, for them is forgiveness and a great reward.*
13. *And whether you hide your word or proclaim it, He certainly has (full) knowledge, of the secrets of the hearts.*
14. *Should He not know what He created? and He is the Subtle, the Totally-Aware.*
15. *It is He who made the earth manageable for you, so walk through its tracts and enjoy the sustenance which He provides; and to Him is the Resurrection.*
16. *Do you feel secure that He who is in heaven will not cause you to be swallowed up by the earth when it shakes?*
17. *Or do you feel secure that He who is in heaven will not send against you a violent tornado to pelt you with stones? Then you would know how (severe) was My warning?*
18. *And verily those before them denied, and how (terrible) was My wrath?*
19. *Do they not see the birds above them, spreading their wings and folding them in? None can uphold them except the Lord of Mercy. Indeed, He sees everything.*
20. *Or who is there that can help you, (even as) an army, besides the Lord of Mercy? The disbelievers are only in delusion.*
21. *Or who is there that can provide for you if He were to withhold His provision? No, they obstinately persist in insolence and aversion.*
22. *Is he who walks falling on his face better guided, or one who walks upright on a straight path?*
23. *Say, "It is He who created you, and endowed you with hearing, sight, and understanding; little is it that you give thanks."*
24. *Say, "It is He who has multiplied you through the earth, and to Him shall you be gathered together."*

25. *They ask, "When will this promise be (fulfilled), if you are telling the truth?"*
26. *Say, "The knowledge is with God only, and I am only a plain warner."*
27. *And when they see it close at hand, the disbelievers' faces will be gloomy; and it will be said, "This is (the promise fulfilled), which you were calling for."*
28. *Say, "If God were to destroy me and those with me, or if He bestows His Mercy on us, who can protect the disbelievers from a painful torment?"*
29. *Say, "He is the Lord of Mercy, We have believed in Him, and in Him we put our trust. And you will soon know who it is that is in clear error."*
30. *Say, "Have you thought: if (all) your water was to disappear into the earth, who could then bring you flowing water?" (67: 1-30)*

This is the first Sura of Part 29. Most of the Suras in this Part have been revealed in Mecca. Some of the verses in this Part were among the very first verses that have been revealed, e.g., the opening verses in Surat Al-Muzzammil (Chapter 73) and Surat Al-Muddathir (Chapter 74). The verses of the Quran that have been revealed in Mecca were mainly concerned with establishing the doctrine and formulating an understanding of the universe and its relationship to its Creator. They also dealt with introducing the attributes of the Creator in a way that fills the hearts of people with awe of God. These feelings drive people to connect with their Creator.

This Sura delves into the worlds of God's creations, e.g., jinn and birds. It also deals with the Hereafter and its keepers. It states the absolute sovereignty of God and His limitless power over everything. It describes the perfection of the creation of God.

"Blessed is He in whose hand is the sovereignty, and He has power over all things." This opening which expresses the praise of God, indicates the limitless blessings of God which He bestows on His dominion. He is the Sovereign and the Controller of the universe and His power is limitless. He created death and life. Death indicates the two states of death. The first is before one has been born and the second is after life has ended; and life means life in this world and life in the Hereafter. Describing the state before birth as a state of death justifies the mention of death before life in the verse. All these states are created by God because He wanted to test humankind. The creation was done according to a deliberate plan to uncover the knowledge that God already has about people's behavior and reward people for what they have actually done, not according to God's knowledge. God is Eminent and All-Forgiving. These are attributes which fill the heart of the believer with security and serenity. God is Mighty and Overwhelming but He is also All-Forgiving and Tolerant, *"He who created death and life, that He may test which of you is best in deed; and He is the Eminent, the All-Forgiving."*

The true image of God which Islam portrays is the image of a God who wants people to understand the purpose of their existence and to live up to the honor that God bestowed on them. This is the honor which they received when God breathed in them of His spirit. This honor made them better than many of God's creations. If people achieve this end then they will receive God's mercy, support, and forgiveness. Signs of these facts can be seen in the universe, *"He who created the seven heavens one above another. You will not see a flaw in what the Lord of Mercy creates. So look again, can you see any rifts?"* God's creation is perfect. It is a testimony to the limitless power of God. The question is repeated again, *"Look again and yet again, your sight will return to you weak and exhausted."* You will not find any flaw. The challenge posed in these verses is meant to motivate people to observe and reflect on God's creation. People should reflect on the marvels of the creation of God. The heart of the believer is tuned to the subtle responses of the universe.

“And we have adorned the lowest heaven with lamps,” What is meant by the, *“lowest heaven?”* Maybe it is the sky that the people living on earth see with their naked eyes. The Quran attracts the attention to the beauty of the sky and the beauty of the whole universe. This is the best way to understand and discover the beauty of the Creator. The discovery of the beauty of the creation is the easiest and most realistic way to discover the beauty of the Creator. These lamps which are used to adorn the heaven have another function, *“and We have made such (lamps) (as) missiles to drive away the devils, and have prepared for them the torment of the blazing fire.”* The devils are part of the unseen. We believe that they exist but we do not know anything about them except what we read about them in the Quran. These devils are pelted in this life; in the Hereafter they will receive the punishment of the blazing fire. The disbelievers will also be punished, *“And for those who disbelieve in their Lord there is the torment of Hell; wretched is the destination.”* The details of Hell are then described, *“When they are flung therein they hear its roaring as it boils up, as it would burst with rage. Whenever a host is flung therein the wardens thereof ask them, ‘Did not a warner come to you?’ They will say, ‘Yes indeed; a warner came to us, but we denied him and said, ‘God never sent down any (Message); you are only in a great error.’ They will say, ‘Had we listened or reasoned, we should not be among the companions of the blazing fire.’ They will then confess their sins; but far will be (forgiveness) from the companions of the blazing fire.”* The verses paint an image of Hell as if it were a living creature that feels and reacts. Such images lead to the conclusion that all the creatures of God believe in their Creator and praise Him. These creatures express their amazement that humankind does not heed the message of guidance sent to him. The dialogue between the keepers of Hell and the disbelievers reflects the regret that the disbelievers will experience when they are faced by the reality on the Day of Judgment.

The happy image of the believers on the Day of Judgment is juxtaposed against the horrible image of the disbelievers, *“As for those who fear their Lord in secret, for them is forgiveness and a great reward.”* They did not see their Lord but they believed in Him. They also knew that God sees them whether they are in public or alone. Their behavior does not change either way. They then deserve the great reward that God has kept for them.

The theme of the previous verse continues in the following verse, *“And whether you hide your word or proclaim it, He certainly has (full) knowledge, of the secrets of the hearts. Should He not know what He created? and He is the Subtle, the Totally-Aware.”* God knows what people do in the open and what they hide in their hearts. No one can escape this fact and nobody can hide from God. When people understand this fact and when it rests deep in their psyche they will be able to fulfill the undertaking that they have been entrusted with; the undertaking of conveying the doctrine, establishing justice, being sincere in their relationship with God. Their outward behavior will be a reflection for their inner feelings.

The narrative moves to another aspect of the creation of God, *“It is He who made the earth manageable for you, so walk through its tracts and enjoy the sustenance which He provides; and to Him is the Resurrection.”* One should reflect on the word, *“manageable.”* The early scholars understood that this word means that God has made it easy for us to travel whether we travel on foot, travel using a vehicle, or travel using an animal. It also meant that it was easy to cultivate and to grow plants. But when we look at the meaning of *“manageable,”* in terms of describing a vehicle then we can think of other interpretations. Consider the earth as a moving platform: it rotates around itself, it rotates around the sun, and the solar system itself moves. These motions occur at phenomenal speeds; however, while we are living normally and performing our daily

chores, we are not affected by any of these motions. We are standing up or walking upright on earth as if the earth were a standing still platform. In this sense the earth becomes a “manageable” platform.

Each of the three motions of the earth serves a purpose. The rotation of the earth around itself produces the night and the day. If the earth were standing still, we would either have a night that would continue forever or a day that would continue forever. In the earlier case everything on the surface of the earth would freeze up and in the latter case everything on the surface of the earth would burn. The rotation of the earth around the sun produces the different seasons. Life as we know it would not continue if we had only one season year-round. The purpose of the third motion is not yet known.

God made the earth manageable by assigning a gravitational force that keeps people attached to its surface while it is moving around. God surrounded the earth with an atmosphere that allows people to move on its surface easily.

God made the earth manageable by covering it with a layer of soil that can be used to grow plants. God made the earth manageable by surrounding it with an atmosphere that allows life to continue on its surface.

There are many other things that one can think of that attach significant meanings to the word “manageable.”

Suddenly, while they are feeling secure and enjoying easy living on the earth that has been made manageable to them, the earth starts shaking under their feet and they are being pelted by stones carried by tornados, *“Do you feel secure that He who is in heaven will not cause you to be swallowed up by the earth when it shakes? Or do you feel secure that He who is in heaven will not send against you a violent tornado to pelt you with stones? Then you would know how (severe) was My warning? And verily those before them denied, and how (terrible) was My wrath?”* This is a reminder that the manageable earth can turn suddenly into a wild beast. Earthquakes, tornados, and hurricanes destroy, kill, and burn. People stand helpless in front of these natural catastrophes. Only God controls these natural phenomena.

The narrative’s theme turns from the warning mode to the reflection mode, asking people to pay attention to common scenes that they see every day, *“Do they not see the birds above them, spreading their wings and folding them in? None can uphold them except the Lord of Mercy. Indeed, He sees everything.”* Many of the miracles that we see around us lose their novelty over time. People need to reflect on the simple phenomena like birds flying. These miracles happen by the command of the Lord of Mercy who sees everything.

“Or who is there that can help you, (even as) an army, besides the Lord of Mercy? The disbelievers are only in delusion.” Who can protect you from God’s wrath? Even the biggest armies could not protect people who disbelieve. Who would provide for you if God withheld His sustenance, *“Or who is there that can provide for you if He were to withhold His provision? No, they obstinately persist in insolence and aversion.”* God controls the sustenance of people. Who can provide for people if God prevented the rain from coming down, caused the air to be polluted, or caused the basic elements needed for production to be depleted? But people do not understand these facts and they continue in their insolence and aversion.

The Quran then provides a comparison between those who are guided and those who went astray, *“Is he who walks falling on his face better guided, or one who walks upright on a straight path?”* Those who are deprived from God’s guidance and have gone astray will never be happy;

they will always be confused and lost. On the other hand, those who are guided will join the caravan of faith walking upright along a straight and easy path.

The verses then remind humankind of their Creator, and the blessings that God bestowed on them, *“Say, ‘It is He who created you, and endowed you with hearing, sight, and understanding; little is it that you give thanks.’”*

“Say, ‘It is He who has multiplied you through the earth, and to Him shall you be gathered together.’” God multiplied people and scattered them on the earth to go through the experience of life and to be tested. God will gather them on the Day of Judgment to account for what they did during their lifetime.

But they are in doubt of the Day of Judgment, *“They ask, ‘When will this promise be (fulfilled), if you are telling the truth?’”* The task of the Prophet (PBUH) is to convey the clear warning; only God knows when the Day of Judgment will be. But we are certain that it will happen, *“Say, ‘The knowledge is with God only, and I am only a plain warner.’”* When it happens they will face it with gloomy faces, *“And when they see it close at hand, the disbelievers’ faces will be gloomy; and it will be said, ‘This is (the promise fulfilled), which you were calling for.’”*

The idolaters thought that if they stay patient long enough, the Prophet (PBUH) and the believers will be annihilated. They can then go back to the old daily life routine. The Prophet (PBUH) challenged them; even if we die all of us, who will protect you? *“Say, ‘If God were to destroy me and those with me, or if He bestows His Mercy on us, who can protect the disbelievers from a painful torment?’”* The verse alludes to the torment that awaits the disbelievers rather than directly confronting them with their disbelief.

The disbelievers have no protector; but God is the protector of the believers, *“Say, ‘He is the Lord of Mercy, We have believed in Him, and in Him we put our trust. And you will soon know who it is that is in clear error.’”* The believers are closely connected to God, the Lord of Mercy, and in Him they have put their trust. The idolaters will soon know who is guided and who has gone astray.

The Sura is then concluded with a final warning, *“Say, ‘Have you thought: if (all) your water was to disappear into the earth, who could then bring you flowing water?’”*