

DPHIL ORIENTAL STUDIES

WISDOM IN THE QUR'AN

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*Al-kalimatu l-ḥikmatu ḍāllatu
l-mu'min, fa-ḥaythu wajadahā fa-
huwa aḥaqqu bihā*

*“A wise word is the lost property of
the believer; wherever he finds it, he is
most worthy of it.”*

– The Prophet Muhammad

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Wa-l-ḥamdu lillāhi rabbi l-‘ālamīn.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an attempt to understand what the Qur'an means by the term *ḥikmah*. I argue that the Qur'an, when it uses the term, is engaging with biblical wisdom discourse, as it had been interpreted and understood in late antiquity. Wisdom texts are a category of books in the Hebrew Bible and Apocrypha, such as Proverbs and Sirach, that emphasize the importance of acquiring wisdom through contemplating the natural world and one's own life experience. The presence of this wisdom genre in the Bible encouraged Hellenistic Jews and early Christians to embrace the Greek philosophical notion of natural law, the idea that what is morally right and wrong is known innately, and confirmed through divine revelation. Over subsequent centuries, church fathers and rabbis continued to debate what the relationship between divine revelation and natural law / wisdom ought to be. I argue that when the Qur'an invokes *ḥikmah*, it engages in that debate, and ultimately presents a relationship between scripture and natural law that is close to the Christian conception.

INTRODUCTION

The chapters that comprise this study may be divided into two halves: chapters 1–3 provide the relevant historical background and an overview of the primary qur’anic verses under consideration in this thesis, and chapters 4–10 then systematically analyse the identified verses and the passages in which they occur in an approximately chronological order.

Chapter 1 surveys previous attempts to understand the term *ḥikmah* in the Qur’an, starting from the earliest Islamic literature and down to modern Western studies. Chapter 2 gives an overview of every occurrence of *ḥikmah* in the Qur’an by organising the verses thematically and describing their relative chronology. The chapter also considers the term *ḥukm* in the Qur’an, to show that although it is a cognate of *ḥikmah*, and there are some semantic continuities between the terms, they are far from synonymous, and devoting a study to the latter without reference to the former is justified. Chapter 3 then reviews wisdom discourses from the Hebrew Bible to late antiquity that may provide the contextual background against which the Qur’an articulates its own theology of *ḥikmah*, with brief indications of where these discourses are discussed further over the course of the study.

Chapters 4–8 examine each of the various Meccan occurrences of *ḥikmah*, with either one or two closely related passages discussed per chapter. There is a break from the generally chronological organisation of the study in chapter 5, which considers a Medinan occurrence of *ḥikmah* alongside the Meccan *ḥikmah* pericope in Q 38, on account of the similarities and mutually reinforcing sense in which *ḥikmah* is used in the two passages. Chapters 9–10 look at the remaining Medinan occurrences of *ḥikmah*, which, on account of their being more formulaically

employed relative to the Meccan uses of *ḥikmah*, can effectively be grouped and analysed together in just two chapters. Finally, a conclusion as to the meaning of *ḥikmah* in the Qur'an closes this study.

CHAPTER 1

The Term *ḥikmah* in the Qur'an: A Survey of the Literature

Attempts to understand the meaning of *ḥikmah* in the Qur'an can be traced back to the earliest qur'anic commentaries, and to the present day both traditional Islamic and Western scholars have continued to grapple with the term. An examination of this body of scholarship demonstrates very well how widely, both across time and across scholarly traditions, the Qur'an's use of *ḥikmah* was recognised to be worthy of consideration. Such an analysis also demonstrates some of the challenges in defining qur'anic *ḥikmah* and brings to light to several promising solutions. In this survey of previous attempts to define qur'anic *ḥikmah*, I shall examine pre-modern and modern *tafsīr* literature, Muslim scholarly conceptions of qur'anic *ḥikmah* in works beyond the *tafsīr* genre, and finally modern Western scholarship. As we shall see, *ḥikmah* in the Qur'an has attracted a legion of definitions and interpretations, some vague and some very specific, with many being mutually incompatible. In the conclusion, I shall draw attention to those understandings of *ḥikmah* already present in the Muslim scholarly tradition that I believe are of particular relevance to the rest of the study.

1.1. AL-SHĀFI'Ī AND PRE-MODERN *TAFSĪR* WORKS

As Joseph Lowry notes, almost none of the earliest extant *tafsīrs* attempt to define *ḥikmah*.¹ There are two exceptions: Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767) and 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī (d. 211/827). Let us consider them in turn. *Tafsīr Muqātil* gives

¹ Lowry, "Early Islamic Exegesis," 150. See also idem, *Early Islamic Legal Theory*, 180–181.

varying glosses for *ḥikmah* where it occurs in the Qur’an, depending on the context of the verse.² In total, Muqātil offers four separate definitions: (1) *al-fahm wa-l-‘ilm* (“understanding and knowledge”) (Q 5:110, 31:12, 38:20), or more specifically understanding and knowledge of the Qur’an (Q 2:269); (2) *nubuwwah* (“prophecy”) (Q 4:54, where *ḥikmah* is given to the family of Abraham); (3) one of the scriptures, whether the Psalms (Q 2:251, where *ḥikmah* is given to David), the Gospel (Q 43:63, where it is given to Jesus), or the Qur’an (Q 16:125 and 54:4–5, where it is given to Muhammad); (4) law, *sunnah*, and the *mawā‘iz* (“admonitions”) that accompany law. As we shall see, defining *ḥikmah* as *sunnah* eventually gained widespread popularity among *tafsīr* scholars, and thus warrants some further analysis.

Several Medinan verses, with considerable overlapping diction, proclaim that the Prophet has been given both the *kitāb* and *ḥikmah* (Q 2:129, 151; 3:164; 62:2 – see chapter 2 for an introduction to the Qur’an’s *ḥikmah* verses). Muqātil consistently glosses *ḥikmah* in these verses as either *al-ḥalāl wa-l-ḥarām* (“lawful and unlawful”), or *al-amr wa-l-nahy* (“command and prohibition”); Q 3:164 is the only such verse where Muqātil adds the gloss *sunnah*. Lowry notes that this seemingly foreshadows al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820). He observes that it is not clear, however, precisely what Muqātil means by *sunnah*; although it is possible that he intends the Prophet’s normative practice (this being the eventually dominant meaning of the word *sunnah* in the Islamic tradition), it is equally possible that he simply means “law,” or “past practice,” or general “normative traditions.”³ In fact, it

² For an introduction to Muqātil’s *tafsīr*, including the question of authenticity, see Gilliot, “Muqātil, grand exégète”; Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, 168–171; idem, “The Qur’anic Commentary of Muqātil b. Sulaymān”; Tohe, “Muqātil ibn Sulaymān,” 60–165.

³ Lowry, *Early Islamic Legal Theory*, 181–182; idem, “Early Islamic Exegesis,” 150–151.

is improbable that Muqātil meant to equate *ḥikmah* with normative Prophetic practice in the sense that al-Shāfiʿī would later popularise. This is shown most clearly by his commentary at Q 3:48, where God promises Mary that He will teach Jesus *kitāb* and *ḥikmah*; here too Muqātil provides the exegetical gloss *al-ḥalāl wa-l-ḥarām wa-l-sunnah*, almost identical to his words at Q 3:164. Further, he uses *sunnah* in explaining what is meant by *shirʿah* (“law”) at Q 5:48, and *amr* (“the matter [of religion]”) at Q 45:17, both terms referring to religious law given to previous scriptural communities.

In the absence of al-Shāfiʿī’s reading that locates *ḥikmah* outside the Qurʿan, Muqātil had to identify *ḥikmah* as some aspect of *kitāb* wherever the two terms were conjoined, and it appears he settled on law. We can reasonably speculate why he chose this interpretation. First, he was probably influenced by the root letters of the term, *ḥ-k-m*, which it shares with *ḥukm*, “judgement.” This is clear from his other extant work on the Qurʿan, *al-Wujūh wa-l-naẓāʾir* (to be discussed in more detail below) – in defining the possible meanings of *ḥikmah*, he gives as an example a verse that uses *ḥukm* instead (Q 19:12); clearly, he regarded the two as interchangeable.⁴

⁴ Muqātil, *al-Wujūh wa-l-naẓāʾir*, 73–74. On the question of the attribution of this work to Muqātil, see Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, 287, and Van Ess, *Theology and Society*, 2:590–591. Works in the *wujūh wa-l-naẓāʾir* genre, of which the one attributed to Muqātil is the earliest one extant, seek to elucidate the different senses (or *wujūh*, literally “faces”) of qurʿanic homonyms. On the genre generally, and the place of Muqātil’s work within it, see Sattar, “Wujuh al-Qurʿan”; Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, 287–288; Van Ess, *Theology and Society*, 2:590–593; Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique*, 109–110; Baalabaki, *The Arabic Lexicographical Tradition*, 202–203; Rippin, “Lexicographic Texts and the Qurʿan,” 167–171; idem, “Al-Mubarrad (d. 285/898) and Polysemy in the Qurʿan”; Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 208–212; Abbot, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, 2:92–113; Tohe, “Muqātil ibn Sulaymān,” 283–304. There was an interesting and relatively early push-back against the *wujūh wa-l-naẓāʾir* genre and its positing multiple meanings for a single lexical item by the mystic al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 318/936—320/938). He instead sought to provide a unified underlying meaning (a single *kalimah*) to all the qurʿanic uses of a single lexical item, the various nuances of which he saw as shades (or *aḥwāl*, “states”) of the underlying meaning. Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Taḥṣīl naẓāʾir al-Qurʿān*, 19; Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique*, 119–120. This tension between semantic unity and diversity of a given lexical item continues to complicate lexicographical efforts today. As Nicolai Sinai notes, in the case of the Qurʿan, its high formulaic density serves to provide a significant degree of unity to the

Second, there are passages in which *ḥikmah* does seem to be quite clearly connected to legal provisions. Thus, Q 17:39 reads, “That is from what your Lord has revealed to you of *ḥikmah*.” The verse (which we shall consider in chapter 7) concludes a long list of injunctions, vv. 23–38. Muqātil’s exegesis shows clearly that he understood this connection: “That (which God has commanded and prohibited in these verses) is of the *ḥikmah* (that He has revealed to you, Muhammad).”

Beyond defining *ḥikmah* as law, which, as mentioned, Muqātil does in every verse in which the term is co-ordinated with *kitāb*, he also makes a point to connect *ḥikmah* to *maw’izah* (“admonition”). For example, at Q 2:129, Muqātil glosses *ḥikmah* as *al-maw’izatu llatī fī l-qur’ān mina l-ḥalāl wa-l-ḥarām*, “the admonition that is in the Qur’an about matters lawful and unlawful.” Similar glosses are found at Q 2:231, 3:164, and 62:2. Thus, for Muqātil, *ḥikmah* – when conjoined to *kitāb* – is not just the legal provisions of scripture, but also the admonition that accompanies those provisions, encouraging obedience, promising reward, and warning against transgression. Muqātil is certainly correct to notice that the Qur’an frequently conjoins *ḥikmah* and *maw’izah* (Q 2:231, 16:125, 31:12–13), a point to which we shall return in this study.⁵

Unlike Muqātil’s *tafsīr*, ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s consists mostly of narrations. He therefore defines *ḥikmah* only at those three occurrences in the Qur’an for which he has a relevant report. At Q 2:269, “He grants *ḥikmah* to whomever He wishes,” he

corpus and its lexicon. See the introduction to Sinai, *Key Terms*. Ultimately, whether a lexical item has several *wujūh* (per Muqātil) or several *aḥwāl* of a single underlying *kalimah* (per al-Tirmidhī) will have to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. For an interesting modern manifestation of the debate, see Madigan’s attempt to provide a unified sense to the Qur’an’s use of *kitāb*, and Sinai’s response. Madigan, *The Qur’an’s Self-Image*, 183; Sinai, “Qur’ānic Self-Referentiality,” 104–105.

⁵ See also Lowry *Early Islamic Legal Theory*, 182, n. 34.

narrates from the Basran scholar Qatādah (d. 117/735) that the term means “the Qur’an, and understanding (*fiqh*) the Qur’an,” almost identical to Muqātil’s explanation of *ḥikmah* at the same verse.

For Q 31:12, “We gave Luqman *ḥikmah*,” ‘Abd al-Razzāq narrates from the Meccan scholar Mujāhid (d. 104/722) that *ḥikmah* means “intelligence (*‘aql*), understanding (*fiqh*), and correctness in speech, without prophecy (*min ghayri nubuwwah*).” This is again almost identical to Muqātil’s explanation of *ḥikmah* in this verse: “knowledge (*‘ilm*) and understanding (*fahm*) without prophecy (*min ghayri nubuwwah*).” Given that Muqātil spent time in both Basra and Mecca,⁶ it is possible that he also derived the glosses in question from Qatādah and Mujāhid, or their scholarly circles.

Finally, at Q 33:34, ‘Abd al-Razzāq reports that the phrase “the verses (*āyāt*) of God and *ḥikmah*” means *al-qur’ān wa-l-sunnah*, again narrating from Qatādah. By the time of ‘Abd al-Razzāq, a contemporary of al-Shāfi‘ī and a *muḥaddith* writing over half a century after Muqātil, it is much more likely that by *sunnah* he meant the Prophet’s normative practice, though this was by no means the standard meaning of the word yet.⁷ Lowry believes that this verse is an unusual location to give such a gloss, and we cannot know why ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s informants gave this meaning of

⁶ *EI2*, s.v. “Muqātil b. Sulaymān”.

⁷ For an evolution of the term *sunnah* in early Islam, see *EI2*, s.v. “Sunna.” ‘Abd al-Razzāq elsewhere continues to use the word in its pre-Shāfi‘ī sense of the normative traditions of the people of past, e.g., “It is from the *sunnah* that churches that are in the garrison towns (*amṣār*) be destroyed, old and new” (‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 6:60, no. 10001). However, an interesting report recorded by ‘Abd al-Razzāq shows that while there were indeed at his time still many sources for the *sunnah* (i.e., many sources from which normative practices might be derived), *the sunnah* par excellence was the Prophet’s practice. Khuṣayb al-Jazarī reports that he saw the Prophet in a dream and asked him about the different ways people were performing the *tashahhud* (the sitting part of the prayer ritual), to which the Prophet responded: “The *sunnah* is the *sunnah* of Ibn Mas‘ūd.” ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 2:205, no. 3077.

ḥikmah here.⁸ I believe the trigger for adopting this interpretation is the command to the wives of the Prophet at the start of the verse: “And remember [feminine plural] (*udhkurna*) what is recited in your homes of the signs of God and *ḥikmah*.” With the imperative *udhkurna*, from the Arabic verb *dhakara*, here translated as “remember,” but which may also be rendered “mention,” the verse is commanding those closest to the Prophet to recall and/or make mention – i.e., transmit to others – his *ḥikmah* utterances. This verse could easily be understood by *ḥadīth* scholars such as Qatādah and ‘Abd al-Razzāq as referring to Prophetic normative practice, to which his wives had the most direct access. We shall return to this verse in chapter 10.

Al-Shāfi‘ī was the first to systematically identify *ḥikmah* with normative Prophetic *sunnah*, at least for the *kitāb/ḥikmah* verses.⁹ He claims that he heard this interpretation from *tafsīr* scholars, whom he does not name.¹⁰ Lowry is able to very plausibly trace the basic idea of *sunnah* as *ḥikmah* to mid- to late eighth century Basra,¹¹ most prominently to the Basran traditionist Qatādah (from whom we saw ‘Abd al-Razzāq narrating the opinion that *ḥikmah* means *al-sunnah*), through whom al-Shāfi‘ī narrates several traditions in his *Musnad*, raising the possibility of a broader intellectual influence.¹²

⁸ Lowry, *Early Islamic Legal Theory*, 183; idem, “Early Islamic Exegesis,” 152.

⁹ *EI2*, s.v. “Sunna”; Lowry, *Early Islamic Legal Theory*, 176–181; idem, “Early Islamic Exegesis,” 147–148.

¹⁰ Lowry, *Early Islamic Legal Theory*, 180; idem, “Early Islamic Exegesis,” 148. Judith Wegner suggests that al-Shāfi‘ī may have been influenced by a parallel division in rabbinics between written and oral law, which she designates *kātūb* and *ḥokmā*. “Islamic and Talmudic Jurisprudence,” 53–54. As Lowry points out, the evidence that Wegner presents for the oral Torah being called *ḥokmā* is slender. Lowry, *Early Islamic Legal Theory*, 180; idem, “Early Islamic Exegesis,” 153. See however chapter 3 for a reassessment of this evidence.

¹¹ Lowry, *Early Islamic Legal Theory*, 183; idem, “Early Islamic Exegesis,” 152. The *ḥikmah/sunnah* equivalence has also been attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās. See Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200), *Zād al-masīr*, 1:113. For the general phenomenon of attributing *tafsīr* opinions to Ibn ‘Abbās, and the possibility of recovering Ibn ‘Abbās’s actual teachings, see Versteegh, “Early Qur’anic Exegesis,” 635.

¹² For instance: Anas b. Mālik < Qatādah b. Di‘āmah (Basra) < Ayyūb al-Sakhtiyānī (Basra) < Sufyān b. ‘Uyaynah (Kufa/Mecca) < al-Shāfi‘ī; and the chain Anas b. Mālik < Qatādah b. Di‘āmah (Basra) <

Ultimately, al-Shāfiʿī was extraordinarily successful in gaining acceptance for this interpretation. After him, in large part, *tafsīr* literature identified *ḥikmah* with normative Prophetic *sunnah*. This was a convenient way of providing qurʿanic evidence for Prophetic practice being normative, and also explained the puzzling series of *kitāb/ḥikmah* verses in which a second, seemingly independent means of guidance had been revealed to the Prophet alongside *kitāb*.

Of the major *tafsīr* scholars, al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) is the most insistent in defining *ḥikmah* as non-scriptural normative prophetic practice wherever possible. He does so at Q 3:48, where *ḥikmah* is given to Jesus (he glosses: “It is the *sunnah* that We give to him that is not in the *kitāb*”), and Q 4:54, where it is given to the family of Abraham (“It is what He revealed to them that was not recited scripture [*kitāb maqrūʾ*]”). He is not entirely consistent, in that he glosses it as prophecy at Q 2:251 (*ḥikmah* given to David), as the Gospel at Q 5:110 (*ḥikmah* given to Jesus), as the Qurʿan at Q 54:5 (*ḥikmah* that has come to the unbelievers), and as *fiqh* (“understanding”) of the religion, *ʿaql* (“intelligence”), and *iṣābah fī l-qawl* (“correctness in speech”) at Q 31:12 (*ḥikmah* given to Luqmān). The range of possibilities does not go beyond what Muqātil had already suggested, though the verses at which the various definitions are given do not always overlap. The same may be said for all of the major *tafsīr* scholars. However, we occasionally encounter some noteworthy divergences.

Al-Ṭabarī himself, for instance, records the opinion that “*ḥikmah* is fear (*khashyah*), for the beginning (*raʿs*) of every matter is the fear of God.” This clearly

Ḥumayd al-Ṭawīl (Basra) < Sufyān b. ʿUyaynah (Kufa/Mecca) < al-Shāfiʿī. See al-Shāfiʿī, *Musnad*, 36, 334.

echoes Proverbs 1:7, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning (*rēshît*) of knowledge; fools despise wisdom (*ḥokmâ*) and instruction,” and Proverbs 9:10, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning (*tāḥillat*) of wisdom (*ḥokmâ*).” We similarly find in Psalms 111:10, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning (*rēshît*) of wisdom (*ḥokmâ*).” It is telling that al-Ṭabarī provides this gloss at the only verse that explicitly praises *ḥikmah* (which is a common theme in biblical wisdom literature, e.g., Proverbs 8 – see chapter 3), “He grants *ḥikmah* to whomever He wishes, and whoever has been given *ḥikmah* has been given an abundant good” (Q 2:269). There is some evidence that al-Ṭabarī’s gloss would have been recognised as a biblical quotation. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) records in his *Kitāb al-Zuhd* the narration from Khālid b. Thābit al-Rabīī (reported by Ibn Ḥajar [d. 852/1449] to be one of the *tābi‘ūn*),¹³ “I found in the opening of the Psalms (*zabūr*), which are called the Psalms of David, that the beginning (*ra’s*) of wisdom (*ḥikmah*) is the fear (*khāshyah*) of the Lord.”¹⁴ Interestingly, the verse is here attributed not to Proverbs (see above citation of Prov 1:7; 9:10), but to the Psalms, undoubtedly due to the latter being a part of the Qur’an’s scriptural landscape.¹⁵ (As mentioned above, Psalm 111:10 is also very close to the citation in *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, but as this is not “in the opening of the Psalms,” it seems more probable that Proverbs is intended.) We will return to the possible significance of the Book of Proverbs for understanding what might have been meant by *ḥikmah* in early Islam below.

¹³ Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath al-bārī*, 6:466.

¹⁴ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 68.

¹⁵ It is also possible that the quotation was indeed found in some version of the rewritten Arabic Psalms of David, a collection of Psalms composed by multiple Muslim authors and redactors from the eighth to the twelfth century. See Vishanoff, “*Kitāb al-Zabūr*”; idem, “Psalms of David.”

As we have already seen, the classical *mufassirūn* did not seek a unified meaning for *ḥikmah*.¹⁶ Instead, like Muqātil, they used contextual information to choose from a range of possibilities whichever seemed to best fit the verse. Abū Ḥayyān (d. 745/1344) in his *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ fī l-tafsīr* provides, at Q 2:129, a fairly exhaustive list of the full array of meanings the *mufassirūn* before him had offered for *ḥikmah*: *al-sharī'ah wa-bayānu l-aḥkām* (“sacred law and the elucidation of rulings”), *al-sunnah wa-bayānu l-nabiyy* (“[Prophetic] *sunnah* and the elucidation of the Prophet”), *al-fiqh fī l-dīn* (“understanding the religion”), *al-fahmu lladhī huwa sajiyyah wa-nūr mina llāh* (“understanding that is a disposition and light from God”), *fahmu l-Qur’ān* (“understanding the Qur’an”), *al-‘ilm wa-l-‘amal bihi* (“knowledge and action in accordance with it”), *al-ḥukm wa-l-qaḍā’* (“judgment and judicial ruling”), *kullu kalimah wa‘azatka* (“any word that admonishes you”), *al-kitāb* (“scripture”), *kullu ṣawāb mina l-qawl* (“every accurate speech”), and *waḍ‘u l-ashyā’ fī mawāḍi’ihā* (“placing things where they belong”). Many of these opinions clearly express an intuitive understanding of “wisdom,” and need detain us no further. However, the final definition is intriguingly reminiscent of what James Crenshaw calls the “fundamental assumption” of biblical wisdom:¹⁷

The fundamental assumption, taken for granted in every representative of biblical wisdom, consisted of a conviction that being just meant a search for ... a just order ... the right time or place for each deed or word ... In truth, “for everything there is a time.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Though see n. 4 above, and the vocabulary works discussed below.

¹⁷ The earliest source I could locate for this definition is al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), *Ta’wīlāt ahl al-sunnah*, 4:259, ad Q 6:128, when defining God’s attribute of being *ḥakīm*.

¹⁸ Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 12.

One further quotation from a classical *tafsīr* may be instructive. In al-Fīrūzābādī's (d. 817/1415) compilation of Ibn 'Abbās's *Tafsīr*,¹⁹ *ḥikmah* is defined somewhat tautologically as *ḥikmatu l-ḥukamā'*, "the wisdom of the wise." This brings out an important tension implicit in some of the earlier definitions – is *ḥikmah* a part of and intrinsic to scripture, e.g., the legal and/or hortatory content of the latter, or is it apart from and extrinsic to God's revealed books, as suggested by the definition attributed to Ibn 'Abbās? Although this tension is not overtly discussed by the *mufassirūn*, there are indications that they were aware of the issue. (Indeed, for al-Shāfi'ī, as well as *ḥikmah* being the normative *sunnah* of the Prophet, which is a supernatural guidance that God cast into his heart, it may similarly be cast into the hearts of the believers to guide them to the correct understanding of the law; there may be here a faint echo of this same tension in his thought too.²⁰) As noted earlier, al-Ṭabarī's glosses of *ḥikmah* are within the range set out by Muqātil (with the addition of normative Prophetic *sunnah*). However, he makes telling adjustments. At Q 5:110 (*ḥikmah* given to Jesus), Muqātil defined the term as "understanding (*fahm*) and knowledge," whereas al-Ṭabarī glosses it: "understanding (*fahm*) the meanings of the *kitāb* that I have revealed to you, which is the Gospel." We find the same theological move by al-Ṭabarī at Q 31:12, concerning the *ḥikmah* given to Luqmān. Muqātil defined it as "knowledge and understanding (*fahm*), without prophecy," whereas al-Ṭabarī defines it as "understanding (*fiqh*) of the religion." Al-Ṭabarī was

¹⁹ Al-Fīrūzābādī, *Tanwīr al-Miqbās*, 104, ad Q 5:110. For the attribution of this *tafsīr* to Ibn 'Abbās, see the citations in n. 11.

²⁰ See Yahia, *Šāfi'ī et les deux sources de la loi islamique*, 279. For Yahia's citations in Lowry's critical edition, see al-Shāfi'ī, *The Epistle on Legal Theory*, 12–13 (para. 14) and 78–79 (para. 121). I am grateful to Christopher Melchert for alerting me to this source.

evidently keen to counter any notion that qur'anic *ḥikmah* could be anything unconnected to the *kitāb* (or normative Prophetic *sunnah*).²¹

1.2. MODERN TAFSĪR WORKS

The tension seen above regarding the extent to which one connects *ḥikmah* to scripture is even more clearly on display in modern *tafsīrs*. A good indication of a *mufassir*'s understanding of the term *ḥikmah* is usually to be found in his *tafsīr* of Q 2:269: "He grants *ḥikmah* to whomever He wishes, and whoever has been given *ḥikmah* has been given an abundant good"; as the verse occurs early in the canonical arrangement of the text, and praises *ḥikmah* without connecting it to *kitāb* or any other word with which it is elsewhere collocated, the *mufassirūn* evidently found it to be an appropriate point at which to discuss the term. Many modern *tafsīrs* simply repeat the full range of opinions found in the medieval works. It seems Salafi *tafsīrs* are the most insistent in tying *ḥikmah* to an understanding of the religion itself, even for verses where it is not conjoined with *kitāb*. Thus 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Nāṣir b. Sa'dī (d. 1956), a Saudi scholar whose *tafsīr* remains popular among Salafis, defines *ḥikmah* at Q 2:269, as "useful knowledge, and righteous action, and knowing the secrets of religious laws (*sharā'i*) and their rulings (*aḥkām*)."²² Similarly, Abū Bakr al-Jazā'irī (d. 1921), an Algerian scholar who settled in Saudi Arabia, at the same verse in his *tafsīr* defines *ḥikmah* as "understanding the religious law (*shar'*) and guarding the *kitāb* and the [normative Prophetic] *sunnah*."²³ We sense here the same impulse felt by al-Ṭabarī: the need to constrain *ḥikmah* to the scriptural realm.

²¹ This same point is noted by Christopher Melchert, "Three Qur'anic Terms," 97.

²² Al-Sa'dī, *Tafsīr al-karīm*, 118.

²³ Abū Bakr al-Jazā'irī, *Aysar al-tafāsīr*, 1:260.

By contrast, modern *tafsīr* scholars hailing from reformist backgrounds have often expanded the scope of qur’anic *ḥikmah* beyond “understanding scripture and religious law.” Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935) in his *tafsīr*, for instance, summarises his teacher Muḥammad ‘Abduh’s (d. 1905) views at Q 2:269: “What is intended by His giving *ḥikmah* to ‘whomever He wishes’ is His giving him its tool, i.e., intelligence (‘*aql*), in a complete fashion, and enabling him to use this instrument well to attain sound disciplines, for the intellect is the just balance by which thoughts and perceptions are weighed.”²⁴ Riḍā tries to reconcile ‘Abduh’s understanding to Ibn ‘Abbās’s report in al-Ṭabarī that *ḥikmah* refers to the Qur’an itself: “Understanding the Qur’an is not possible without a perfection of the intellect and using it well.... So the report [from Ibn ‘Abbās] explains *ḥikmah* with the most specific [example of it] in keeping with the context, whereas [our] teacher and imam explained it by the most general [use of it].... So whoever is afflicted by blind imitation (*taqlīd*) will be deprived of the fruits of the intellect, i.e., *ḥikmah*.” This is similar to Muḥammad ‘Abduh’s understanding of the term *furqān* (“criterion”), which he regarded as an intellectual faculty through which one can arrive at truth independent of scripture.²⁵

Muḥammad Abū Zayd (d. 20th c., > 1930), another Egyptian reformist scholar, who published his *tafsīr* in 1930, regarded *ḥikmah*, *mīzān* (“balance”), and *furqān* to be synonymous, and defined them as “the ability to distinguish between truth and error,”²⁶ perhaps following ‘Abduh.²⁷ Similarly, the Indian reformist scholar Abū

²⁴ Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-manār*, 3:75.

²⁵ Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Koran*, 22–23.

²⁶ Abū Zayd, *al-Hidāyah wa-l-‘irfān*, 1:40, ad Q 3:3.

²⁷ Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Koran*, 23, n. 20.

I-Kalām Āzād (d. 1958) in his Urdu *tafsīr*²⁸ at Q 2:269 defines *ḥikmah* as the development within a person of an understanding by which “he becomes aware of the paths of good and evil.” Another modern *mufassir*, the Shi‘ī scholar Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā‘ī (d. 1982), includes in his definition of *ḥikmah* at the same verse that it is “the knowledge that elucidates the realities of the natural world (*al-‘ālam al-ṭabī‘ī*) in so far as they relate to the happiness of man, such as the realities of his natural state (*al-ḥaqā’iq al-fiṭriyyah*), which are the foundations of religious legislation.”²⁹

The most extensive discussion of *ḥikmah* by any of the modern era *mufassirūn* is by the reformist scholar Ibn ‘Ashūr (d. 1973). His interpretation, again at Q 2:269, goes further than any Sunnī scholar before him in defining *ḥikmah* beyond it being merely an understanding scripture. He notes that *ḥikmah* can be given to “whomever He wishes,” and for that reason it is said that

wisdom descended on the tongues of the Arabs, the intellect of the Greeks and the hands of the Chinese....³⁰ The beginning of the manifestation of wisdom was in the East, with the Indians it was with the Brahmans and the Buddhists, with the Chinese it was with the Buddhists, with the Persians it was the wisdom of Zoroaster, and with the Copts it was the wisdom of the priests. Then the wisdom of these nations was transferred to Greece, and it was refined, corrected, categorized, and divided, according to them, into two types: practical wisdom and theoretical wisdom.³¹

²⁸ Abū I-Kalām Āzād, *Tarjumān al-Qur’ān*, 1:274, *ad* Q 2:269 (= Q 2:271 in the author’s verse numbering).

²⁹ Al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī, *al-Mīzān*, 2:395, *ad* Q 2:269.

³⁰ This quotation is adapted from al-Tawḥīdī (d. c. 400/1010), *al-Muqābasāt*, 260. The original is: “Wisdom descended on the heads of the Romans, the tongues of the Arabs, the hearts of the Persians, and the hands of the Chinese.”

³¹ Ibn ‘Ashūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr*, 3:62. By “practical wisdom” and “theoretical wisdom,” Ibn ‘Ashūr is presumably referring to *phronesis* and *sophia*. On these terms, see chapter 5.

After detailing this division, drawing on al-Farābī and Ibn Sīnā, he concludes, “So the manifestation of wisdom was in religions, and then what the intelligence of rational minds produces was added to it.”³²

Finally, a particularly intriguing suggestion is made by the Pakistani exegete Jāvēd Aḥmad Ghāmidī. Commenting on Abraham’s prayer in Q 2:129 that God send to his progeny a messenger to “teach them scripture (*al-kitāb*) and wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*),” Ghāmidī notes that when

[*al-kitāb*] and *al-ḥikmah* are co-ordinated like this, then *al-kitāb* refers to the law (*shar‘īat*) and *al-ḥikmah* refers to the reality of religion (*dīn*), and questions of faith (*īmān*) and morality (*akhlāq*).³³

Further, Ghāmidī separates scriptures into those whose primary concern is *kitāb*/law, and those whose primary concern is *ḥikmah*/morality, the Qur’an’s *tawrah* being the prime example of the former category, and the *injīl* of the latter.³⁴ I shall return to the conjunction of *kitāb* and *ḥikmah* in the final chapter.

1.3. QUR’ANIC VOCABULARY AND LEXICOGRAPHIC WORKS

In the qur’anic vocabulary genre, the earliest works were either on *gharīb al-Qur’ān*, which examined words that were unusual and therefore difficult to understand (though later works in the genre were much more expansive, covering all the major lexical items in the Qur’an), or on *mushtarak* words, i.e., homonyms.³⁵ The earliest

³² Ibid., 3:63–64.

³³ Ghāmidī, *al-Bayān*, 1:131. See also idem, *Mīzān*, 66–78 [=69–81 (English trans.)].

³⁴ Ghāmidī, *Mīzān*, 69 [= 71].

³⁵ Baalbaki, *The Arabic Lexicographical Tradition*, 64, 202.

extant work in either genre is Zayd b. ‘Alī’s (d. 120/738) *Tafsīr gharīb al-Qur’ān*,³⁶ in which he glosses *ḥikmah* at Q 2:269 as (1) *amānah* (“trust”), (2) *bayān* (“elucidation”), (3) *fiqh* (“understanding”), (4) *‘aql* (“intelligence”), and (5) *fahm* (“understanding”).³⁷ Interestingly, by defining *ḥikmah* as *‘aql*, Zayd makes a connection between the first part of the verse, “He grants *ḥikmah* to whomever He wishes,” and the closing statement, “none takes admonition except the *ulū l-albāb*,” as he glosses the latter phrase as *ulū l-‘uqūl*, “those with intellect.” This is a connection to which we shall return in chapter 9.

The earliest extant work specifically in the *mushtarak* genre is Muqātil b. Sulaymān’s *al-Wujūh wa-l-naḏā’ir*.³⁸ He gives five possibilities for the term: (1) *mawā’iz* (“admonitions”), (2) *fahm wa-‘ilm* (“understanding and knowledge”), (3) *nubuwwah* (“prophecy”), (4) *tafsīr* of the Qur’an, and (5) the Qur’an. These significantly overlap with the definitions given by Muqātil in his *tafsīr* as discussed above. The only difference is that in his *tafsīr* he occasionally offered one of the other scriptures, viz., the Psalms and the Gospel, as a possible meaning of *ḥikmah*, whereas in his *al-Wujūh wa-l-naḏā’ir* he offers only the Qur’an as a scripture to which *ḥikmah* might refer.

Three other major qur’anic vocabulary works will give us a reasonable overview of how the term was understood in this genre.³⁹ Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276/889) in his *Gharīb al-Qur’ān* defines *ḥikmah* as *al-‘ilm wa-l-‘amal* (“knowledge and

³⁶ For an introduction to the work, see Versteegh, “Zayd Ibn ‘Alī’s Commentary.” Versteegh gives several compelling reasons for holding the work to be authentic. Ibid., 15. See also idem, “In Search of Meaning,” 45–48. A dissenting opinion is expressed by Baalbaki, *The Arabic Lexicographical Tradition*, 64.

³⁷ Zayd b. ‘Alī, *Tafsīr gharīb al-Qur’ān*, 105.

³⁸ Muqātil, *al-Wujūh*, 73–74. See also n. 4.

³⁹ For an overview of the three works cited here, see Rippin, “Lexicographic Texts and the Qur’an,” 165–166.

action”), insisting that a man cannot be called wise (*ḥakīm*) until he combines the two.⁴⁰ Abū Bakr al-Sijistānī (d. 330/941) in *Nuzhat al-qulūb*, which is also from the *gharīb al-Qurʾān* genre, defines it as another word for the intellect (*ʿaql*), making a connection between *ḥikmah* and *ḥakamah*, a part of a horse’s bridle: just as the bridle restrains the beast, so *ḥikmah* wards off ignorance (*jaḥl*) from its possessor.⁴¹ Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfāhānī (d. 502/1108), in his popular *al-Mufradāt fī gharīb al-Qurʾān*, differentiates between *ḥikmah* as it applies to God, which is “knowledge (*maʿrifah*) of things and their creation in the most well-wrought manner (*iḥkām*),” and as it applies to people, which is “knowledge (*maʿrifah*) of what has been created and doing good deeds.”⁴²

There is thus considerable overlap between the qurʾanic exegetical and vocabulary works in defining *ḥikmah*, although it is notable that the *gharīb al-Qurʾān* works (with the exception of Zayd b. ʿAlī’s) emphasise moral action much more than the *mufassirūn*. This may have been on account of such works being more closely aligned to the broader lexicographic genre, and thus being influenced by predominant understandings of lexical items in early Arabic dictionaries, which regularly include moral action as part of their definition of *ḥikmah*. For instance, al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad’s (d. 170/786) *al-ʿAyn* defines *ḥikmah* as “justice (*ʿadl*), knowledge (*ʿilm*), and forbearance (*ḥilm*)”⁴³

⁴⁰ Ibn Qutaybah, *Gharīb al-Qurʾān*, 32.

⁴¹ Abū Bakr al-Sijistānī, *Nuzhat al-qulūb*, 83.

⁴² Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfāhānī, *al-Mufradāt*, 249.

⁴³ Al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad, *al-ʿAyn*, 3:66. On the relative independence of the early lexicographical works, in particular al-Khalīl’s *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*, from the *tafsīr* genre, see Versteegh, “In Search of Meaning,” 59–60.

Later lexica began to incorporate definitions from the *tafsīr* genre, such as *ḥikmah* being prophecy, or an understanding of the Qur'an, or the Psalms.⁴⁴ It seems that the association of *ḥikmah* with biblical literature among the linguists can be traced to Abū Ishāq al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923). As well as being an influential grammarian, he was also a *tafsīr* scholar, and so would have been familiar with the idea that *ḥikmah* can be identified with biblical scripture. At Q 3:184 (“If they deny you, messengers before you were denied, who came with clear signs, holy writs [*al-zubur*], and an illuminating scripture”), al-Zajjāj glosses *zubur* as “the plural of *zabūr*, every book that has *ḥikmah*.”⁴⁵ Later linguists, such as Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī (d. 395/1005), explicitly trace back the idea of David’s Psalms (*zabūr*) being repositories of *ḥikmah* to al-Zajjāj.⁴⁶

The earliest lexicographer whom I could identify as giving *al-injīl* as one of the meanings of *ḥikmah* is Ibn Sīdah (d. 455/1066). He adduces those very verses of the Qur’an at which the *mufasssīrūn* proposed this meaning.⁴⁷ This is consistent with what is known of Ibn Sīdah’s methodology, which aimed at encyclopaedically including in his work all lexical analysis that had preceded him.⁴⁸ Evidently, he also included glosses found in *tafsīr* literature. It seems that it was not until Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī’s (d. 1205/1790) *Tāj al-‘Arūs* that “Torah” also came to be included in the possible meanings of *ḥikmah*, because, as Zabīdī explains, “(all of the scriptures) contain *ḥikmah* that is articulated (*manṭūq bihā*), and *ḥikmah* that is not articulated

⁴⁴ See Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2:617, s.v. “*ḥikmah*”. See also Melchert, “Three Qur’anic Terms,” 99–101.

⁴⁵ al-Zajjāj, *Ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān*, 1:495, ad Q 3:184.

⁴⁶ Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī, *al-Furūq al-lughawiyya*, 290.

⁴⁷ Ibn Sīdah, *al-Muḥkam*, 3:50, s.v. “*ḥ-k-m*.”

⁴⁸ Baalbaki, *The Arabic Lexicographical Tradition*, 323–24, 326.

(*maskūt ‘anhā*).⁴⁹ Gradually, therefore, the lexicographical tradition came to identify *ḥikmah* with all the scriptures mentioned in the Qur’an.

1.4. EARLY RENUNCIANT (ZUHD) WORKS AND WISDOM ANTHOLOGIES

The phrase, “I have found in the *ḥikmah*,” or “I have read in the *ḥikmah*,” or “it is written in the *ḥikmah*” occurs several times in renunciant works such as Ibn Ḥanbal’s *Kitāb al-Zuhd*.⁵⁰ Christopher Melchert understands these citations to indicate that some in renunciant circles thought *ḥikmah* to be an extra-qur’anic scripture on par with the Gospel and Torah.

A significant clue as to the meaning of *ḥikmah* in these works is the formula “it is written” (*maktūb*), which is the only one used to introduce the “in the *ḥikmah*” locution in the earliest extant works from the *zuhd* genre, those of ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/797) and of Wakī’ b. al-Jarrāḥ (d. 197/812).⁵¹ This seems to echo the rabbinic formula for introducing biblical scripture, *ktīb*, also adopted by Ephrem.⁵² As the quotations are invariably aphoristic (e.g., “Gentleness is the head of wisdom”), it is plausible that *ḥikmah* in these *zuhd* works is ultimately derived from the Syriac title for the Book of Proverbs, namely *ḥekmtā*, and thus alludes to that book.⁵³ Indeed, *ḥikmah* is occasionally personified in such works, echoing the

⁴⁹ Al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-‘arūs*, 31:513, s.v. “*ḥikmah*.”

⁵⁰ Melchert, “Three Qur’anic Terms,” 101.

⁵¹ Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 309, no. 1058; Wakī’ b. al-Jarrāḥ, *al-Zuhd*, 3:735–736 (no. 422), 776 (no. 458), 809 (no. 498). For the recension of Ibn al-Mubārak’s *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, see Melchert, *Before Sufism*, 7. Interestingly, all four of these “written in the *ḥikmah*” narrations, as well as several more in Ibn Hanbal’s *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, are through Iraqi Hishām < ‘Urwah b. al-Zubayr lines of transmission, perhaps indicating that Hishām had some connection with early Judaeo-Christian traditions in Kufa (see the following discussion on the significance of the “written in the *ḥikmah*” locution).

⁵² Jansma, “Ephraem on Genesis,” 255; Bacher, *Die exegetische Terminologie*, 2:91.

⁵³ This was clearly the established Syriac title in late antiquity. See, for example, the Didascalia Apostolorum 3:23.

depiction of Lady Wisdom in biblical wisdom literature (see chapter 3). It is true that there is much attributed to this *ḥikmah* source in these quotations that does not have a clear parallel in biblical scripture, but pseudo-biblical quotations are a common feature of the early renunciant tradition.⁵⁴ As Melchert has shown, some of these *ḥikmah* quotations *do* echo passages from the Bible, and there is furthermore often a conflation of *ḥikmah* and Torah – with the same authority sometimes attributing a given aphorism to one source and sometimes to the other – suggesting that there was a considerable conceptual overlap between the two for the writers in the *zuhd* genre, and supporting the notion that *ḥikmah* is a biblical text in their understanding. (On the expansive use of the term *tawrāh*/Torah in late antiquity and early Islam to refer to the entirety of the Hebrew scriptures, see chapter 10.)

The collective evidence thus seems to favour that *ḥikmah* as used in the *zuhd* works refers to a real or imagined biblical scripture, ultimately traceable to Proverbs. The question remains whether these writers identified qur’anic *ḥikmah* with this scripture, thus furnishing us with an additional definition of the latter to add to our survey of past opinions. At the present stage of research, this is difficult to say,⁵⁵ though that it was an actual scripture (rather than idealised or imagined) is supported by a *ḥadīth* recorded by al-Bukhārī, which again uses the locution “it is written in the *ḥikmah*”:

‘Imrān b. Ḥusayn said, “The Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace, said, ‘Modesty (*ḥayā*) does not bring anything except good.” Bashīr b. Ka‘b said, “It is written (*maktūb*) in the *ḥikmah*: Truly from modesty (*ḥayā*) comes dignity, and truly from modesty (*ḥayā*) comes tranquillity.” ‘Imrān said to him, “I am

⁵⁴ Melchert, “Quotations of Extra-Qur’anic Scripture,” 97–107.

⁵⁵ Though we should note that the authorship of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, two of the Bible’s most prominent wisdom texts (see chapter 3) was widely attributed to Solomon in late antiquity (Kynes, *An Obituary for Wisdom*, 70–72), and qur’anic *ḥikmah* is never attributed to him.

narrating to you from the Messenger of God, God bless him and grant him peace, and you narrate to me from your parchment (*ṣaḥīfatika*)!”⁵⁶

The final phrase, “from your parchment (*ṣaḥīfatika*),” indicates an actual anthology of *ḥikmah* sayings.

While the above-mentioned *zuhd* works seem to have envisioned *ḥikmah* as biblical scripture, it is possible that *ḥikmah* also referred to non-scriptural anthologies of aphorisms. This was the view of Ibn ‘Āshūr, who comments, “Some of the rabbis used to have parchments (*ṣaḥā’if*) in which were etiquettes (*ādāb*) and admonitions (*mawā’iz*) like something from the School of Solomon, upon whom be peace, and his likes, and the Arabs used to transmit sayings from them.”⁵⁷ Similarly, al-Ṭabarī reports in his *Tārīkh* that some Arabs had collections of the wise sayings of Luqmān, which were even approved of by the Prophet.⁵⁸ Aphoristic literature was certainly popular in late antiquity (see chapter 3), and indeed its presence in Arabia is suggested by early Islamic collections of wise sayings attributed to pre-Islamic Arabs (*amthāl al-‘Arab*).⁵⁹ As I will argue in chapter 6, there is evidence that this interest in proverbial sayings in the Arabian peninsula does indeed predate Islam, and had some impact on the qur’anic use of *ḥikmah*.

⁵⁶ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, al-adab, bāb al-ḥayā’*, 6117. See also Aḥmad, *Musnad*, 33:64, no. 19830, and 33:144, 19914; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, al-īmān, bāb bayan ‘adad shu‘ab al-īmān*, 37a.

⁵⁷ Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr*, 3:63, ad Q 2:269.

⁵⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:351–352.

⁵⁹ Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, 227–228.

1.5. MODERN WESTERN STUDIES

Josef Horowitz suggests that *ḥikmah* in the Qur'an refers to a pre-Mosaic scripture,⁶⁰ which is similar to Melchert's suggestion of what early renunciant literature meant by *ḥikmah*, insofar as the latter may have been (in the terminology of the renunciants) a scripture separate from the Torah, Psalms, and Gospel. Horowitz bases his view on Q 4:54 ("We gave the family of Abraham the *kitāb* and *ḥikmah*"). He argues that when the Prophet later learned of the Torah and Gospel as prior scriptures, he combined them with *kitāb* and *ḥikmah* to create a scriptural tetralogy, which was completed with Jesus (Q 3:48 – see chapter 2). Further, given that Q 2:231 addresses the believers and reminds them of God's favour in "what He has sent down to you of the *kitāb* and *ḥikmah*," it follows that the pre-Mosaic *ḥikmah* scripture is also (somehow) identical to this new qur'anic revelation. Horowitz struggles however to explain why David's *zabūr* is omitted from this frequently occurring set.⁶¹

Rudi Paret found this unconvincing. He accepts that it may well be the case that the Prophet wanted from the outset to connect *ḥikmah* to scripture, which explains their frequent co-occurrence, but this is a long way from saying that *ḥikmah* constitutes a discrete scripture. It is more likely to refer to the *content* of divine revelation. Paret does not believe that we should try to draw sharp boundaries within the *kitāb/ḥikmah/Torah/Gospel* tetralogy. Rather, they stand for a "relatively unsystematic enumeration of previous divine bestowals."⁶² We will revisit this issue in chapter 10.

⁶⁰ Horowitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, 71–72.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 73–74.

⁶² Paret, *Der Koran*, 68, ad Q 3:48.

Although John Wansbrough does not offer an explanation for what *ḥikmah* in the Qur'an means, he nonetheless, in his *Quranic Studies*, astutely notes several sapiential formulae and themes in the Qur'an, such as the frequent use of the wisdom formula "O my son!"⁶³ However, he does not build on his insight that the Qur'an employs language familiar from wisdom literature in any significant way.

Horovitz too notices a connection with biblical wisdom:

In der ḥikma des Koran erkennen wir einen Nachklang der σοφία, um deren Verleihung nach Sapientia Salomonis 9, 10 Salomo gebeten hatte: »sende sie vom heiligen Himmel her und vom Thron deiner Herrlichkeit schicke sie.« Daß Muhammad sie mit dem kitāb verband, lag um so näher, als auch bereits ältere Vorstellungen die offenbarten Schriften mit der ḥokmā identifiziert hatten, und insbesondere die Aussagen des Alten Testaments über diese ḥokmā in der talmudischen Exegese ohne weiteres auf die Tora übertragen worden waren.⁶⁴

We will return to the rabbinic transference of biblical wisdom (*ḥokmā*) to the Torah in chapter 3, and to the relationship between *kitāb* and *ḥikmah* in chapter 10. As I hope to show, Horovitz here (and Wansbrough before him – see above) were correct in their intuition that qur'anic wisdom is connected to the biblical and para-biblical traditions.

More recently, there have been several studies on qur'anic *ḥikmah* that ought to be mentioned. Hikmet Yaman's 2011 monograph, *Prophetic Niche in the Virtuous City: The Concept of ḥikmah in Early Islamic Thought*, surveys how *ḥikmah* was defined in Arabic lexicographic, exegetical, Sufi, and philosophical writings. When it comes to qur'anic *ḥikmah*, there is little in the study by way of close reading or

⁶³ Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 15. For a critique of Wansbrough's identification of certain qur'anic themes as belonging to the wisdom genre (on which latter see chapter 3), see Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, vi.

⁶⁴ Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, 73.

historical-critical scholarship, however – most of the analysis consists of presenting *tafsīr* narratives connected to the *ḥikmah* passages.⁶⁵ Similarly, U. Isra Yazicioglu’s contribution to the edited volume *The Oxford Handbook of Wisdom and the Bible*, titled “Wisdom in the Qur’an and the Islamic Tradition,” draws heavily on *tafsīr* when elucidating qur’anic wisdom, and weaves an interpretation of the latter into a broader discussion of wisdom as understood in Islamic theology, spirituality, and jurisprudence.

Neither Yaman nor Yazicioglu attempt to connect qur’anic *ḥikmah* to the biblical tradition. Such an attempt is made by Mehmet Önal and Necmettin Tozlu, in their article “The Concept of Wisdom in the Bible and Qur’ān: A Method of Education.” However, with the exception of noting that Jesus as a bringer of wisdom in the Qur’an, just as in the New Testament, relates to his bringing clarity to the Mosaic revelation (see chapters 2 and 6),⁶⁶ many of the connections they make between qur’anic and biblical wisdom are generic, and not particularly helpful in understanding qur’anic wisdom.

The most serious historical-critical study on *ḥikmah* in the Qur’an and in pre- and early Islamic Arabia that I am aware of is Dimitri Gutas’s “Classical Arabic Wisdom Literature: Nature and Scope.” He concludes that *ḥikmah* both in the pre-Islamic poetry tradition and in every occurrence in the Qur’an means “maxim.” I will consider some of the evidence that Gutas adduces for his assertion in chapter 8, in connection with the wisdom of Luqmān. Suffice it to say for now that understanding *ḥikmah* as “maxim” in every verse in the Qur’an in which it is mentioned yields some

⁶⁵ Yaman, *Prophetic Niche*, 48–67.

⁶⁶ Önal and Tozlu, “The Concept of Wisdom,” 108.

odd results. Consider, for example, Q 2:269, if *ḥikmah* were translated as maxim(s): “He grants maxims (*ḥikmah*) to whomever He wishes, and whoever has been given maxims (*ḥikmah*), has been given an abundant good.”

1.6. CONCLUSION

We may broadly divide most of the various definitions surveyed of qur’anic *ḥikmah* into two groups. First, there are those interpretations that make *ḥikmah* some component or instance of divine revelation. This includes definitions that equate qur’anic *ḥikmah* with a biblical book, such as the Psalms or the Gospels. Second, we have definitions that make *ḥikmah* a human faculty of understanding, synonymous with the human intellect (*‘aql*). Within the latter group of definitions, *ḥikmah*, insofar as it means “understanding” or “intellect,” is frequently connected to correctly understanding scripture.

In the following chapters, I will argue that there is considerable merit in each of these two groups of definitions. Through a close reading of the relevant qur’anic texts, and by situating the Qur’an within late antique wisdom discourse, I will attempt to demonstrate that the Qur’an’s discourse on *ḥikmah* stands in continuity with the evolving Near Eastern, and more specifically biblical wisdom tradition. Situating the Qur’an within this broader wisdom discourse will enable us to refine both of the aforementioned groups of definition; we will see precisely which component of revelation is equated with *ḥikmah* in the Qur’an, and what exactly is meant by the human faculty called *ḥikmah*. But first, let us acquaint ourselves with the relevant *ḥikmah* verses in the Qur’an that will be the subject of analysis.

CHAPTER 2

The Qur'an's *ḥikmah* and *ḥukm* Verses: An Overview

The word *ḥikmah* occurs twenty times in the Qur'an, in nineteen separate verses (it is mentioned twice in Q 2:269). In the first section of this chapter, I offer a taxonomy of the *ḥikmah* verses, and consider the chronological development of the term over the Qur'an's proclamation. This diachronic progression will provide the framework for the later analysis of the verses, when we consider one or two passages in depth per chapter. Here, by way of introduction, I will make some brief remarks on how the verses relate to and cohere with each other.

As we have seen in chapter 1, the earliest works on qur'anic vocabulary already considered *ḥikmah* and *ḥukm* to be interchangeable, and indeed, as I will show, there is some phraseological and conceptual overlap in the Qur'an's use of the two words that could be used to support their synonymity. Devoting a study to the former that does not, for its conclusions, rely on how the Qur'an uses the latter, therefore requires some justification. I will attempt to show, in the second section of this chapter, that *ḥikmah* is sufficiently distinct from *ḥukm*, and sufficiently well defined as a qur'anic technical term, for it to merit separate study.

2.1. *ḤIKMAH*

2.1.1. The Qur'an's *ḥikmah* Taxonomy

The first three categories of *ḥikmah* verses below, (a)–(c), are listed in order of the Qur'an's prophetological chronology: (a) the *ḥikmah* given to the previous prophets; (b) the *ḥikmah* given to the Prophet Muhammad; and (c) the latter's duty to now

convey this *ḥikmah*. The final category of verses, labelled (d), lists a few passages where *ḥikmah* is attributed to non-prophetic figures.

a) *Hikmah* given to previous prophets

The verses that attribute *ḥikmah* to previous prophets sometimes generalise who the recipients were and at other times mention specific prophets.

Q 3:81 (all prophets)	(Remember) when God took the covenant of the prophets, ¹ “What I have given you of scripture (<i>kitāb</i>) and wisdom (<i>ḥikmah</i>) – then a messenger comes to you confirming what is with you – you shall certainly believe in it, and you shall certainly help him.” He said, “Do you pledge and accept My covenant on this condition?’ They said, “We pledge.” He said, “Then be witnesses, and I am among the witnesses with you.”
Q 4:54 (family of Abraham)	We gave the family of Abraham scripture (<i>al-kitāb</i>) and wisdom (<i>al-ḥikmah</i>), and We gave them a mighty dominion (<i>mulk</i>).
Q 2:251 (David)	By God’s permission they routed them; and David killed Goliath, and God gave him dominion (<i>al-mulk</i>) and wisdom (<i>al-ḥikmah</i>) and taught him some of what He wills.
Q 38:20 (David)	We strengthened his kingdom (<i>mulk</i>) and gave him wisdom (<i>al-ḥikmah</i>) and decisive speech.
Q 3:48 (Jesus)	And He will teach him scripture (<i>al-kitāb</i>) and wisdom (<i>al-ḥikmah</i>), the Torah and the Gospel. ²

¹ The exegetes are split over how to interpret this *idāfah*: is this “covenant of the prophets” a covenant that God took from the prophets, or a covenant that God communicated to each people through their respective prophets? See Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Tahrīr wa-l-tanwīr*, 3:299. The latter I think is more probable, given the phrase “then a messenger comes to you” in the verse, and the immediately preceding two verses: “Whoever turns their back after that — those are the reprobates. / Do they desire some religion other than God’s, when all those who are in the heavens and on earth have surrendered to him, voluntarily or involuntarily, and will be returned to Him?” Such language and threats are routinely used in the Qur’an in relation to those who would *reject* prophets, rather than to prophets themselves.

² The translation choice here will be discussed in chapter 10.

- Q 5:110 (Jesus) I taught you scripture (*al-kitāb*) and wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*), the Torah and the Gospel.
- Q 43:63 (Jesus) When Jesus brought clear proofs, he said, “I have brought you wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*), and (I have come) to make clear to you some of the things that you differ about; so fear God and obey me.”

b) Hikmah revealed to the Prophet

The theme of prophets being given *ḥikmah* is continued with the Prophet

Muhammad. In the verses listed below, Q 4:113, 16:125, and 17:39 and are

addressed to the second person singular, therefore primarily to the Prophet.³

- Q 2:231 When you divorce women and they complete their term [of waiting], then either retain them honourably or release them honourably, and do not retain them maliciously such that you transgress; and whoever does that certainly wrongs himself. Do not take the signs of God in mockery, and remember God’s blessing upon you, and what He has sent down to you of the scripture (*al-kitāb*) and wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*), to admonish you therewith. Be wary of God, and know that God has knowledge of all things.
- Q 4:113 But for God’s bounty and mercy to you [singular], a party of them had intended to lead you astray. But they will only lead themselves astray and they will not harm you in any way. God has sent down to you [singular] scripture (*al-kitāb*) and wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*), and He has taught you what you did not know. God’s bounty to you is great.
- Q 16:125 Call to the way of your [singular] Lord with wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*) and fair admonition, and dispute with them with what is better. Your Lord is well aware of those who stray from his way, and He is well aware of those who follow the right path.
- Q 17:39 That is from what your [singular] Lord has revealed to you [singular] of wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*).
- Q 33:34 And remember [feminine plural] (O wives of the Prophet) what is recited in your homes of the signs of God and wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*). God is certainly all-attentive, all-aware.

³ Robinson, *Discovering the Qur’an*, 241–243.

Q 54:4–5 Indeed reports have come to them wherein is a restraining reproof, far-reaching wisdom (*ḥikmah*), but the warnings do not avail.

c) The four primary duties of the Prophet

In four almost identical passages, the Qur'an divides the Prophet's role into four duties: reciting God's signs (*āyāt*), purifying the believers, teaching scripture (*al-kitāb*), and teaching wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*). These may be considered a subset of category (b) above, but for convenience are listed separately here.

Q 2:129 [Abraham prayed], "Our Lord, raise among them a messenger from among them, who will recite Your signs to them and will teach them scripture (*al-kitāb*) and wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*) and will purify them. You are the mighty, the wise."

Q 2:151 Thus⁴ We have sent to you a messenger from among yourselves, who recites to you Our signs, and purifies you, and teaches you scripture (*al-kitāb*) and wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*), and teaches you what you did not know.

Q 3:164 God certainly favoured the believers when He raised up among them a messenger from among themselves to recite to them His signs and to purify them, and to teach them scripture (*al-kitāb*) and wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*), and previously they had indeed been in manifest error.

Q 62:2 It is He who sent to the unscriptured (*ummiyyīn*)⁵ a messenger from among themselves, to recite to them His signs, to purify

⁴ The locution *ka-mā*, usually rendered "just/even as" (in line with the primary use of the *ka* particle, which is for *tashbīh*, or comparison) can also be used for *ta'īl*, or justification. See Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ*, 2:45, and Ibn Hishām, *Mughnī al-labīb*, 3:7.

⁵ On the meaning of *ummī*, see Sināi, *Key Terms*; Goudarzi, "The Second Coming of the Book," 335–338. As Sināi notes, in calling the Prophet *ummī* (e.g., Q 7:157), the Qur'an draws attention to the fact that with the proclamation of the Qur'an scripture is now being communicated to those beyond the communities of the *ahl al-kitāb*. See also Zellentin, *The Qur'an's Legal Culture*, 157–158, n.2, with additional references. Although *ummī* and gentile are thus co-extensional (if we count the Christians as a group from within the Israelites), the Qur'an does not draw attention to the ethnic dimension of the division between the Israelites and *ummiyyūn*, but rather the fact that one group has scripture and the other does not. Referring to the latter group as "gentiles," a term grounded in ethnic differentiation, misses the Qur'an's particular emphasis. I have thus, following Dayeh, preferred "unscriptured." For Christians being a group within the Qur'an's "Israelites," see Zellentin, *The Qur'an's Legal Culture*, 162–165; idem, *Law as Literature*, Introduction (I am grateful to the author for sharing his draft with me). The late antique Christian negotiations of Israelite identity that Zellentin

them, and to teach them scripture (*al-kitāb*) and wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*), and previously they had indeed been in manifest error.

d) *Ḥikmah* to non-prophets

Alongside the Prophet's role as a teacher of *ḥikmah*, some verses describe God as directly granting wisdom to anyone He wills, including non-prophets:

- Q 2:269 He grants wisdom (*ḥikmah*) to whomever He wishes, and whoever has been given wisdom (*ḥikmah*), has been given an abundant good. And none takes admonition except those endowed with insight (*ulū l-albāb*).⁶
- Q 31:12 We certainly gave Luqmān wisdom, saying, "Give thanks to God; and whoever gives thanks, gives thanks only for his own sake. And whoever is ungrateful – God is indeed self-sufficient, ever praised."

2.1.2. Chronological Development of Qur'anic *ḥikmah*

The earliest qur'anic mention of *ḥikmah* dates to Nöldeke's second Meccan period.⁷

These verses form a well-structured set: Q 38:20 ascribes *ḥikmah* to David, Q 43:63

draws upon when discussing the Qur'an's Israelites are succinctly summarised by Brock, *The People and the Peoples*, Introduction, esp. 9–11. For translating *ummī* as "unscriptured," see Dayeh, "Prophecy and writing in the Qur'an."

⁶ I owe the translation of *ulū l-albāb* as "those endowed with insight" to Sinai, *Key Terms*.

⁷ The chronological order presented here is based on mean verse length, as argued for by Sinai, *Historical-Critical Introduction*, 113–124, which I accept to be a sound point of departure. Nöldeke's *sūrah* ordering for the *ḥikmah* verses agrees almost entirely with Sinai's. Indeed, for the Meccan period there is complete alignment between the two. See Nöldeke, *The History of the Qur'ān*, 63–188. See also, however, Stefanidis, "The Qur'an Made Linear," 7–8, for conflicting evidence regarding whether the order in which Nöldeke places *sūrahs* within each of his four phases (i.e., the three Meccan and one Medinan periods) are indicative of his judgement regarding their intra-phase chronology. The strongest evidence in favour of Sinai's chronology is that when *sūrahs* are arranged according to it they exhibit what he calls covariance – and what Sadeghi has called (in the context of examining Mehdi Bazargan's proposed chronology, which is also based on mean verse length) smooth, concurrent change – across multiple independent features; i.e., when *sūrahs* are ordered by increasing mean verse length, various other stylistic and literary features also exhibit either clustering or smooth change. See Sinai, *Historical-Critical Introduction*, 111–132; idem "Inner-Qur'anic Chronology"; Sadeghi, "The Chronology of the Qur'ān," esp. 281–283. The most plausible explanation for this is that ordering *sūrahs* by mean verse length does indeed approximate the chronological pronouncements of the Qur'an, which underwent a smooth evolution in stylistic and literary features over time. Crucially, this ordering at no point depends on the Muslim literary sources, such as the *sīrah*, and thus avoids the charge of circularity (viz., that the proposed chronology of the Qur'an is dependent on *sīrah*, which in turn grew out of a need to explain the genesis of the Qur'an). For the charge of circularity in Nöldeke's chronology and the various chronologies that grew out of it, see

to Jesus, Q 17:39 proclaims that *ḥikmah* is now being given to Muhammad, and Q 54:4–5 (which is probably the earliest *ḥikmah* passage) addresses the Prophet’s audience, telling them that *ḥikmah* has come to them through this revelation. Thus, *ḥikmah* in some of its earliest occurrences is associated with the post-Mosaic prophets to whom the Qur’an ascribes a scripture, viz., David (who was given the Psalms, e.g., Q 17:55), Jesus (who was given the Gospel, e.g., Q 57:27), and of course Muhammad. It is noteworthy that while *ḥikmah* is therefore associated with prophets of scripture, it is never ascribed to Moses at any diachronic stage of the term’s use. This already suggests that it refers to an aspect of revelation that is distinct from the Torah.

There are two *ḥikmah* verses dated to Nöldeke’s third Meccan period. Q 16:125 underscores the importance of *ḥikmah* by instructing the Prophet to make it the basis of his missionary activity: “Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*).” It should be noted, however, that Angelika Neuwirth considers there to have been some Medinan additions to the final section (vv. 106–128) of this *sūrah*, and it cannot be ruled out that this is a Medinan insertion.⁸ Q 31:12 and the passage that follows it (vv. 12–19) confirm that the celebrated Luqmān, a legendary pre-Islamic Arabian sage (see chapter 8), was indeed given wisdom. The verses record his exhortatory advice to his son. The resemblance between this passage and Near Eastern wisdom literature will be explored in chapter 8.

Reynolds, “Le problème de la chronologie du Coran,” 405–502, and the response by Sinai, “The Chronology of the Qur’ān,” 348–349. Ultimately, the relative chronology of verses within the respective Meccan and Medinan components of the Qur’an play a relatively marginal role in my analysis, and so the present note will suffice as justification for why I consider it legitimate to occasionally engage in intra-Meccan and intra-Medinan diachronic considerations. The more basic Meccan-Medinan split, on the other hand, is somewhat more central to my study of qur’anic *ḥikmah*. On this, see n. 9.

⁸ Neuwirth, *Studien zu Komposition der mekkanische Suren*, 301.

The remaining thirteen *ḥikmah* verses are all Medinan.⁹ Apart from Q 2:251 and 2:269, in this period *ḥikmah* is consistently collocated with *kitāb* or, on one occasion (Q 33:34), with *āyāt allāh* (“the signs of God”). Neither pairing ever occurs in the Meccan corpus. There has been a clear development, therefore, in the term’s use. The increased prominence of *ḥikmah* is seen especially from the series of verses listed in section (c) above: the Prophet’s role as a teacher of *ḥikmah* is reiterated several times, with one of the passages (Q 2:129) having Abraham pray for such a prophet to be sent to his offspring.

2.2. *ḤUKM*

The meaning of *ḥukm* is, at least as compared to *ḥikmah*, relatively straightforward to determine. My aim in this section is to analyse the extent to which the two terms overlap. Several medieval and modern analyses of *ḥukm* define it in some of its senses as equivalent to *ḥikmah*, and qur’anic usage supports a degree of synonymy. Nonetheless, as I hope to show, the terms are carefully distinguished in the Qur’an. This gives us increased assurance that *ḥikmah* has a unique technical signification that merits separate study.

This discussion is divided into three parts. In the first, I give a broad overview of the meaning of *ḥukm* in the Qur’an and identify which use comes closest to *ḥikmah*. In the second, I investigate this latter sense of the term in more detail, in

⁹ The Meccan-Medinan division of *sūrah*s is on surer footing than the more detailed chronology of the Qur’an’s proclamations (see n. 7), and seems now to be broadly accepted within the academy (including by scholars who remain sceptical about the possibility of reconstructing a detailed chronology of the *sūrah*s, or even about the traditional Muslim account of the geographical and temporal origins of the Qur’an). See Sinai, *Historical-Critical Introduction*, 124–130; idem, “The Unknown Known”; Reynolds, “The Qur’ānic Doublets,” 34–35; Durie, *The Qur’an and Its Biblical Reflexes*, chaps. 2–3.

particular with reference to the recipients of *ḥukm*. In the third, I will make concluding observations on the relationship between *ḥukm* and *ḥikmah*.

2.2.1. *Ḥukm* in the Qur'an: A Taxonomy

In modern scholarship, a taxonomy of *ḥukm* in the Qur'an has been attempted most notably by al-Farāhī, Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Paret, and Horovitz.¹⁰ The below scheme freely draws on all their works.

a) *Hakama* as “to judge,” and *ḥukm* as “judging” (verbal noun)

By far the most common use of the verb *ḥakama* is “to judge,” with its verbal noun *ḥukm* therefore meaning “judging” or “decision making.” For instance:

And David and Solomon when they judged (*yaḥkumāni*) concerning the tillage when the sheep of some people strayed into it by night, and We were witness to their judging (*ḥukmihim*). (Q 21:78)

b) *Ḥukm* as “a decree/judgement” (deverbal count noun)

As with all verbal nouns in Arabic, *ḥukm* can also be used as a deverbal noun, meaning “judgement,” in the sense of an individual act of giving a ruling or making a decision, or that decision itself. For example, after outlining rules for dealing with believing women emigrants, the Qur'an concludes:

That is the judgment (*ḥukm*) of God; He judges (*yaḥkumu*) between (*bayna*) you. (Q 60:10)

¹⁰ Al-Farāhī, *Mufradāt al-Qur'ān*, 178–180, especially the editor's n. 2 on p. 180; al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, 7:250–251 (ad Q 6:89); Paret, *Der Koran*, 73; Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, 72–73.

c) *Hukm* as “sound judgement” (deverbal non-count noun)

As with the English word “judgement,” *ḥukm* by extension can also mean the “the fact of possessing the ability to make considered decisions or to arrive at reasonable conclusions to a high degree or in a sophisticated form,”¹¹ i.e., “sound judgement.” In English, we see this in phrases such as “she was a person of judgement,” or “he lacked judgement.” Consider how the Qur’an describes Joseph’s upbringing under God’s watchful care in Egypt:

When he came of age, We gave him (sound) judgement (*ḥukm*) and knowledge, and thus do We reward the virtuous. (Q 12:22)

Ḥukm here may well also be translated as “intelligence” or “understanding,” for which there is no other noun used in the Qur’an (although several verbs convey this meaning).¹² It is clearly in this sense that *ḥukm* comes closest to “wisdom.”¹³ Such a use is attested in pre-Islamic poetry too, where at times it is even closer to “wisdom” than we find in its qur’anic use. Consider, for instance, the verse of al-Musayyab b. ‘Alas:¹⁴

*fa-ra’aytu anna l-ḥukma mujtanibu l-ṣibā
wa-ṣaḥawtu ba‘da tashawwuqin wa-ruwā‘ī*

¹¹ *OED*, s.v. “judgement.”

¹² Paret, *Der Koran*, 146 (*ad* Q 6:89).

¹³ Whether this sense of *ḥukm* developed under Aramaic influence, rather than as an organic expansion of the core meaning of the root in Arabic (“to judge”), does not bear on the current analysis. See Horowitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, 72; Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, 111.

¹⁴ Al-Mufaḍḍal, *The Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, 94 (Arabic) [= 30 (English trans.)]. Al-Musayyab was the uncle of the famed pre-Islamic poet al-A‘shā. See *EI3*, s.v. “al-A‘shā.” The editor comments on the translation that “the use of *ḥukm* in the sense of wisdom is somewhat unusual” (32, n. 6). He notes after the Arabic text that there is an alternative recension of the verse in which *ḥilm* (“forbearance”) replaces *ḥukm*. Horowitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, 73, n. 1, suggests that *ḥukm* here could be rendered “judgement,” which seems implausible.

I saw that wisdom counselled me to leave youthful folly,
and I became sober and staid after love-longing and passion.

d) *Hukm* as “authority,” “rule,” or “government”

Here, *ḥukm* comes close to meaning *ḥukūmah* (“government”), meaning the right or ability to give judgement. For instance:

Then they are returned to God, their true master. Truly, authority (*ḥukm*) belongs to Him, and He is the swiftest of reckoners. (Q 6:62)

2.2.2. The Recipients of *ḥukm*

We saw above that the prophetic recipients of *ḥikmah* were of Abraham’s lineage, especially David, Jesus, and Muhammad. Let us now consider the recipients of *ḥukm*. Two verses describe *ḥukm* being given to Israelites generally. As these conjoin *ḥukm* with *kitāb*, they are reminiscent of the *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah* verses, and thus deserve particular attention.¹⁵

Q 45:16 Certainly We gave the Children of Israel scripture (*al-kitāb*), *al-ḥukm*, and prophethood (*al-nubuwwah*) and We provided them with all good things, and We gave them preference over all the nations.

Q 6:89 They¹⁶ are the ones whom We gave scripture (*al-kitāb*), *al-ḥukm*, and prophethood (*al-nubuwwah*). So if these disbelieve in them, We have certainly entrusted them to a people who are not unbelievers in them.

What does *ḥukm* in these two verses mean? Following the earlier taxonomy, it could be either meaning (c), sound judgement (a meaning close to “wisdom,” as we

¹⁵ For scholars who have equated *ḥikmah* to *ḥukm*, see the following section.

¹⁶ The referent of the pronoun “they” has persuasively been argued by Goudarzi to refer to not just the prophets listed in the preceding verses, but also “their forefathers and their offspring and their brothers” (v. 87). See Goudarzi, “The Second Coming of the Book,” 181–182.

have seen), or meaning (d), authority.¹⁷ Classically, most of the *mufassirūn* seem to have opted for the first option (i.e., some variant of sound judgement and/or wisdom). Thus, Muqātil understood it to refer to understanding (*fahm*) or knowledge (*fahm*) of the *kitāb*.¹⁸ Some took it to refer specifically to understanding the legal content of the scripture, e.g., al-Ṭabarī.¹⁹ More recent exegetes have understood the term *ḥukm* as political power or authority, e.g. Ibn ‘Āshūr.²⁰ Richard Bell in his commentary was also open to this possibility.²¹

These two possibilities are not mutually exclusive. Ghāmidī suggests that *ḥukm* refers to “that *ability* and *power* that these ancients possessed to some degree or another, and on the basis of which they had the opportunity to decide all affairs relating to individual and social spheres in accordance with God’s scripture” (my emphasis).²² Examining these verses in light of parallel passages supports this reading. First, the *kitāb/ḥukm/nubuwwah* grouping occurs once in reference to Jesus (Q 3:79), and the *kitāb/ḥukm* combination once in reference to John the Baptist (Q 19:12). In neither case can *ḥukm* mean worldly power, as neither Jesus nor John are characterised in the Qur’an as having been in a position of worldly authority during their ministry, and indeed John is described as still being a child when endowed with

¹⁷ Horovitz made the intriguing suggestion that the *kitāb, ḥukm, nubuwwah* grouping represents the Hebrew Bible’s Ketuvim, Law/Torah, and Nevi’im division (which, when ordered correctly, gives us the acronym *Tanak*). *Koranische Untersuchung*, 73. Although El-Badawi supports this identification, he recognises that the order in which the triad is mentioned would be odd. “From Clerical to Scriptural Authority,” 85. A more fundamental problem with this suggestion is that the Qur’an just as frequently pairs two of this triad together without the third, precluding the possibility that the three represent a tightly bound unit of scriptural repository. Thus, *kitāb* and *nubuwwah* alone are mentioned in Q 29:27 and 57:26, and *kitāb* and *ḥukm* alone are paired in Q 19:12.

¹⁸ Muqātil, *Tafsīr Muqātil*, 1:574 (ad Q 6:89).

¹⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 9:387 (ad Q 6:89).

²⁰ Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr*, 25:345 (ad Q 45:16).

²¹ Bell, *A Commentary on the Qur’ān*, 2:260.

²² Ghāmidī, *al-Bayān*, 2:61 (ad Q 6:89).

ḥukm. On the other hand, in Sūrat al-Mā'idah the *kitāb/ḥukm/nubuwwah* triplet is tellingly adjusted:

When Moses said to his people, "O my people, remember God's blessing upon you when He appointed prophets among you, and made you kings, and gave you what He did not give to any of the nations." (Q 5:20)

The final phrase, "what He did not give to any of the nations," almost certainly refers to the *kitāb*.²³ In addition, we have a clear overlap with between the phrase "He appointed prophets among you" and the *nubuwwah* part of the aforementioned triplet. The significant difference is that in Q 5:20, in place of *ḥukm*, we have a reference to the Israelites' sovereignty, "... and made you kings (*mulūk*)." This parallel text suggests an equation between *ḥukm* and *mulk*, which in turn suggests that *ḥukm* in the *kitāb/ḥukm/nubuwwah* triplet has meaning (d) above.

Several other verses also ascribe *ḥukm* to individual prophetic figures. As Madigan has noted, there is a strong correlation between *ḥukm* and *'ilm* ("knowledge," presumably of revelation) in the Qur'an.²⁴ Prophets to whom God gives both are Joseph (Q 12:22), Lot (Q 21:74), Solomon (Q 21:79), and Moses (Q 28:14; see also Q 26:21, where only *ḥukm* is mentioned). Additionally, Abraham prays for *ḥukm* in Q 26:83. *Ḥukm* may be granted at the attainment of maturity, as for Joseph and Moses, or in childhood, as with John the Baptist. None of these three were in a position of power or judicial authority at the point in the narrative where

²³ See Goudarzi, "The Second Coming of the Book," chap. 2, for a comprehensive documentation of the Qur'an's repeated emphasis on the uniqueness of the Israelites among all the nations (prior to Muhammad) as recipients of the *kitāb*.

²⁴ Madigan, *The Qur'ân's Self-Image*, 105, 145–151. See also Goudarzi, "The Second Coming of the Book," 273–275.

they are granted *ḥukm*. If, as seems likely, *‘ilm* refers to revelation,²⁵ then *ḥukm* is plausibly understood as “sound judgement” or “understanding” of the revelatory knowledge that is being vouchsafed to the prophetic figure.

Given that the recipients of *ḥukm* include both Israelite prophets (in addition to the Prophet Muhammad – see below) and the Israelites more broadly, the most convincing explanation of the *kitāb* (=Torah), *nubuwwah*, and *ḥukm* grouping is that offered by Goudarzi, namely that it is shorthand for the “prophetic heritage of Israelites,” the legacy that subsequent generations of Israelites inherit from their forefathers.²⁶ As we saw above, this evidently includes both the ability to judge by scripture, and the authority to do so.

Goudarzi’s reading of the *kitāb/nubuwwah/ḥukm* triplet as demarking a particularly Israelite heritage explains the locution “an Arabic *ḥukm*” in Q 13:37, which is now uniquely given to the Prophet, the implication being that this *ḥukm* was previously in a foreign language. The passage reads:

³⁶ Those whom We have given scripture (*al-kitāb*) rejoice in what has been sent down to you. But among the factions (*al-aḥzāb*) are those who deny a part of it. Say, “Indeed I have been commanded to worship God and not to associate (a partner) (*ushrika*) with Him. To Him do I call and to Him will be my return.”
³⁷ For this reason²⁷ We have sent it down as an Arabic decree (*ḥukm*). Yet should you [singular] follow their desires after the knowledge (*‘ilm*) that has come to you [singular], you [singular] shall have against God neither any guardian nor any defender. (Q 13:36–37)

²⁵ Goudarzi, “The Second Coming of the Book,” 274–275.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 182, 194–198 (quotation from p. 198).

²⁷ The verse begins with *ka-dhālika*, almost universally translated as “thus.” The particle *ka*, however, can be used for *ta’īl* (justification, which I believe is the intended use here) as well as *tashbīh* (comparison, which is the usual sense of the particle) – see n. 4. Ibn Hishām rejects the view that when used in the former sense, the particle must be followed by *mā*. *Mughnī al-labīb*, 3:7–8. Both Iṣlāḥī and Ghāmidī accept the *ta’īl* use here. Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur-i Qur’ān*, 4:296, and Ghāmidī, *al-Bayān*, 2:591. In context, it is difficult to understand the *tashbīh* sense of *ka-dhālika* here.

The “factions” (*aḥzāb*) referred to in v. 36 are certainly the *mushrikūn*, as shown by their contrast with those who have scripture (for similar contrasts see, e.g., Q 2:105; 3:186; 98:1, 6), and by the fact that the Prophet is told to respond to them by averring that he has been commanded not to commit *shirk*.²⁸ To paraphrase vv. 36–37, then, there are communities who already possess a *kitāb* – and thus the *ḥukm* associated with it – in their own language, and now that *ḥukm* is being revealed to the Arabian Prophet.²⁹ This is in keeping with several other verses that recognize the uniqueness of an Arabic scripture being sent down to those who have not previously received the guidance of revelation (e.g., Q 12:2).

2.2.3. The Difference between *ḥukm* and *ḥikmah*

As we have seen, one of the meanings of *ḥukm* does indeed come close to “wisdom,” and the Qur’an combines *kitāb* and *ḥukm* just as it combines *kitāb* and *ḥikmah*. It is not surprising that scholars both classical and modern have taken an interest in the relationship between *ḥukm* and *ḥikmah*. As we saw in chapter 1, Muqātil in his *al-Wujūh wa-l-naẓā’ir* uses a verse that mentions *ḥukm* to illustrate one of the possible meanings of *ḥikmah*, thus freely interchanging between the two, and defining both as *fahm wa-’ilm* (“understanding and knowledge”).³⁰ Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī surmises that every *ḥikmah* is a *ḥukm*, but not the reverse.³¹ Abū Bakr al-Sijistānī proposes that the relationship between the two terms is part of a pattern in

²⁸ This is also the opinion of Muqātil, *Tafsīr Muqātil*, 2:382. See also Sinai, *Key Terms*, s.v. “*ummī*.”

²⁹ Note that although *ḥukm* in Q 13:37 has a different meaning to the *ḥukm* that is given to Joseph (Q 12:22), Lot (Q 21:74), Solomon (Q 21:79), and Moses (Q 28:14) – viz., in Q 13:37 it means decree, whereas for the other prophets it means sound judgement –, nonetheless a clear continuity between Muhammad and the earlier prophets who were given *ḥukm* is established though the *ḥukm* and *’ilm* pairing common to all of these verses.

³⁰ Muqātil, *al-Wujūh wa-l-naẓā’ir*, 73–74.

³¹ Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Mufradāt*, 249.

which the *fu'l* and *fi'lah* morphological paradigms are synonymous, such as *dhull* and *dhillah* (“humiliation”), *khubr* and *khibrāh* (“experience”), *qull* and *qillah* (“paucity”), *bughḍ* and *bighḍah* (“hatred”).³² In modern scholarship, Horovitz concludes that *ḥukm* is used with the same meaning as *ḥikmah*, either having acquired this meaning after *ḥikmah* was adopted into Arabic as a foreign loan word, and exerted cognate pressure on *ḥukm*, or else being a more direct borrowing from the Aramaic *ḥukmā*, “wisdom.”³³ Madigan also equates *ḥikmah* with *ḥukm*, on the basis of their separate collocation with *kitāb*.³⁴

To my knowledge, only al-Farāhī has attempted to linguistically distinguish *ḥukm*, where it has the sense of “sound judgement/understanding/intellect,” from *ḥikmah*. He defines the former as “the beginning of wisdom ..., and when that [*ḥukm*] reaches completion, and becomes a firmly established quality, it is called *ḥikmah*.”³⁵ Although al-Farāhī provides no philological evidence for his view, there does seem to be Qur’anic support for such a distinction. Consistently, it is *ḥukm* rather than *ḥikmah* that the prophets are given upon reaching maturity (Joseph in Q 12:22, Moses in Q 28:14), and again it is *ḥukm* that John the Baptist is given in young age (Q 19:12) rather than *ḥikmah*. By contrast, wherever the Qur’an wishes to indicate a great measure of wisdom, it uses *ḥikmah*, e.g., *ḥikmah bālighah*, “far-reaching wisdom” (Q 54:5), and the description of *ḥikmah* as *khayran kathīran*, “much good” (Q 2:269).

³² Abū Bakr al-Sijistānī, *Nuzhat al-qulūb*, 81.

³³ Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, 72.

³⁴ Madigan, *The Qur’ān’s Self-Image*, 93.

³⁵ Al-Farāhī, *Mufradāt al-Qur’ān*, 279.

Whether or not we accept any of the proposed definitions or functions of qur'anic *ḥukm* discussed above, it remains the case that when specific prophets are mentioned as recipients of either *ḥukm* or *ḥikmah*, we see a tightly controlled and well-ordered discourse. *Ḥikmah* is consistently and exclusively associated with post-Mosaic recipients of scripture, viz., Jesus, David, and Muhammad. *Ḥukm*, on the other hand, as we have seen, is part of the broader Israelite prophetic legacy, and thus associated with several of the Israelite prophets, as well as the Israelites more generally. This alone, I believe, provides a sufficiently strong case for separating out the study of *ḥikmah* from *ḥukm*. But before we get to qur'anic wisdom, in the following chapter we will consider the historical context in which the Qur'an was proclaimed, and what the communities of late antiquity might have understood by "wisdom."

CHAPTER 3

Where is Wisdom to Be Found

3.1. INTRODUCTION

In 1973, a seminar was held at the University of Notre Dame with the aim of exploring the role of wisdom in late antiquity. In the Introduction to the volume that resulted from that conference, Robert Wilken noted that “the significance of wisdom for the religious history of late antiquity has emerged slowly.”¹ It is worth quoting from Wilken’s summary of the results of the seminar:

We learned that wisdom ... is an extraordinary cross-cultural phenomenon and could be found in different forms in all the religious currents of late antiquity.... “Wisdom literature seems always to have been an accepted intercultural and interethnic coinage, appropriated as religiously neutral and non-committal.”²

Conspicuously absent from the published proceedings of the seminar is any chapter on qur’anic wisdom and its relationship to its late antique antecedents. This has continued to be a glaring lacuna in the exploration of biblical wisdom and its legacy.³ It is the aim of this study to begin to fill that gap.

In the present chapter, I present an overview of various biblical and late antique wisdom discourses, and the journey of wisdom from the Bible to the qur’anic milieu.⁴

¹ Wilken, “Introduction,” xv. See also Ticciati, “Wisdom in Patristic Interpretation,” 187.

² Wilken, “Introduction,” xx.

³ A recent publication, *The Oxford Handbook of Wisdom and the Bible*, edited by Will Keynes, examines wisdom in the Bible and other ancient Near Eastern civilisations and communities, including in early Jewish literature, rabbinic literature, and patristic writings. The volume has a welcome inclusion on “Wisdom in the Qur’an and the Islamic Tradition” by U. Isra Yazicioglu (see chapter 1). Its examination of the term *ḥikmah* in the Qur’an and of the relevant passages is useful, but is at a survey level, and does not attempt to connect the passages to wisdom discourses in late antiquity. I am grateful to several contributors to this volume who provided me with pre-publication proofs of their chapters.

⁴ One could of course start the journey further back and consider the impact of the ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature on the Bible. This is unlikely to be as useful as biblical and Judaeo-Christian wisdom discourses for contextualising qur’anic *ḥikmah*. The literature on Biblical wisdom and its antecedents is vast. A

Several of the ideas introduced here are directly relevant to one or more of the *ḥikmah* pericopes to be examined, and so will receive a fuller treatment in the chapters to come, as will be indicated. This is not intended to be a comprehensive introduction to wisdom.⁵ Rather, I aim only to present the main texts and themes of biblical and late antique wisdom discourse that I believe are particularly relevant for understanding qur'anic *ḥikmah*.

As I suggested in chapter 1, one of the primary dilemmas relating to wisdom discourse within a scriptural tradition is what the relationship between wisdom and divinely revealed scripture ought to be. If people can attain wisdom that enables them to discern how best to live their lives, what is the purpose of scripture? This question is most pertinent for our study, and is a useful entry point for many of the wisdom texts we will consider. A further concern, as we will see, is how wisdom is to be attained. Is it through human effort, and is thus, at least potentially, universally accessible, or is it divinely bestowed upon an elite? We will return to this question later in this chapter.

As we will see, the Bible itself grapples with the relationship between human wisdom and divine revelation. Attempts to resolve the tension are not unique to scriptural texts. Plato in essence addresses the same problem in what has come to be known as the Euthyphro dilemma: “Is that which is holy loved by the gods because it is holy, or is it holy because it is loved by the gods?” (*Euthyphr.* 10a).⁶ As Christine Hayes has meticulously documented, various discourses within the Graeco-Roman philosophical and legal tradition,

good starting point is McLaughlin, *An Introduction to Israel's Wisdom Traditions*, 11–24. Regarding the journey of wisdom as presented here, there is a case to be made that wisdom texts should be grouped and presented by similarity rather than chronologically or by degree of canonicity within the Bible. See Zurawski, “Wisdom and Apocalypticism,” 253–255. I have nonetheless opted for a broadly chronological presentation, in order to retain subheading categories more familiar to Qur'anic Studies scholars. Furthermore, most introductions to biblical wisdom still utilise the categories employed here, and I believe this remains not only pragmatic, but generates broadly coherent text groupings.

⁵ For introductory works on wisdom, see n. 23.

⁶ Crowe, *The Changing Profile of the Natural Law*, 14–15.

and in particular the Stoics, effectively answered the dilemma with the former of the two alternatives.⁷ Right and wrong, according to these discourses, are not the will of a divine sovereign, but are a *natural* part of the universe, mentally perceptible by rational human beings, and this natural law is anterior to any legal code, being “a rational order that is unwritten, universal, eternal, and unchanging.”⁸ Hayes argues that it was the shared discourse between biblical wisdom and Graeco-Roman natural law that enabled some early Jewish writers, and Christian writers throughout late antiquity, to embrace natural law.⁹ We will revisit this point in chapter 7, where we will examine specific evidence for biblical wisdom being a gateway to the adoption of natural law.

We can understand rabbinic and Christian wisdom discourses as attempts to grapple with the dilemma of how to relate natural law / wisdom to divine law, with starkly different outcomes: as we will see, the rabbis reduced biblical wisdom to divinely proclaimed positive law, while the church fathers invoked wisdom, or more usually the natural law with which wisdom came to be identified, as the filter that would determine which laws from the Hebrew Bible were still relevant for Christians. Thus, broadly speaking, the rabbis effectively privileged law over wisdom, and the Christians the reverse. I will argue that the Qur’an is much closer to the Christian understanding.¹⁰ Indeed, the Qur’an goes further. Whereas for the church fathers natural law was a convenient means by which to deal with the legislative

⁷ Hayes, *What’s Divine about Divine Law*, 54–89. This is not to say that the Stoics were directly responding to Plato’s dialogue, of course. Furthermore, the Stoics in fact denied the platonic and middle-platonic variant of moral realism, even though they agreed on the existence of a universal natural law – for the Stoics, this universal natural law does not have a mind-independent existence in abstract Platonic forms. *Ibid.*, 58–59.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 94–139. See also Legaspi, “Wisdom in Dialogue with Greek Civilization,” 157.

¹⁰ It is true that the Qur’an proclaims much positive law, but this is not inconsistent with a commitment to natural law. Indeed, as Holger Zellentin has shown, from the apostolic era throughout late antiquity many Christians similarly were committed to both a legal-cum-ritualistic code (albeit one that was significantly more limited than that of the rabbis) alongside an affirmation of natural law. See Zellentin, *The Qur’an’s Legal Culture*; *idem*, “Gentile Purity Law from the Bible to the Qur’an”; *idem*, “Law in the Medinan Qur’an”; *idem*, *Law as Literature*, Introduction.

content of the “Old Testament,” while avoiding the Marcionite heresy of dismissing the Hebrew scripture altogether as the work of an inferior deity,¹¹ for the Qur’an the relationship between *ḥikmah* and law includes the former’s proper connection to the Qur’an’s *own* laws, rather than those of a previous dispensation. As I will show, the Qur’an requires even that its own laws be understood through the filter of *ḥikmah*.

As well as summarising below the wisdom discourses connected to the biblical tradition, I will introduce two discourses that are independent of the Bible: philosophical wisdom and the indigenous Arabian wisdom tradition. The latter is clearly relevant for our investigation. The relevance of philosophical wisdom for understanding and contextualising qur’anic *ḥikmah* is more difficult to determine. However, as I hope to show, there are some intriguing indications that elements of Greek philosophy, and more particularly Stoicism, the Hellenistic school that most enthusiastically embraced natural law, were circulating among Syriac-speaking Christians prior to the rise of Islam. This raises the possibility that these ideas directly or indirectly found their way into the qur’anic milieu and shaped the meaning of qur’anic *ḥikmah*. But before we begin examining wisdom discourses, as I have now already used the term natural law several times, and as it will resurface periodically throughout this study, it would be well to try to define it and assess the appropriateness of the expression for our investigation.

3.2. NATURAL LAW, NATURAL MORALITY

Attempting to define “natural law” runs into a very basic problem: what is understood by the expression has evolved considerably from antiquity to late antiquity, then to the

¹¹ For a brief summary of Marcionism and its relationship to other forms of early Christianity, and how the Marcionite challenge was a catalyst for other Christians to try to determine how to hold on to the Hebrew Bible, see Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*, 37–45.

medieval era, and finally to modernity. Indeed, as we will see below, there is considerable diversity and unclarity within any given time as to the expression's precise meaning.

The concept of natural law can be traced back to the ancient Greek dramatists and philosophers. Michael Crowe, in his excellent overview of the development of natural law, notes that the *locus classicus* that "has been cited by almost every writer on the natural law since Aristotle" is Sophocles's (490–405 BCE) play *Antigone*.¹² The protagonist's brother, Polynices, has attacked his home city Thebes in league with a foreign power, the Argives. As punishment, Creon the king of Thebes declares at the start of the play that Polynices's body is to be denied burial rights. Antigone, having defied the king's decree and buried her brother, makes an impassioned plea for the correctness of her actions:

Creon: You dared disobey the laws (*nomous*)?
Antigone: It was not Zeus who published this decree,
 Nor have the Powers that rule among the dead
 Imposed such laws as these among mankind;
 Nor could I think that a decree of yours –
 A man – could override the laws (*nomima*) of the gods
 Unwritten and unchanging. Not of today
 Or yesterday is their authority;
 They are eternal; no man saw their birth. (*Ant.* 449–457)

This encapsulates well the central theme of the play: the contrast between the laws of men and the laws of the gods. The former are praised by the chorus, but, as Creon himself eventually acknowledges, are necessarily subservient to the unwritten and eternal laws. Note that while Sophocles uses the phrase "laws of the gods" rather than "law of nature," the two were synonymous for the Stoics.¹³

¹² Crowe, *The Changing Profile of the Natural Law*, 6. For Sophocles's *Antigone*, I have used the 1994 translation by Kitto with slight modifications.

¹³ Hayes, *What's Divine about Divine Law*, 55.

As Eric Brown points out, Antigone does not indicate how she knows what the laws of the gods are.¹⁴ Plausibly, it could be through observation of universally accepted customs, or simple moral intuition. The lack of clarity we noted earlier regarding the meaning of the expression “natural law” thus stretches back to the origins the concept itself. Briefly, we may distinguish three senses of how the phrase came to be used:¹⁵

- (1) In its “classical” formulation, which found its fullest expression in the writings of the Stoics, it is synonymous with the laws of nature, which latter provide the norms in accordance with which one ought to live. Nature being an expression of divine will, natural law is thus both rational (and hence rationally discoverable) and of universal validity – it is the same for all people, at all times.
- (2) In its “moral” formulation, which represents a turn in the use of the phrase that starts with Cicero, Philo,¹⁶ and the church fathers, it refers to the dictates of innate human moral reasoning, the moral nature of the human being now providing the norms in accordance with which one ought to live;
- (3) In its “legal” formulation, it refers to those laws that alone are legally binding on human beings as a result of their cohering with a set of moral principles that transcend the legal realm.

¹⁴ Brown, “The Emergence of Natural Law,” 335–336.

¹⁵ Particularly useful for understanding the differing and evolving sense of natural law are Brown, “The Emergence of Natural Law”; Murphy and Coleman, *Philosophy of Law*, 11–19 (although the authors do not distinguish what I call the moral formulation of natural law from the classical formulation); Weinreb, *Natural Law and Justice*, esp. chap. 1; Crowe, *The Changing Profile of the Natural Law*, chaps. 1–3; Hayes, *What’s Divine about Divine Law*, chap. 2; Flückiger, *Geschichte des Naturrechtes*.

¹⁶ For Philo’s underappreciated role in the development of natural law, see Horsley, “The Law of Nature in Philo and Cicero.”

With this background in mind, a few basic observations will be useful by way of introduction to the remainder of this chapter. Patristic writers, from the very earliest writings (i.e., those of the apostolic fathers and the apologists), enthusiastically embraced natural law. Further, it is reasonably clear that what they intended by the phrase is what I have referred to as the moral formulation of natural law, i.e., a universal and unchanging moral law grounded in human nature, which has thus been common to all humanity since Adam. This understanding of natural law continues in late antiquity among both the Syriac and Greek fathers. We will explore patristic attitudes to natural law in greater detail in chapter 7.

Although the rabbis do not mention the phrase, they clearly polemicise against and resist various aspects of what natural law was understood to mean in late antiquity, including that it should be rational and grounded in nature.¹⁷ In other words, they reject what I have called natural law in its classical formulation. This does not however mean that the rabbis reject the idea that *halakhah* should conform to our moral sensibility. Indeed, it is clear that they frequently use their position as the gatekeeping interpreters of the biblical text to ensure that the latter is interpreted in a morally acceptable manner, with morally unacceptable biblical laws interpreted so as to align the derived law with the rabbis' own

¹⁷ For a detailed analysis of rabbinic opposition to natural law, see Hayes, "The Rabbinic Construction of Divine Law," in *What's What's* ¹⁸ See Hayes, *What's Divine about Divine Law*, 318–320, citing Moshe Halbertal's Hebrew work *Interpretive Revolutions in the Making*. Hayes argues that there are instances, highlighted by Dov Weiss, in which the rejection of morally dubious laws is not through the hermeneutic of privileging some legal texts over others, but rather through a plain morally grounded rejection of the laws and challenging God in relation to them. Hayes interprets these as instances of *phronesis*, or practical reasoning, rather than natural law. See Hayes, *What's Divine about Divine Law*, 320–326. We should note however that, firstly, the rabbinic texts that Weiss identifies in which the rabbis challenge God on moral grounds relate to narrative rather than legal passages. Secondly, the group of texts that he studies, the Tanḥuma-Yelammedenu, are very late, many reaching their final redacted form in the Islamic era. See Weiss, "Confrontations with God in Late Rabbinic Literature," 56–64.

moral leanings. However, it is crucial to note that such moral reasoning is presented as part of the legal system, rather than a critique of it. Morally dubious laws are not explicitly rejected, but rather the supposedly correct understanding of such laws is exegetically “discovered” in light of legal requirements imposed by other passages that in turn blunt or annul the legal effects of the former.¹⁸ Thus, the rabbinic rejection of natural law does not equate to an acceptance of the possibility of seemingly immoral laws. On the contrary, as the rabbis know that God would not command immoral actions, they have no need to posit a moral filter for the law outside of God’s commands.¹⁹

In a sense, then, the church fathers and the rabbis are talking past one another (to the extent they are in dialogue) when it comes to natural law, as their definitions of the latter are significantly at variance with one another. But this does not mean that a comparative analysis of the two discourses is not instructive, as the rabbis’ and church fathers’ attitudes to natural law (however defined) have clearly contrasting consequences for their attitude towards positive law. This is because natural law, however one might choose to understand it, presents itself as a measure against which any positive legal enactment may be judged. The rabbis, by rejecting the existence of such an external measure, effectively constrain law to the realm of what has been commanded. The church fathers, by accepting the existence

¹⁸ See Hayes, *What’s Divine about Divine Law*, 318–320, citing Moshe Halbertal’s Hebrew work *Interpretive Revolutions in the Making*. Hayes argues that there are instances, highlighted by Dov Weiss, in which the rejection of morally dubious laws is not through the hermeneutic of privileging some legal texts over others, but rather through a plain morally grounded rejection of the laws and challenging God in relation to them. Hayes interprets these as instances of *phronesis*, or practical reasoning, rather than natural law. See Hayes, *What’s Divine about Divine Law*, 320–326. We should note however that, firstly, the rabbinic texts that Weiss identifies in which the rabbis challenge God on moral grounds relate to narrative rather than legal passages. Secondly, the group of texts that he studies, the *Tanḥuma-Yelammedenu*, are very late, many reaching their final redacted form in the Islamic era. See Weiss, “Confrontations with God in Late Rabbinic Literature,” 56–64.

¹⁹ The insight that we need to distinguish between different conceptions of natural law when considering rabbinic attitudes is well made by Steinmetz, *Punishment and Freedom*, chap. 2, esp. 31–33. Statman makes the same point with regards to the broader debate of whether Judaism, including in its medieval formulations, can accommodate natural law. See Statman “Natural Law and Judaism.”

of an external measure, are able to justify the rejection of much of what had been previously divinely ordained (with varying explanations for why it was ordained in the first place), on the grounds that it is not derivable from natural law. Furthermore, the church fathers are able to focus more squarely on encouraging the inculcation of desirable moral qualities that they understand natural law imposes, rather than adherence to positive law.

As a final note, because of the imprecise and potentially misleading nature of the term, several scholars working in Biblical Studies have eschewed using the phrase “natural law,” and even criticised it as inappropriate for discussing biblical ethics, with many favouring as an alternative the phrase “natural morality.”²⁰ John Rogerson defines this as “a moral consensus of what was self-evidently just and right” to the community under discussion,²¹ and Barton emphasises its “contrast with an ethic of divine command or positive law.”²² In the present study, in order to avoid potential confusion, I shall henceforth use “natural law” only when discussing a passage in which the writer himself employs the term, otherwise “natural morality” will be the preferred term when discussing self-evident moral truths (or natural law in its moral formulation).

3.3. HEBREW BIBLE WISDOM

The term “wisdom literature” as a label for a supposedly distinctive genre of books in the Hebrew Bible dates back to the mid-nineteenth century.²³ Three books from the Hebrew

²⁰ Burnside continues to use the expression “natural law,” but explicitly avoids offering a precise definition. “Natural Law and Biblical Law,” 182. For the preference of the expression “natural morality” over “natural law,” see Barton, *Ethics in Ancient Israel*, 125–126; Rogerson, “Old Testament Ethics,” 117–118. A useful discussion of the dangers inherent in anachronistic uses of ethical terms (including “natural law”) to analyse pre-modern texts may be found in Paris, “An Ethicist’s Concerns about Biblical Ethics.” See also Rowe, “St. Paul and the Moral Law,” 26.

²¹ Rogerson, *Theory and Practice in Old Testament Ethics*, 16–17.

²² Barton, *Ethics in Ancient Israel*, 126.

²³ The earliest identification of a wisdom corpus within the Hebrew Bible seems to be Johann Bruch’s *Weisheits-Lehrer der Hebräer*, published in 1851. See Kynes, *An Obituary for “Wisdom Literature,”* 82–87. After gaining acceptability among Bible scholars, this “wisdom” genre was subsequently adopted by other scholars of the ancient Near East, including Egyptologists and Assyriologists. See Sneed, “Is the ‘Wisdom Tradition’ a

Bible fall under this category: Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes. A further two are from the Apocrypha: Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon (both of which I shall discuss in the following section).²⁴ What precisely unites these texts and makes them distinctive from texts outside of this genre can be difficult to define.²⁵ Most popular introductions to biblical wisdom, if they are not sceptical of the category altogether, draw on some combination of formal features and content to try to delineate the most typical characteristics of this genre. At the very least, we can say that biblical wisdom texts are united by a preoccupation with wisdom. The Hebrew term *ḥokmâ* or the Greek *sophia* in the Septuagint occur throughout these texts at a far higher frequency than is found outside these works.²⁶ Beyond that, praise of wisdom, often in the form of the personified quasi-divine figure of Lady Wisdom, is a key feature of three of the five texts: Proverbs (e.g., Prov 1–4, 8–9), Sirach (e.g., Sir 1, 24), and Wisdom of Solomon (e.g., Wis 6–11). These three are further comprised primarily of proverbial sayings that provide precepts for right living, an assurance that following such advice leads to prosperity, and warnings of dire consequences for choosing folly over wisdom.²⁷ These ideas exemplify what we might call “traditional Israelite wisdom.”²⁸ These books are written to teach about and inculcate wisdom in their readers, primarily through

Tradition?,” 57, n. 25. Almost two centuries of research has produced a vast library of secondary literature on Israelite wisdom traditions. The classic in the field, and still useful despite its age, is von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*. A fairly standard introduction remains Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*. For a more sceptical perspective, see Weeks, *An Introduction to the Study of Wisdom Literature*, and now Kynes, *An Obituary for “Wisdom Literature,”* which also provides a very useful history of the field. For the Hellenistic era, see Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*. A clear introductory overview is McLaughlin, *An Introduction to Israel’s Wisdom Traditions*, with recommended reading lists provided for each wisdom book and genre. The edited volume by Day, Gordon, and Williamson, *Wisdom in Ancient Israel*, includes a good collection of introductory essays on wisdom texts, their backgrounds, and wisdom related themes. The recently published handbooks edited by Adams and Goff, *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Wisdom Literature*, and edited by Kynes, *The Oxford Handbook of Wisdom and the Bible* (see n. 3), both promise to become standard reference works in the field.

²⁴ Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 5.

²⁵ Weeks, “Is ‘Wisdom Literature’ a Useful Category?,” 3; Kynes, *An Obituary for “Wisdom Literature,”* 100–104; Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 1.

²⁶ Weeks, *An Introduction to the Study of Wisdom Literature*, 1.

²⁷ Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 4; Adams, *Wisdom in Transition*, 1–6; Gregory, “Sirach/Ben Sira,” 91–92.

²⁸ Goff, “Qumran Wisdom Literature and the Problem of Genre,” 218–319, 328.

imparting sage advice, or exhorting the readers to consider the workings of nature themselves. The other two books in the Hebrew Bible wisdom collection, Job and Ecclesiastes, are often described as sceptical reactions to the core assertion of the traditional Israelite wisdom tradition that everyone gets their just deserts in this life. The suffering Job asks, “Why do the wicked live on, reach old age, and grow mighty in power?” (Job 21:7), and the author of Ecclesiastes, presenting himself as Solomon, declares, “I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind” (Eccl 1:14).²⁹

Returning to Proverbs, Sirach, and Wisdom of Solomon, it is important to note that they do not justify their precepts for right living by appeal to Mosaic Law, but rather derive the former from lived experience and observation of nature. In other words, the right way to live is presented as knowable not through revealed law, but through contemplation of the universe,³⁰ for example, “Go to the ant, you lazybones; consider its ways, and be wise” (Prov 6:6).³¹ In contrast to the divine revelation to a prophet, therefore, wisdom is available to all willing to seek her: “On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand; beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out” (Prov 8:2–3). (Proverbs 8 proved to be a rich source of speculation on wisdom among both rabbis and Christians – see below.)

²⁹ For a development of the sceptical tradition within biblical wisdom, see Schwienhorst-Schönberger, “Order: Wisdom, Retribution, and Skepticism”; Schellenberg, “Epistemology: Wisdom, Knowledge, and Revelation,” 34–37. I briefly consider elsewhere whether this sceptical wisdom tradition finds an echo in Q 38. The *sūrah*, with its central stories of David, Solomon, and Job, is already rich in wisdom themes. I argue that vv. 28–29, immediately prior to the Solomon pericope, may be a response to the sceptical wisdom associated with him. See Hussain, “The Function of David, Solomon and Job in Q 38.”

³⁰ Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 946–947.

³¹ See Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches*, 87–88, where he cites this as an example of natural law in the Hebrew Bible.

There are several questions that remain hotly debated in the study of biblical wisdom literature, apart from matters of definition. Prominent among them is whether there ever was a distinctive Israelite wisdom tradition at all, or whether “wisdom literature” is merely a scholarly construct.³² Such questions need not detain us. For our purpose, it is sufficient to note that there exists in the Hebrew Bible a particular wisdom *discourse* that is clearly distinct from the discourse of, for example, the Deuteronomistic history (i.e., the series of books Joshua through to Kings), which latter presents the history of Israel as a series of victories and disasters that correlate respectively with whether God’s Sinaitic covenant was being adhered to or not, rather than whether one was heeding the words of the wise and learning from nature’s example.³³ Elements of this wisdom discourse (viz., the notion that right and wrong are knowable through close attention to the human being, his worldly environment, and nature) bear striking resemblance, already in the Hebrew Bible, to natural law discourse, and indeed more broadly to natural theology discourses (the idea that God is knowable through His creation).³⁴

By considering wisdom discourse rather than so-called wisdom literature, we may also sidestep the difficult question of the extent to which this putative wisdom corpus or genre influenced the books that fall outside of it. Even if a given passage explicitly mentions

³² For a recent survey of the wisdom debate in Biblical Studies, see Kynes, *An Obituary for “Wisdom Literature,”* 25–59.

³³ This is recognised even by scholars sceptical of the usefulness of the “wisdom literature” category. Weeks specifically proposes that we abandon what he regards as a futile enquiry into some sort of shared and distinctive theology or ethics in biblical wisdom literature in favour of “thinking of our texts ... as the products of a particular mode of discourse – rather in the same way that an academic discipline offers certain formats and imposes certain concerns, conventions, and rules of engagement, without demanding specific views or conclusions.” *An Introduction to the Study of Wisdom Literature*, 126. See also Kynes, *An Obituary for “Wisdom Literature,”* 18. See also n. 37 below. A particularly forceful defence of the notion of a wisdom (or “sapiential”) discourse is given by Goff, “Qumran Wisdom Literature and the Problem of Genre,” esp. 327–329.

³⁴ The literature on this is vast, but particularly useful are the following: Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology*, esp. 90–94; Barton, *Ethics in Ancient Israel*, esp. 94–126; Gehman, “Natural Law and the Old Testament”; Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament*; Bockmuehl, “Natural Law in Second Temple Judaism,” in *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches*, 87–112. See also the collection of articles in *Semeia* 66 (1994).

hokmâ, the term has a wide range of meanings throughout the biblical corpus, including simply “skilful” or “knowledgeable” in some way³⁵ – its use may not be evoking the *hokmâ* of Proverbs. There was a temptation in older biblical scholarship to discover the influence of wisdom in a very wide array of biblical passages. This has significantly contributed to the scepticism voiced by some scholars regarding the usefulness of biblical wisdom as a category.³⁶ If we restrict ourselves to wisdom discourse, however, we may simply ask what any given passage says about wisdom, particularly as a mode of guidance distinct from divine revelation, rather than making any claims of it having been influenced by or being a response to other parts of the biblical corpus.

By focussing, then, on wisdom discourse, we can see that in several passages in the Hebrew Bible an attempt is made to address and resolve the aforementioned tension between wisdom and direct prophetic guidance. Strategies to navigate the two include attempts that seek to “sapientialise” the Law – i.e., present the Law as an instance of wisdom –, or alternatively to subordinate wisdom to the Law. For an example of the former, consider the excerpt from Deuteronomy below:

⁵ See, just as the Lord my God has charged me, I now teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to enter and occupy.

⁶ You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom (*hokmatkem*) and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, “Surely this great nation is a wise (*hākām*) and discerning people!” (Deut 4:5–6)

³⁵ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 32–33.

³⁶ Weeks, *An Introduction to the Study of Wisdom Literature*, 138; Kynes, *An Obituary for “Wisdom Literature,”* 31–37.

There is no question here of a conflict between Torah and wisdom; rather, the Torah is a clear manifestation of wisdom, so much so that foreign nations too will recognise it as such.³⁷

Other passages are not so accommodating to wisdom. General suspicion of wisdom may be seen, as Blenkinsopp has noted, in the several crises that engulf the house of David during his reign, and which can be traced back to the machinations of “wise men” acting as counsellors to the ruling family.³⁸ Of particular relevance here may be 2 Samuel 13, in which Jonadab, a very wise (*ḥākām*) man (2 Sam 13:3), devises a scheme which enables Amnon, David’s son, to rape his own half-sister Tamar. In Tamar’s desperate plea, “No, my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel” (v. 12), we may detect a contrast between what ought not to be done in Israel and what Jonadab’s wisdom nonetheless enables.³⁹

For the reasons mentioned above, it is difficult to know whether the passages that Blenkinsopp identifies are indeed grounded in and consciously engaging with traditional Israelite wisdom discourse. There is however one story in the Pentateuch that does seem to tackle the tension between the *ḥokmâ* of wisdom discourse and the Torah of Moses in a

³⁷ Hayes, *What’s Divine about Divine Law*, 28–30; Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament*, 118. More broadly, on the topic of the relationship between the Torah and wisdom in the Hebrew Bible, see Jackson, *Wisdom-laws*; Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*; Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament*. For a generalist but nonetheless very useful overview, see Barton, “Law and Wisdom,” in *A History of the Bible*, 60–88. There seems to be a clear scholarly trend in seeing wisdom and law as complementary, indeed overlapping categories. See Burnside, “Law and Wisdom Literature,” and the references he provides in section 3 of the chapter “Towards a Complementary Understanding of Law and Wisdom.” For the continuation of this relationship in the Second Temple period, see the various articles in Schipper and Teeter, *Wisdom and Torah*.

³⁸ Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament*, 6–7. Blenkinsopp also reads in the serpent’s description as being *’ārûm* (“crafty”) in Genesis 3:1 a critique of the dangers of wisdom, *’ārûm* being a relatively rare word, occurring outside Genesis exclusively in Proverbs (Prov 14:8, 15, 18; 22:3; 27:12), where it is a praiseworthy quality, and the Book of Job (Job 5:12; 15:5), both wisdom texts; *ibid.*, 8.

³⁹ For more on the Hebrew Bible’s suspicion of wisdom, see Hayes, *What’s Divine about Divine Law*, 40–41; Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 56.

relatively direct, albeit literarily subtle manner: the tale of Joseph in Egypt.⁴⁰ Of all the patriarchs, Joseph is uniquely described as “wise” (*hākām*) (Gen 41:8, 33, 39), and scholars starting with von Rad have identified several wisdom themes in the Genesis account of his rise to power in Egypt, such as Joseph’s controlling his passions from a foreign woman (Gen 39:8–10, cf. Prov 5), his becoming an adviser to the king (Gen 41, cf. Prov 22:29), and his forbearance with those who have wronged him (Gen 50:19–20, cf. Prov 24:29).⁴¹ As Wilson notes, the wisdom aspect of Joseph’s story seems to have been understood in antiquity, with both Psalm 105:22 and the pseudepigraphic *Joseph and Aseneth* (19:11; 21:21) presenting him as a teacher of wisdom.⁴²

As if to drive home how Joseph’s wisdom sets him apart from the rest of the patriarchs and is an alternative guiding force in his career, distinct from divine revelation, the narrative takes several well-established Genesis tropes and de-theologises them, such that they lose their connection with Yahweh established earlier in Genesis. Thus, whereas Abraham (Gen 15:12–13), Isaac (Gen 26:2), and Jacob (Gen 28:12–13; 46:2–4), as well as Abimelech (Gen 20:3, 6) and Laban (Gen 31:24), all have dreams in which the Lord appears to them (though admittedly Isaac’s dream is not explicitly said to be a vision of the Lord), Joseph dreams of his own rise to power (Gen 37:5–9), and later in the story Pharaoh dreams of the economic future of Egypt (Gen 41:1–5). Similarly, whereas the earlier patriarchs build

⁴⁰ I owe much of this analysis of Joseph’s story and its connection to wisdom to biblical study classes taken with Jan Joosten, and have not been able to trace his analysis to any secondary literature.

⁴¹ For the history of scholarship on reading the story of Joseph as an instance of wisdom literature, see Wilson, *Joseph, Wise and Otherwise*, 7–27, and McLaughlin, *An Introduction to Israel’s Wisdom Traditions*, 144. For opposition to reading the Joseph account as wisdom literature see Gordon, “A House Divided,” 96, esp. n. 16 for further references. The debate concerning the influences of the wisdom genre on Joseph’s story is a good reminder of the aforementioned point that we are not concerned here with identifying what does and does not count as wisdom influence. Rather, we are interested in wisdom *discourse*, in other words, what does the Hebrew Bible say about wisdom and in particular its relationship to law, regardless of the genre or form in which those statements occur.

⁴² Wilson, *Joseph, Wise and Otherwise*, 7.

altars to Yahweh at the place where they have visions of the divine (Gen 12:7; 13:18; 26:25; 35:7), Joseph builds grain stores on the basis of the dreams he interprets (Gen 41:48).⁴³

On the surface level, as it is clearly Joseph's wisdom that enables him to interpret dreams (Gen 41:1–40) and manage the affairs of Egypt so as to prevent the country from starvation (Gen 41:41–47; 47:13–25), it seems to be an unequivocally positive force. But a closer reading suggests that things are not quite so straightforward. In the earlier parts of Joseph's story, we are told by the narrator at several junctures that "the Lord was with Joseph." This refrain is repeated at key junctures in the story where Joseph, against all odds, rises in honour and status, viz., after his rise to being the head of Potiphar's house (Gen 39:2, 3), and again after his rise to becoming the head of the prisoners (Gen 39:21, 23). The phrase is conspicuously absent, however, once Joseph enters Pharaoh's service, Joseph's greatest rise in power and social standing.

Is there a suggestion here that Joseph's actions at the head of the Egyptian economy were lacking, in some way, of divine approval? As the story unfolds, and as the famine endures year after year, we see the Egyptians having to sell or give up more and more of their personal possessions in order to buy grain from Joseph (Gen 47:13–26). Eventually, they have nothing left to sell but their own freedom.⁴⁴ Joseph's wisdom has brought him, his family, and Pharaoh great wealth and power, but it has cost the Egyptians their liberty. That the narrative is ambivalent here about Joseph's wisdom is evidenced by the fact that the precedent set by the slavery of the Egyptians will ultimately prove to be disastrous for the

⁴³ There is an interesting connection here with the qur'anic Joseph story, which also features this same de-theologising of significant qur'anic terms, e.g., among many, *ḍalāl* (vv. 8, 95), *ṣāliḥ* (v. 9), *mu'min* (v. 17), and *rabb* (vv. 23, 41–42, 50). See Silverstein, "Joseph." See also n. 45 below.

⁴⁴ The Egyptians' apparent gratitude for their newly enslaved status should probably be understood as sarcastic, "You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be slaves to Pharaoh" (Gen 47:25). An alternative way to read this phrase would be that the Egyptians truly were grateful for their slave status (see Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 449). In light of the brutal portrayal of Israelite slavery under the Egyptian pharaoh, the latter seems to be a less plausible reading.

Israelites. Immediately after the Joseph story, which had ended in the enslavement of the local Egyptians and the accumulation of unchecked centralised power for Pharaoh, Exodus begins with a new Pharaoh enslaving the Israelites (Exod 1:8–14). Thus, Joseph’s wisdom ultimately proves to be double-edged: he is able to save the Egyptians from starvation, but in the process sets in motion a series of events which culminates in the enslavement of the Israelites. What is noteworthy is that the Israelites, who were enslaved following Joseph’s unchecked use of wisdom, will come to be rescued by the quintessential law-bearing prophet, Moses. Furthermore, as part of his rescue efforts, Moses defeats the wise men (*ḥākāmîm*) of Pharaoh’s court.

We should note that a connection between the Joseph and Moses stories is made in Genesis 50:25 and Exodus 1:19, where in the former passage Joseph, near the end of his life, expresses his desire to have his bones returned to the land of his fathers, and in the latter passage his wish is fulfilled by Moses. The two stories are thus clearly linked in the biblical narrative, and present a unified critique of human wisdom and a reflection on the relationship between Torah and *ḥokmâ*.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ This is another point of connection with the qur’anic Joseph story (see n. 43): like the Genesis-Exodus account, the Qur’an makes a literary connection between Moses and Joseph. In the case of the Qur’an, this is achieved through several narrative overlaps in their respective stories – see Witztum, “The Syriac Milieu of the Quran,” 281–292. One such overlap is in the near identical verses describing the two, Q 12:22 (concerning Joseph) and 28:14 (Moses): “When he came of age (*wa-lammā balagha ashuddahu*) ... We gave him judgement and knowledge (*ātaynāhu ḥukman wa-’ilman*).” Thus, both Joseph and Moses are recipients, if not of *ḥikmah* in the Qur’an, then of the related *ḥukm* (see chapter 2). A clear point of divergence between the biblical and qur’anic accounts of Joseph and Moses, then, is that in the Qur’an Moses is not presented as undoing the damage done to the Israelites by Joseph’s wisdom. Rather, the parallel presentation of their lives serves to equate the two, in what may be a polemical corrective. On this technique generally, see Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 13; Sinai, *Historical-Critical Introduction*, 204–205, and also 142–143). (The Qur’an uses the same technique in Sūrat Maryam to present Jesus as just one in a line of prophets, and thus to challenge the Christian notion of Jesus as the culmination of Israelite salvation history; see Sinai, *Historical-Critical Introduction*, 85–86. See also Ghaffar, *Der Koran in seinem religions- und weltgeschichtlichen Kontext*, 27–53, for how the background presence of the Temple in Sūrat Maryam also serves this polemical purpose.) I admit that I find these points of convergence in the biblical and qur’anic Joseph accounts intriguing (viz., the de-theologising motif and the apparent polemical corrective in the relationship between Joseph and Moses), and it is possible that the Qur’an is hereby reacting against the negative portrayal of the role of wisdom in the Joseph story. Further research is required into how the figures of Joseph and Moses related to each other in late antiquity to fully appreciate the implications of these observations.

3.4. DEUTEROCANONICAL WISDOM

The question of what the appropriate relationship between Torah and *ḥokmâ* should be gains urgency in the deuterocanonical wisdom texts, Sirach (also called Ben Sira, especially when referring to the author rather than the text) and the Wisdom of Solomon. This urgency can be understood in light of the Hellenistic cultural and political landscape under which these books were produced.⁴⁶ At the forefront of the Greek challenge to Judaism was the question of the nature of law. As outlined above, Graeco-Roman discourse on divine law was that it is, above all else, rational, epitomised in the Stoic notion of natural law. Furthermore, this divine/natural law, being unwritten and unchanging, was necessarily distinct from the written laws of nations, which could only attempt to uphold the justice and equity demanded by natural law.⁴⁷ Jewish responses to this Graeco-Roman discourse were expressed in terms of the relationship between *ḥokmâ/sophia* and the written Torah.⁴⁸

Ben Sira accepts that wisdom is indeed not limited to scripture, for God “poured her out upon all his works” (Sir 1:9). Nonetheless, unlike Proverbs, in Sirach we may discern a clear move away from a universally accessible wisdom. Ben Sira expressly claims wisdom as Israel’s own heritage:

“Then the Creator of all things gave me a command,
and my Creator chose the place for my tent.
He said, ‘Make your dwelling in Jacob,
and in Israel receive your inheritance.’” (Sir 24:8)

⁴⁶ Gregory, “Sirach/Ben Sira,” 87–88; Chesnutt, “Wisdom of Solomon,” 108–109. More broadly, on the importance of the Hellenistic background for both early Jewish and Christian literature, see Hayes, “Were the Noahide Commandments Formulated at Yavne,” 226–229.

⁴⁷ Hayes, *What’s Divine about Divine Law*, 62–70.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 40–41; eadem, “Were the Noahide Commandments Formulated at Yavne,” 225–229; Mclaughlin, *An Introduction to Israel’s Wisdom Traditions*, 128–129. See also n. 37.

Locating wisdom in Israel leads Ben Sira to address the issue of what the appropriate relationship between wisdom and Torah ought to be. After an extended praise for wisdom in Sirach 24, reminiscent of Lady Wisdom's song in Proverbs 8, Ben Sira continues:

²³ All this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God,
the law that Moses commanded us
as an inheritance for the congregations of Jacob.

²⁵ It overflows, like the Pishon, with wisdom,
and like the Tigris at the time of the first fruits.

...

³³ "I will again pour out teaching like prophecy,
and leave it to all future generations."

Although Ben Sira does not go so far as to equate wisdom with Torah, it is clear that for him Torah, or more generally Israelite prophecy, is the ultimate repository of true wisdom, or its highest expression. What more one might say regarding the relationship between Torah and wisdom in Sirach is still contested: perhaps Ben Sira intends "a nationalization of wisdom (as per Martin Hengel) or a universalization of Torah (as per John Collins)," ⁴⁹ or perhaps he "viewed universal wisdom as a natural revelation granted to all humanity and Torah as a special wisdom bestowed only upon Israel."⁵⁰ In any case, it seems that explaining the relationship between the two had become critical in Ben Sira's day.

If there is any doubt that Ben Sira is motivated by responding to Hellenistic notions of divine law, a consideration of the youngest biblical wisdom book, the Wisdom of Solomon, demonstrates clearly that Greek philosophical ideas were being addressed in the wisdom literature of the time.⁵¹ As Collins puts it,

⁴⁹ Rosen-Zvi, "The Wisdom Tradition in Rabbinic Literature," 180 (with references in n. 33).

⁵⁰ Tropper, "Wisdom in Rabbinic Interpretation," 206 (with references in n. 3). See also Gregory, "Sirach/Ben Sira," 93–94.

⁵¹ Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 60–61.

the author of the Wisdom of Solomon found his common ground with Greek philosophy in the idea of wisdom. In the Book of Proverbs wisdom had already been spoken of as the first of the works of the Lord and had been given a role in the process of creation. Ben Sira had gone further, identifying it with the Law. In the Wisdom of Solomon the idea of wisdom is developed with a philosophical vocabulary that was simply not available to the Hebrew writers. Much of this vocabulary is Stoic, and it serves to associate wisdom with the Logos or Pneuma, which the Stoics envisaged as a world soul, “a breath pervading the whole world.”⁵²

Somewhat ironically, this increasing significance given to wisdom in Sirach and then in the Wisdom of Solomon is matched by an equally increasing insistence that it is only Israel in which true wisdom is to be found. Thus, although the Wisdom of Solomon is teeming with ideas borrowed from Greek philosophy, including natural law,⁵³ it is unclear whether the author believes that humans can attain this wisdom without divine grace. Whereas in Proverbs wisdom’s call is to anyone willing to listen (Prov 8:2–3), in the Wisdom of Solomon, despite its more direct engagement and adoption of Greek philosophical ideas, it may be that any knowledge of God is impossible without revelation, “for the reasoning of mortals is worthless” (Wis 9:14).⁵⁴

One further development in the Wisdom of Solomon is of particular significance. Following the assurance in Proverbs that “waywardness kills the simple, and the complacency of fools destroys them; but those who listen to me will be secure and will live at ease, without dread of disaster” (Prov 1:32–33), writers in Israel’s wisdom genre had struggled with theodicy.⁵⁵ The Wisdom of Solomon is the first text in the wisdom genre to invoke an afterlife: the good may appear to suffer now, but will be vindicated in their life

⁵² Collins, “Natural Theology and Biblical Tradition,” 4. See also *idem*, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 229–232; Chesnutt, “Wisdom of Solomon,” 112–114.

⁵³ Chesnutt, “Wisdom of Solomon,” 116, 118.

⁵⁴ For the mixed evidence, see Collins, “Natural Theology and Biblical Tradition,” 5–6; *idem*, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 218–221; Chesnutt, “Wisdom of Solomon,” 117.

⁵⁵ See n. 29.

after death (e.g., “The righteous who have died will condemn the ungodly who are living, and youth that is quickly perfected will condemn the prolonged old age of the unrighteous,” Wis 4:16).⁵⁶ This fusion of wisdom and apocalypticism is a major trend in early Jewish literature, to which we now turn.

3.5. WISDOM IN EARLY JEWISH LITERATURE

Just as the wisdom genre predates the Bible, so wisdom texts and wisdom discourse continued to be produced by Jews (and Christians) beyond the biblical corpus. Some of the works are straightforwardly modelled after Proverbs, such as some of the wisdom texts that have been discovered at Qumran, Pseudo-Phocylides, and the Sentences of Syriac Menander. We shall have an opportunity to consider such texts in chapters 7 and 8. The latter two are part of a genre of texts known as gnomologia (see also below), which represent a fusion of Hellenistic and biblical styles of maxim collections, usually with a focus on wisdom and how to attain it.⁵⁷

There are three trends in early Jewish literature (i.e., pre-rabbinic non-biblical Jewish writings) that are particularly worth noting. First, there are several early Jewish texts that align with the deuterocanonical wisdom literature (especially the Wisdom of Solomon) in being suffused with Greek philosophical language and discourse on natural law. However, many of these texts notably break with the Wisdom of Solomon in the latter’s insistence on circumscribing wisdom to Israel (if that is the correct interpretation of its position – see above), and instead try to demonstrate the complete and mutual compatibility of the Torah and Greek notions of natural law. The most prominent and systematic among such writers is

⁵⁶ Chesnutt, “Wisdom of Solomon,” 115–116.

⁵⁷ Wilson, *The Sentences of Sextus*, 1–4, 25–29, 32; Horst, “Pseudo-Phocylides,” 565–573; Baarda, “The Sentences of Syriac Menander,” 583–589.

Philo. This Alexandrian Jewish philosopher was, of all the Hellenistic Jewish writers whose works have reached us, the most enthusiastic in his embrace of Greek philosophical ideas, in particular natural law. He presents Mosaic law as simultaneously wise and natural, and the terms evidently are virtually synonymous for him.⁵⁸ Furthermore, it is clear that in describing the law as “wise,” he is invoking biblical wisdom discourse.⁵⁹ Philo sees Wisdom and the *logos*, the divine mind that permeates the universe in Stoic philosophy and which is responsible for both the orderliness of the universe and its intelligibility by the human mind, and thus what enables the existence of a natural law, as complementary (or possibly identical) hypostases of God, thus enabling him to infuse the biblical text with Greek ideas.⁶⁰ Apart from Philo, there are several other texts that bear witness to this biblical wisdom / Stoic *logos* / Graeco-Roman natural law nexus, including 4 Maccabees, the Letter of Aristeas, and Aristobulus.⁶¹ We will consider some of these, as well as Philo, in chapter 7. We should also note here that the connection between human wisdom and natural law was not just made by the Hellenistic Jews – we see the same connection among the Hellenistic proponent of natural law themselves, for whom “the law of nature was the universal, divine law that was also known as the right reason of nature. *It was known to the wise man through his reason and his understanding of nature.*”⁶²

⁵⁸ Hayes, *What’s Divine about Divine Law*, 111–124; See also Horsley, “The Law of Nature in Philo and Cicero,” who provides a detailed argument for the relationship between the key natural law thinkers in antiquity and the Stoics, and, importantly, notes the developments in natural law that occurred with Philo, such as his distinguishing between God and the natural law (a distinction the Stoics did not make), which ultimately enabled the adoption of natural law into Christianity.

⁵⁹ Legaspi, “Wisdom in Dialogue with Greek Civilization,” 157. For Philo’s use of and acquaintance with biblical wisdom literature more broadly, see Laporte, “Philo in the Tradition of Biblical Wisdom Literature”; Cover, “Jewish Wisdom in the Contest of Hellenistic Philosophy and Culture,” 243.

⁶⁰ Cover, “Jewish Wisdom in the Contest of Hellenistic Philosophy and Culture,” 243–245; Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 158–160.

⁶¹ For the connection between Mosaic Law and natural law in Philo, see Martens, *One God, One Law*, 124–126. For more on Greek philosophical influence on early Jewish literature, see *ibid.*, 125, n. 38, and Hayes, *What’s Divine about Divine Law*, 105–124. For the Letter of Aristeas, see also chapter 9.

⁶² Martens, *One God, One Law*, 28 (my emphasis); see also *ibid.*, 22, 27.

The second major trend of wisdom discourse in early Jewish writings is the connection that developed between wisdom and apocalyptic literature, already mentioned above. The latter is a genre of writings that usually present a biblical figure being guided by an angel through a series of unveilings that reveal to the visionary the future course of history or the workings of the cosmos, the best-known apocalypse being the biblical Book of Revelations. The connection between wisdom and apocalypticism can be traced to the Bible itself, specifically to Daniel.⁶³ The protagonist of the book is repeatedly identified as being wise (e.g., in the first chapter alone, Dan 1:14, 17, 29), and in his interpretations of dreams (Dan 1:17) and his becoming an adviser to the king (Dan 1:19), he performs all of the functions associated with the ancient Near Eastern wise man.⁶⁴ Indeed, there are clear overlaps between Daniel and Joseph, whose connection with wisdom we considered above.⁶⁵ Significantly, chapters 7–12 of the Book of Daniel are a very rare example of apocalypticism in the Hebrew Bible.⁶⁶

The final trend in early Jewish literature brings to mind a question we briefly considered earlier: how does one become wise? The primary thrust of the biblical (including deuterocanonical) works was that wisdom is available to those willing to seek her by listening to the wise and learning from nature and experience. But there are already indications in the Hebrew Bible that wisdom is attained through divine grace rather than human effort, such as Solomon's prayer for wisdom in 1 Kings 3:9–12.⁶⁷ As wisdom and apocalypticism increasingly came into conversation, it is not surprising that in some texts

⁶³ We may once more sidestep several difficult questions that occupy Biblical Studies, such as whether the apocalyptic genre developed out of conventional Israelite wisdom literature, or mantic wisdom (i.e., the interpretation of omens), or prophecy, or some combination of all of the above. For our purpose, it suffices to note that the two genres clearly overlap. See Mastin, "Wisdom and Daniel," 169.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 161–163.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁶⁶ Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 107.

⁶⁷ See also Schellenberg, "Epistemology: Wisdom, Knowledge, and Revelation," 37–41.

wisdom is no longer the gradually accumulated learning of the sage, but the revelation of otherwise unknowable mysteries by God. Some of the most prominent examples of this trend are 1 Enoch and various writings from the Dead Sea Scrolls that refer to revelation of the *rāz nihyeh* (“the mystery that is to be”) that causes its recipients to become wise, such as 4QInstruction.⁶⁸ We will consider these trends in greater detail in chapter 4, where the qur’anic use of *ḥikmah* in Q 54 will be shown to be highly reminiscent of some of the ways “wisdom” is used in apocalyptic works.

3.6. NEW TESTAMENT WISDOM

Prominent New Testament passages that have been linked in scholarly literature with the wisdom genre include several Gospel pericopes, parts of Paul’s letters, and the Letter of James.⁶⁹ The latter continues the trend of early Jewish literature such as 4QInstruction in presenting wisdom as revealed from God (Jas 1:5; 3:15).⁷⁰ Paul and Luke incorporate several popular Greek “wisdom maxims” into their writings.⁷¹ Paul in particular clearly has much say about both wisdom and natural law. In Romans 2, he argues that Gentiles, while not being subject to the Jewish law, nonetheless have a law by nature:

¹⁴ When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. ¹⁵ They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them.

⁶⁸ Goff, *Discerning Wisdom*, 10; Cover, “Jewish Wisdom in the Contest of Hellenistic Philosophy and Culture,” 259.

⁶⁹ McLaughlin, *Introduction to Israel’s Wisdom Traditions*, 189–191.

⁷⁰ Wold, “Wisdom in the New Testament,” 355.

⁷¹ Domach, “Tempered in the Christian Fire,” 5–6.

The precise meaning of Paul here has been much debated, including whether he was indeed advocating a type of natural law.⁷² Nonetheless, that is clearly how the church fathers would overwhelmingly read this passage.⁷³

Paul's apparent acceptance of natural law stands in contrast with his disparaging the wisdom of his times, as seen most prominently in 1 Corinthians:

¹⁸ Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," ²⁰ and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

Paul thus seems to combine some sort of commitment to natural law with a disparaging of wisdom. As Legaspi has argued, this is probably because, for the New Testament writers including Paul, Jesus himself was the embodiment of wisdom (see below), and thus they had no need for the wisdom of the philosophers (cf. Acts 17:16–34, where Paul preaches to Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in Athens).⁷⁴ This antipathy to Greek philosophy would continue in sections of the early church (see below), but, significantly, so complete was the absorption of Hellenistic ideas of natural law that the rhetoric of aversion towards philosophy in some quarters did not translate into a rejection of natural law.

Further, it is very likely that wisdom teachings played a significant role in the ministry of the historical Jesus, with his proverbial and parable sayings (which include those that

⁷² For arguments against the natural law reading, see Flückiger, *Geschichte des Naturrechtes*, 295–296; Rowe, "St. Paul and the Moral Law," 18–19. For an assessment of the debate, see Crowe, *The Changing Profile of the Natural Law*, 53–54.

⁷³ Crowe, *The Changing Profile of the Natural Law*, 54, 57; Levering, "Christians and Natural Law."

⁷⁴ Legaspi, "An End to Wisdom," in *Wisdom in Classical and Biblical Tradition*, 202–244.

specifically mention wisdom) making up the oldest layer of the Gospel accounts.⁷⁵ Many of Jesus's best-known moral teachings, including the Sermon on the Mount and the Golden Rule, came especially to be associated in patristic writings with wisdom and natural law, a matter we shall revisit in chapters 7 and 8.

Alongside the connection of several individual teachings of Jesus to the wisdom tradition, numerous New Testament passages portray Jesus *himself* as Wisdom incarnate. Thus, for instance, Paul calls Jesus "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24).⁷⁶ In this, the New Testament authors were drawing both on traditional biblical wisdom literature, as evidenced by the significant commonality between the portrayal of Jesus in several New Testament passages (e.g., John 1:1–18; 1 Cor 8:5–6; Col 1:15–17; Heb 1:3, Matt 11:27–30) and that of Lady Wisdom in Proverbs, Sirach, and the Wisdom of Solomon,⁷⁷ and also Greek philosophical ideas that had already been adopted by Hellenised Jews. The adoption and adaptation of Greek ideas is evident, for instance, in the overlap between the description of the *logos* in the prologue to John's Gospel, a term borrowed from the Stoics, and the description of wisdom in contemporary Jewish wisdom literature such as the Wisdom of Solomon.⁷⁸ For some early Christians, as they grappled with the question of who Jesus was, such hypostases seemed to offer an answer: he was the *logos* that the Stoics and Hellenised Jewish writers like Philo had spoken about, and the Wisdom

⁷⁵ Green, Brown, and Perrin, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, s.v. "Wisdom"; Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom*, 16; McLaughlin, *Israel's Wisdom Traditions*, 190–191 (including further references in n. 13). Wold, while recognising the sapiential material in Q (the theoretical pre-synoptic source from which Matthew and Luke apparently draw many of their teachings), urges caution against attributing this material to the historical Jesus. Wold, "Wisdom in the New Testament," 353–354.

⁷⁶ The standard work on Christology is Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, chapter 7 of which deals specifically with wisdom Christology. See also Wold, "Wisdom in the New Testament," 360–365; McLaughlin, *Introduction to Israel's Wisdom Traditions*, 191; Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 7, 95. For in-depth studies on the issue, see Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage*; Robinson, "Logoi Sophon"; Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology, and Law*.

⁷⁷ Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 163–212; Venard, "Christology from the Old Testament to the New," 25.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 248–250; Wold, "Wisdom in the New Testament," 364–365;

that the Hebrew Bible describes as being with God and emanating from Him.⁷⁹ We will come back to this in chapter 6, where we will consider how the Qur'an portrays the relationship between Jesus and wisdom, evidently in response to the aforementioned Christian discourse.

3.7. CHRISTIAN WISDOM

Wisdom texts from the Hebrew Bible and deuterocanonical works, in particular Proverbs, Wisdom of Solomon, and Sirach, were some of the most popular scriptural texts in the early Church, with Origen declaring that the goal of the Christian was to "become wise."⁸⁰ The deliberate connection that Second Temple Jews such as Philo made between Israelite wisdom and Greek philosophy also continued in the early Church. Clement of Alexandria, for example, cited Proverbs as evidence for the usefulness of philosophy as one of the "ways of wisdom" (Prov 4:11 LXX) to God, alongside Scripture (*Strom.* 1:5).⁸¹ The most prominent wisdom discourse among the church fathers, however, was a continuation of the New Testament's portrayal of Jesus as Wisdom or *logos* incarnate.

As mentioned above, the early Christians also embraced several other aspects of Greek philosophical thought,⁸² one of which in particular is of interest to us: natural law.⁸³ In this, as we have seen above, they had a precedent in Philo and other early Jewish writers. However, the term "wisdom" itself overwhelmingly came to be used for the incarnate Christ, with Wisdom's self-praise in Proverbs 8 in particular providing a proof text for the

⁷⁹ McLaughlin, *Introduction to Israel's Wisdom Traditions*, 191; Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 213–230.

⁸⁰ Bay, "The Wisdom Tradition in Early Christianity," 389–391.

⁸¹ Clement makes use of the plural "ways (*hodous*) of wisdom" in the Septuagint; the Masoretic text has the singular *derek*.

⁸² Domach, "Tempered in the Christian Fire," 6–15.

⁸³ Christian adoption of natural law has been long recognised, though it remains under-researched, particularly among the Syriac fathers. See the references in Zellentin, "Gentile Purity Law from the Bible to the Qur'an," 189, n. 116; idem, *Law as Literature*, n. 58. Particularly useful is Levering, "Christians and Natural Law."

identification – e.g., “The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth” (vv. 21–22).⁸⁴ It seems to me that this, perhaps alongside Paul’s polemicizing against (Greek) wisdom (see above), may explain the somewhat puzzling observation that the church fathers, unlike their Second Temple Hellenised Jewish predecessors, almost exclusively used the Stoic term “natural law” where they might otherwise have used “wisdom.” Nonetheless, we shall see below and in chapter 7, when we examine Christian readings and use of the Decalogue, that equating natural law with wisdom did not entirely die out among the church fathers.

Another Christian borrowing from Philo and the Greeks is first attested in Origen: the idea that the prophets were themselves wise men, or sages. Claire Hall, in her doctoral dissertation “Origen and Prophecy,” shows how in the first century CE Hellenistic notions of prophecy tended to “unite the roles of prophet and sage,” and this was “an essential background for understanding the portrayal of Moses and the prophets in the work of both Philo and Origen.”⁸⁵ Thus, in both Philo and Origen, the Israelite prophets of the Hebrew Bible were portrayed as wisdom-bearing Greek philosopher-sages.⁸⁶

Philo’s portrayal of prophecy and prophets would prove instrumental for Origen. Philo ... accepted that while ecstasy could be an important feature of true prophecy, the most important prophets – such as Moses – were marked out instead by their supreme virtue. This virtue was what made them indistinguishable from sages and philosophers, and allowed their minds unencumbered and active engagement with God.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ See Joyce, Paul. “Proverbs 8 in Interpretation (1)”; Young, “Proverbs 8 in Interpretation (2).”

⁸⁵ Hall, “Origen and Prophecy,” 11–12.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 93–94, 116.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 94

I argued in chapter 1 that al-Shāfiʿī's identification of qur'anic *ḥikmah* with the normative example of the Prophet seems to have been doctrinally motivated, and does not receive strong support in the Qur'an. However, it is certainly true that the Prophet is presented as a moral exemplar for the believers (most prominently in the Medinan corpus, e.g., Q 33:21, but already foreshadowed in the Meccan proclamations, e.g., Q 68:4), and he is of course a recipient of wisdom. As I will try to show throughout this study, qur'anic *ḥikmah* is intimately connected to moral instruction, and so the fact that the Prophet is a recipient of *ḥikmah* and is also presented as a moral exemplar is probably not coincidental, and is certainly in line with late antique notions of prophecy as represented by Origen.⁸⁸ So, just as in Sirach we saw a confluence of biblical wisdom and Israelite prophecy, so in Philo and Origen we see a synthesis of Greek wisdom and Israelite prophecy. We will revisit this in chapter 10, where we will consider how the Medinan Qur'an possibly attributes wisdom teachings to the Prophet's non-qur'anic oral proclamations.

Finally, Christians continued and even expanded the Greek tradition of compiling gnostic wisdom texts, or *gnomologia*, collections of wise sayings that focussed on inculcating wisdom in their readers.⁸⁹ I have already mentioned above that some of these sayings were incorporated into the New Testament, and that Jews too were engaged in the production of such works. These texts were a staple of the Hellenistic education system, being some of the first writings that a student would be exposed to and be obliged to copy out. As late as John Chrysostom (d. 407 CE), well into the Christianisation of Rome, Greek pagan gnostic texts were being used for the same pedagogical purpose.⁹⁰ Examples of such

⁸⁸ Further work on prophets as moral exemplars is forthcoming from Holger Zellentin and May Shaddel, who are examining the notion of scriptural and prophetic protection from satanic interference in late antiquity.

⁸⁹ For an introduction to Hellenistic *gnomologia* and their influence on Jewish and Christian circles, see Wilson, *Love Without Pretense*.

⁹⁰ Domach, "Tempered in the Christian Fire," 15–17.

works are the Sayings of Diogenes, the Sentences of Sextus, and the maxims of Sahdona (see below). The former two are originally pagan collections of proverbs, though the Sentences of Sextus were evidently Christianised over time through a process of editing.⁹¹ The Sentences were translated into Syriac in the sixth century, and remained highly popular throughout late antiquity.⁹²

Although the present study focusses exclusively on the passages in the Qur'an that explicitly mention *ḥikmah*, even a cursory glance at the Syriac gnomologia, both Christian and Jewish, shows how much potential for further research remains. To give one example, while the Qur'an's portrayal of the role of the Prophet has been fruitfully compared to the role of a late antique bishop,⁹³ a rabbinical master, and a late antique holy man,⁹⁴ there are evident overlaps between the qur'anic messenger and the sage of the gnomologia. Thus, from the Sentences of Sextus, the sage is conjoined with God in status and necessity of obedience (v. 190, 194), and is second only to God, though God's servant (vv. 176, 244, 319);⁹⁵ he delivers the word of God and thus purifies souls (v. 24, cf. Q 2:129); and he disregards what those without faith say have to say (v. 241, cf. Q 33:1, 48). The twenty-fourth sentence in the collection, for instance, and its qur'anic parallel, which consists of a prayer from Abraham for a future messenger, are given below:

⁹¹ Wilson, *The Sentences of Sextus*, 11.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 6–11.

⁹³ Sinai, "Muhammad as an Episcopal Figure."

⁹⁴ Brown, "Muhammad," 68–71.

⁹⁵ On both of these, see Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers*, 164–175.

A soul is purified (*kathairetai* [from *kathairō* = Syriac: *'etdakī?*]⁹⁶) by a word of God (*logō theou*) from a sage (*sophou* [= Syriac: *ḥakīmā*]⁹⁷).

“Our Lord, raise among them a messenger from among them, who will recite Your signs to them and will teach them scripture (*al-kitāb*) and wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*) and will purify (*yuzakkīhim*) them. You are the mighty, the wise” (Q 2:129)

The overlaps between the sentence and the qur'anic verse are clear, particularly when we consider the way the sentence would plausibly have been rendered in Syriac:⁹⁸ wisdom (*ḥakīmā* and *al-ḥikmah*), purification (*'etdakī* and *yuzakkīhim*), and God's word/scripture are common to both passages.

One of the most interesting of the gnomologia for our purpose are the Maxims of Sahdona. These were composed approximately contemporaneously with the proclamation of the Qur'an by the early seventh century monk, and then bishop, Sahdona.⁹⁹ Here are the first five maxims:¹⁰⁰

1. The pursuit of pure wisdom (*ḥekmtā*) from above is the straight way (*šbīlā ... trīšā*) that leads to God....
2. If therefore you find wisdom and follow it at the beginning of its path, you will gain access through it to what is hidden and unattainable....
3. Not all pursuits are like the pursuit of knowledge; not all wisdom is like the wisdom of the soul; not all commerce (*tegūrtā*) is like the commerce of the fear of God: it is those who find God and follow him who will inherit what is His.

⁹⁶ The verb *kathairō* appears once in the New Testament (Heb 10:2), and is rendered *'etdakī* in the Peshitta. Although this particular sentence is not translated in either of the two Syriac versions of the Sentences that have reached us, it seems likely that *'etdakī* would have been an appropriate way to render *kathairō*, and in that case it is cognate with the qur'anic *yuzakkīhim*. For the Syriac Sentences, see Lagarde, *Analecta Syriaca*, 2–31.

⁹⁷ This is the standard Peshitta translation of *sophos* throughout the New Testament, e.g., Matt 23:34; 1 Cor 1:19, 20, 25–27; Eph 5:15; Jas 3:13.

⁹⁸ See nn. 96 and 97 above.

⁹⁹ *GEDSH*, s.v. “Sahdona (Martyrius).”

¹⁰⁰ The maxims may be found in Martyrius (Sahdona), *Maximes sapientiales*, 88–93 (text), 82–86 (French trans.). The English translation here is my own.

4. Open all the doors of all nature (*kyānē*) and look at what is within them; by understanding you will see the One who is hidden in everything. Follow visible things and investigate (them), for in them you will find that which is not visible.

5. If you desire attaining what is hidden from eternity, consider with understanding everyday events, and in them you will see the hidden agent....

6. Part of this knowledge is therefore concealed and covered in nature; and part is hidden and secret in God. That which is learned from¹⁰¹ nature is by the physical sight and by intellectual understanding. That which is in God, is (learned by) either an utterance (*qālā*) cast from him, by speech (*mīmrā*) and by hearing (*šem'ā*), either in scripture (*ktābā*) or...¹⁰²

There are several points of interest here. The first maxim, which connects the pursuit of wisdom with a straight path that leads to God, is reminiscent of Q 16:125, “Call to the way (*sabīl*) of your Lord with wisdom (*ḥikmah*) and fair admonition.”¹⁰³ The third maxim recalls the ambiguity regarding wisdom and philosophy we noted earlier in Paul and Syriac Christianity. It includes an interesting trade metaphor, reminiscent of the opening passage in *Sūrat al-Baqarah*. After the declaration that this scripture is a “guidance (*hudan*) for the God-fearers (*muttaqīn*)” (v. 2), the *sūrah* goes on to describe opposing groups, concluding, “Those are the ones who have purchased error at the price of guidance (*hudan*). Their trading (*tijāratuhum*) has not profited [them], nor are they guided aright (*muhtadīn*)” (v. 16).

The most significant maxims for us, however, are 4–6. They make clear how wisdom is to be obtained – through an examination of nature. This hearkens back to the traditional wisdom of Proverbs. But now, the relationship between wisdom derived from an

¹⁰¹ The consonantal text here reads *من* (*mn*), and is given in the printed edition with a diacritical dot above the *m*, suggesting it should be vocalised *man* (“who”). However, it seems more natural to read this as *men* (“from”).

¹⁰² The manuscript with this portion of the text abruptly ends here.

¹⁰³ The phrase “straight way” in the maxim has of course obvious echoes with the Qur’ān, such as in Q 1:5. However, similar phrases are fairly widely attested in the Peshitta and Syriac writings. In the Peshitta alone, see Jeremiah 31:9 (*’ūrḥātā trīšātā*) and Hebrews 12:13 (*šbīlā trīšā*).

examination of nature and the guidance of scripture is explicitly discussed. Even though the sixth maxim is incomplete, it is clear what the author has in mind: there are two types of knowledge: that which is attained through contemplating nature, and that which is revealed in scripture (*ktābā*). This is identical to the two modes of divine self-revelation proposed by Ephrem (d. 373), one of the earliest and most influential of the Syriac fathers: “Scripture (*ktābā*) that teaches, nature (*kyānā*) that proclaims: both admonish man” (*Hymns on Virginity* 1.3).¹⁰⁴ The addition that we have in Sahdona is that the self-revelation of nature is identified as wisdom. Although in his surviving corpus Sahdona does not expressly conjoin *ktābā* and *ḥekmtā* within a single phrase (unlike Ephrem, who in the above citation *does* mention *ktābā* and *kyānā* together), nonetheless his use of these two terms for the two forms of guidance that he identifies recalls the *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah* verses discussed in chapter 2, and one that we shall revisit in chapter 10.¹⁰⁵

Finally, we should note what Peter Brown called the “the last and one of the greatest products of the Wisdom Literature of the ancient Near East,” the Sayings of the Desert Fathers.¹⁰⁶ These are a collection of sayings originating in the oral teachings of Egyptian monks, edited in Palestine in the fifth century, and fully translated into Syriac by the seventh century.¹⁰⁷ Unlike more traditional wisdom literature, the Sayings do not rhapsodize about wisdom and the benefits of becoming wise, thus paralleling, as described above, the way in

¹⁰⁴ Translated in *Ephrem the Syrian*, 262. I am grateful to Nora Schmid and Holger Zellentin for this reference. See also Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 40–43.

¹⁰⁵ See also the recent study by Julien Decharneux on the Qur’an’s natural theology, in which he argues that the Qur’an continues the Christian discourse on divine *theōria*, or contemplation, of both creation and scripture as means of knowing Him. “The Natural Theology of the Qur’ān.”

¹⁰⁶ Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity*, 82.

¹⁰⁷ For an introduction to work, see Siegal, *Early Christian Monastic Literature*, 36–42 (including the short bibliography she provides in 36, n. 2); Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 76–103. Siegal’s work in particular demonstrates the ongoing interest in wisdom literature in late antiquity by examining the diffusion of this Sayings literature across Jewish-Christian religious boundaries, and in particular the way various narratives in the collection of Sayings may have been adopted into the Bavli.

which Christians continued Jewish discourse on natural law, but ceased calling it wisdom, perhaps on account of the by then near exclusively Christological connotations of the term. Nonetheless, they share with wisdom literature a concern for “a turn to ‘things of this world,’ such as life experiences and moral stories, to resolve disputes over praxis,” in place of turning to scripture.¹⁰⁸ The Sayings are thus a remarkable witness to the ongoing interest in and production of wisdom literature throughout late antiquity, and the endurance of the traditional biblical concept of wisdom and the experience of the wise as guiding forces parallel to scripture.

3.8. RABBINIC WISDOM

In one sense, the rabbis ignored wisdom literature. There are no *midrashim* on any of the wisdom texts, for example, until the medieval period.¹⁰⁹ The tractate Avot in the Mishnah, a collection of maxims attributed to early rabbinical authorities, is at least formally similar to Proverbs, Ben Sira, and Wisdom of Solomon, but there is almost no sense that wisdom might be a guide to proper living alongside the Torah of Israel, either in the tractate itself or its commentary, the Avot of Rabbi Nathan.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, there is a great deal of uncertainty regarding the date of the final redaction of the tractate, which may have been well within the Islamic period, before which it remained (in whatever form it existed) of only marginal interest to the rabbis.¹¹¹

In the corpus of rabbinic literature, there are only a handful of instances where the rabbis invoke wisdom in a manner reminiscent of traditional biblical wisdom (several of

¹⁰⁸ Siegal, *Early Christian Monastic Literature*, 14. For the connection between the Sayings and traditional wisdom literature, see Schoedel, “Jewish Wisdom and the Formation of the Christian Ascetic.”

¹⁰⁹ Flesher, “The Wisdom of the Sages,” 269

¹¹⁰ Tropper, “Wisdom in Rabbinic Interpretation,” 208–215; idem, “Avot, Wisdom, and Artistic Prose,” in *Wisdom, Politics, and Historiography*, 51–87; Mermelstein, “Wisdom and the Rabbis,” 370–371.

¹¹¹ See Stemberger, “Mischna Avot.”

these examples being from Mishnah Avot, a distant echo of the wisdom literature that Avot is modelled on), and there are only occasional explicit recognitions of the distinctiveness and universality of wisdom. For instance:

“Her king and her leaders are amongst the gentiles [where] Torah is not [to be found]” (Lam 2:9). If a man should say to you there is wisdom amongst the gentiles, believe him for it is written “I will make the wise vanish from Edom and understanding from Esau’s mountain” (Obad 1:8). [However, if he should say] there is Torah amongst the gentiles, do not believe him for it is written “Her king and her leaders are amongst the gentiles [where] Torah is not [to be found].” (Ekha Rabbah 2:9)¹¹²

The rabbis were certainly not alone in including foreign knowledge among what they called wisdom. Consider, for example, Acts 7:22, “So Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians,” which Clement of Alexandria understood as referring to grammar and philosophy (*Strom.* 1:23). Usually, the rabbis express suspicion of such foreign wisdom. For instance, consider this oft-cited passage from Sifra Deut 34:

“And talk about them” (Deut 6:7) – make them central, do not make them ancillary. That your negotiation will only be about them. That you do not mix other things in them, like so-and-so. Lest you say: “I have learned the wisdom of Israel, I will [now] learn the wisdom of the nations.”¹¹³

Despite a few instances such as these in which the rabbis recognise the distinctiveness of wisdom, whether to be praised or condemned, overwhelmingly they continued the trajectory we saw above from Ben Sira and fully equated wisdom with Torah. So whereas in wisdom literature “Torah” could be used to mean the teaching of experience (e.g., Prov 1:8,

¹¹² Quoted from Tropper, “Wisdom in Rabbinic Interpretation,” 206. For other examples, see *ibid.*, 204, n. 4; Rosen-Zvi, “The Wisdom Tradition in Rabbinic Literature,” 177–178; Mermelstein, “Wisdom and the Rabbis,” 375–377.

¹¹³ Cited from Rosen-Zvi, “The Wisdom Tradition in Rabbinic Literature,” 172. See also Tropper, “Wisdom in Rabbinic Interpretation,” 206; and Hayes, *What’s Divine about Divine Law*, 250, for a similar passage from Sifra.

“Hear, my child, your father’s instruction, and do not reject your mother’s teaching [*tôrat immekkā*]”), with the rabbis it is “wisdom” that is reinterpreted to mean Torah. It is very plausible that it was this appropriation of wisdom for the rabbinic *halakhic* project that ultimately led to the rabbis referring to themselves as *ḥăkāmīm*, “the sages.”¹¹⁴ As Rosen-Zvi shows,

for the Tannaim torah and wisdom are simply synonyms. In m. B. Meṣi’a 2:11, the role of the rabbi is to teach a person *wisdom*, i.e., torah. In Tannaitic literature wisdom is the wisdom of the sage, literally “the wise” (*ḥākām*), teacher of torah. The two, torah and wisdom, are equal and thus interchangeable, often within one sentence. Thus in Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, Yitro 2 we read: “Jabetz asked for wisdom ... ‘If you bless me—in the study of torah ...’”¹¹⁵

That this was a reaction to evolving Christian notions of wisdom is shown most clearly in the rabbinic response to the Christian interpretation of Proverbs 8. Whereas, as we have seen, Christians used the hymn of the personified figure of Wisdom in the chapter as proof of Jesus’s pre-existence and identity with Wisdom, the rabbis used the same verses to identify Wisdom with the Torah, and to similarly assert the Torah’s pre-existence.¹¹⁶

A particularly clear example of rabbinic recasting of wisdom literature into a mode more in keeping with their own theology is the Targum on Qohelet. This is a relatively late targum, with estimates of its composition ranging from the sixth to the ninth century.¹¹⁷ Although it may well therefore be post-qur’anic, it encapsulates very neatly how the biblical text, with all its imagery, its poetry, and its allusiveness, is transformed into a *halakhic* text. One example will suffice. The opening of Ecclesiastes 3, “For everything there is a season,

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 190.

¹¹⁵ Rosen-Zvi, “The Wisdom Tradition in Rabbinic Literature,” 175–176.

¹¹⁶ Edwards, “Proverbs 8, Christological Controversies, and the Pre-existence of the Son and Torah.” I am grateful to Holger Zellentin for pointing out this connection to me.

¹¹⁷ Yesudian-Storfjell, “The Reception of Qoheleth,” 62.

and a time for every matter under heaven, a time to be born, and a time to die” (vv. 1–2), is given the targumic commentary, “There is a special time to beget sons and daughters, and a special time for killing disobedient and wicked children: to kill them with stones by the decree of the judges.”¹¹⁸ As Flesher concludes, “No longer does the focus lie on life experience, but on knowledge revealed from heaven.”¹¹⁹

Interestingly, there are occasions in talmudic literature where a distinction is made between the Bible on the one hand and the Talmud on the other, where the latter is referred to as wisdom.¹²⁰ Thus, even where the rabbis concede to wisdom a status separate from the Torah, it is frequently equated with the Talmud, and so again tied to *halakhah*. For example, b. B. Mes. 33a: “[This refers to] his teacher who taught him wisdom (*ḥokmâ*), and not his teacher who taught him Bible (*miqra’*) or Mishnah.”¹²¹ Leaving aside the Mishnah, the standard distinction between the oral and written Torah (usually expressed as *tôrâ še-bə-‘al-peh* and *tôrâ še-bi-ktab*) may thus be expressed as *miqra’* and *ḥokmâ*.¹²² As with Sahdona, we once again see a division reminiscent of the *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah* locution.

As is evident, the Christian acceptance and the rabbinic rejection of a distinctive role for wisdom parallels their respective acceptance and rejection of natural law, as described earlier. We have thus seen two trends with regards to biblical wisdom discourse and natural law. On the one hand, there has been an attempt to demonstrate the compatibility of the Torah with natural law, as most prominently represented in pre-Christian tradition by Philo.

¹¹⁸ Flesher, “The Wisdom of the Sages,” 271.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 275–276. The Targum here is at odds with the rabbis, who went out of their way to argue that, despite a biblical ordinance to the contrary, the rebellious son should not be executed. See Hayes, *What’s Divine about Divine Law*, 314–318. The point that interests me here is the transformation of the wisdom text into a *halakhic* text.

¹²⁰ Tropper, “Wisdom in Rabbinic Interpretation,” 206–207.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹²² Judith Wegner has previously made a similar claim, though without particularly compelling evidence. See chapter 1, n. 10.

The Christians inherited this trend and took it further: with minimal exceptions for what could be considered to be ritualistic commands,¹²³ those parts of the so-called Old Testament that could not be derived from natural law could not, in their view, have been part of God's eternal design for mankind, and thus ought to be rejected. The other trend is represented by the deuterocanonical works Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon, which conversely tried to show not so much the compatibility of Torah with natural law, but rather how wisdom is only (or at least pre-eminently) found in the Torah or in Israel. If the Christians were the inheritors of the former trend, then the rabbis were the inheritors of this latter one, and likewise took it further, resulting in a conception of wisdom diametrically opposed to that of the church fathers.

3.9. PHILOSOPHICAL WISDOM

Syriac interest in Greek philosophy certainly predates the rise of Islam, and from the earliest Syriac literature *ḥekmtā* was used to refer to Greek learning and philosophy.¹²⁴ Already in the sixth century several of Aristotle's works that form part of the *Organon* (his books on logic) were being translated into Syriac.¹²⁵ These were included in the curriculum at Qenneshre, a bilingual Greek-Syriac Christian theological school established around 530 CE, and the foremost Miaphysite school of the sixth and seventh centuries (and active well into the ninth century CE).¹²⁶ There is also evidence of a more popular engagement with Greek

¹²³ I refer here to the apostolic decree that Gentiles entering the fold of believers should "abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood" (Acts 15:20). As Holger Zellentin has shown in detail, the proscriptions of this decree were almost universally upheld in late antiquity, across Latin, Greek, and Syriac churches, and even occasionally expanded. See esp. Zellentin, *Law as Literature*, Introduction. Note that Zellentin considers both murder and the consumption of animal blood as part of the same *ethical* prohibition, and thus arguably even this part of the apostolic decree is grounded in ethical rather than ritualistic concerns.

¹²⁴ Brock, "Syriac Attitudes to Greek Learning," 19; Possekkel, *Evidence of Greek Philosophical Concepts*, 47. See also n. 127.

¹²⁵ Fowden, *Before and after Muhammad*, 141–142.

¹²⁶ Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East*, 169–176, 206; idem, "You Are What You Read," 99–100; King, "Why Were the Syrians Interested in Greek Philosophy?," 62–64.

philosophy, beyond the interests of the clergy.¹²⁷ Given the increasing prominence of Greek philosophical thought contemporaneous with or just prior to the qur'anic proclamations, this raises the intriguing question of whether qur'anic *hikmah* may be in direct dialogue with Hellenistic ideas.

A particularly interesting piece of evidence for the pre-qur'anic eminence of Greek philosophy in the Syriac speaking world is the *Letter* of Mara bar Serapion. The *Letter* purports to be written by an educated Syriac speaker to his son. The writer, as he presents himself, has been taken captive by the Romans who have seized his hometown of Samosata, and is uncertain what the future holds for him. The text is in the form of a parting advice from a father to his child.

The letter has a number of features that appear relevant to our investigation. Before coming to its contents, we should note that the authenticity, identity, and dating of the letter are all still debated. Nonetheless, an early date of the second or even the first century CE is now a widely held scholarly opinion, and seems to me to be reasonable.¹²⁸ (This would, incidentally, make it one of the earliest pieces of Syriac writing.) As for the identity of the author, Cureton, who first published the letter in 1855, identified him as a Christian because of his passing reference to the “wise king” of Jews whom they rejected, which is very

¹²⁷ The motivation for the fascination with Aristotle among sixth century Syriac speakers is contested, and not all of those involved in translating and commenting upon his works were associated with Church; see King, “Why Were the Syrians Interested in Greek Philosophy?”; Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East*, 176–177, n. 87. See also Brock, “Syriac Attitudes to Greek Learning,” 19, for evidence that prosperous Syriac speakers in the fifth century wanted their children educated in “the wisdom of the Greeks.”

¹²⁸ The most prominent outlier is Kathleen McVey, who argues that the letter is a fourth century Christian pseudepigraphon, forged to provide a philosopher’s testimony to Jesus’s wisdom. See McVey, “A Fresh Look at the Letter of Mara bar Serapion to His Son,” 269. I am persuaded by the rebuttals offered by Rensberger and Pokorný. The reference to Jesus in the *Letter* is far too vague and casual for someone to have gone to the trouble of forging the entire letter in the hope that it would be noticed. Comparable forgeries, for example the probable interpolation in the works of Flavius and the Sibylline Oracles, are far more explicit in their endorsement of Jesus. See Rensberger, “Reconsidering the *Letter* of Mara bar Serapion,” 11; Pokorný, “Jesus as the Ever-Living Lawgiver,” 138–139.

plausibly a reference to Jesus. He is followed in modern scholarship most notably by McVey.¹²⁹ The alternative view, put forward by Rensberger and Pokorný, is that this was a Syriac-speaking pagan philosopher who had heard of Jesus from the growing number of converts to his movement, both among Jews and Gentiles.¹³⁰

But such questions need not detain us. What is relevant for our purpose is that the only surviving manuscript of the letter dates to the seventh century,¹³¹ and was bound with several translations of Greek philosophical works, including collections of ethical and proverbial sayings (i.e., *gnomologia*).¹³² Evidently, whoever compiled these works considered the *Letter* to be an example of Greek philosophy in Syriac. Furthermore, this collection provides evidence of the popularity of Greek philosophical writings beyond the narrow corpus of parts of the *Organon* associated with learned churchmen.¹³³

Mara explains to his son that the purpose of his writing the letter is to exhort him to pursue wisdom:¹³⁴

On this account, I have written for you this record, touching that which I have by careful observation discovered in the world. For the kind of life men lead has been carefully observed by me. I tread the path of learning, and from the study of Greek philosophy have I found out all these things, although they suffered shipwreck when the birth of life took place. Be diligent, then, my son, in attention to those things which are becoming for the free, so as to devote yourself to learning, and to follow after wisdom; and endeavour thus to become confirmed in those habits with which you have begun.

¹²⁹ See n. 128 above.

¹³⁰ Rensberger, "Reconsidering the *Letter* of Mara bar Serapion," 8–11; Pokorný, "Jesus as the Ever-Living Lawgiver," 131.

¹³¹ Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts*, 3:1154.

¹³² Merz and Tielman, "General Introduction," 4–5; Rensberger, "Reconsidering the *Letter* of Mara bar Serapion," 18–19; Brock, "Syriac Attitudes to Greek Learning," 26–27.

¹³³ See n. 127.

¹³⁴ All translations from the *Letter* of Mara bar Serapion are taken from ANF 8.

Elsewhere, Mara instructs his son to “devote yourself to wisdom.” While older scholarship identified the author as a Stoic, this is far from straightforwardly the case, as the philosophical contents of the letter are compatible with other Hellenistic philosophical currents in the first and second century.¹³⁵ Regardless of whichever Hellenistic philosophical school or schools might have influenced Mara, the above citation makes clear that it is definitely the philosophical wisdom of the Greeks that he has in mind here.

Mara is clearly not, however, slavishly beholden to Greek learning to the neglect of his native Aramaic traditions. As several studies of the letter have observed, it is both in form and content a clear continuation of the Semitic wisdom literature.¹³⁶ He commences the letter, for example, with an address to his son, which is almost paradigmatic in the wisdom tradition. His use of parallelism is evocative of Proverbs and Qohelet, and his praise of wisdom is far more in keeping with the rhetoric found in biblically inspired wisdom literature than Greek philosophy. What we have here, therefore, is an early Syriac example of a fusion of Greek philosophical ideas with Semitic wisdom.

Thus, Syriac Christians in the period immediately prior to the rise of Islam were becoming interested in Greek philosophical thought (after an initial hostility in early Syriac writings),¹³⁷ at least one example of which, the *Letter* of Mara bar Sarapion, is a creative fusion of traditional Aramaic (and even possibly biblical) wisdom with Hellenistic philosophy, and arises independently of a similar fusions in patristic and early Jewish traditions. If Qur’anic *ḥikmah* is connected to late antique ideas of natural law, ultimately inherited from the Stoics, it would be entirely in keeping with widespread trends in late antiquity.

¹³⁵ Rensberger, “Reconsidering the *Letter* of Mara bar Serapion,” 6; Merz and Tielman, “The Letter of Mara bar Serapion,” 108–109; McVey, “A Fresh Look at the Letter of Mara bar Serapion to his Son,” 261–262.

¹³⁶ See, e.g., Rensberger, “Reconsidering the *Letter* of Mara bar Serapion,” 4, 7.

¹³⁷ Brock, “Syriac Attitudes to Greek Learning,” 17–18.

3.10. NON-BIBLICAL ARABIAN AND OTHER SEMITIC WISDOM

Just as wisdom literature did not begin with the Bible, but rather can be traced to earlier Egyptian, Canaanite, and Mesopotamian literary compositions, so popular wisdom literature was not confined to biblical and biblically inspired works in late antiquity. The best-known example of late antique wisdom literature outside biblical and para-biblical works is the story of Ahiqar. Like Daniel and Joseph, Ahiqar is a court adviser, falls from grace and is briefly imprisoned, and is able to solve riddles (an analogue to Joseph's and Daniel's ability to interpret dreams).¹³⁸ It was one of the most popular stories in late antiquity, with Ahiqar mentioned in literary works ranging from the deuterocanonical texts (viz., Tob 1:21–22; 14:10) to pre-Islamic poetry.¹³⁹

We have already seen in chapter 1 evidence from al-Ṭabarī's *Tarīkh* for the existence of an indigenous wisdom tradition in Arabia prior to Islam, in the form of wise sayings attributed to the legendary sage Luqmān. Further evidence for the existence of such a tradition will be considered in chapter 8, where the clear parallels we will examine between Luqmān and Ahiqar leave little doubt that the Qur'anic milieu was open to the influence of ancient Near East wisdom literature. Hoyland notes that for "such a genre, fixing a time or place of emergence is impossible."¹⁴⁰ However, tracing the use of the term *ḥikmah* in pre-

¹³⁸ For the formal similarities of the three stories, see Niditch and Doran, "The Success Story of the Wise Courtier."

¹³⁹ For the popularity of the work in late antiquity, see Bledsoe, "Ahiqar and Other Legendary Sages." Another example of a non-biblical Semitic wisdom text is provided by Brock, "A Piece of Wisdom Literature in Syriac."

¹⁴⁰ Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, 227.

Islamic poetry may point us in the right direction.¹⁴¹ I could discover only two occurrences.

The first is in a poem by al-Aʿshā Maymūn b. Qays (d. c. 7/629), as recorded in his *dīwān*:¹⁴²

wa-inna akhāki lladhī taʿlamīna
layāliyanā idh naḥullu l-jifārā
Surely your companion, the one whom you knew
(of) our nights when we would alight at al-Jifār,

tabaddala baʿda l-ṣibā ḥikmatan
wa-qannaʿahu l-shaybu minhu khimārā
Has changed, after youthfulness, to wisdom,
and grey old age has covered him with a veil.

There is nothing surprising here. Wisdom is contrasted with youthfulness and the night parties at al-Jifār, and is conjoined with old age and grey hair.

The second occurrence is in a couplet by the Christian poet ʿAdī b. Zayd (d. c. 600 AD), who was associated with the Lakhmid court at Hira:¹⁴³

wa-ūtiyā l-mulka wa-l-injīla naqraʿuhu
nashfī bi-ḥikmatihī aḥlāmanā ʿilalā
They were given the kingdom (*al-mulk*) and the Gospel (*al-injīl*) that we read,
We cure with its wisdom (*ḥikmatihī*) our mental powers and vices.

min ghayri mā ḥājatin illā li-yajʿalanā
fawqa l-bariyyati arbāban kamā faʿalā
Without him having any need except for making us,
Lords over His creation as He made (it).

¹⁴¹ I take this body of literature, on the whole, to be authentic. On this, and the underuse of this corpus by Qurʾan scholars, see Bauer, “The Relevance of Early Arabic Poetry for Qurʾanic Studies,” 701–702; Sinai, *Allāh in Pre-Quranic Poetry*, 2–3, who offers controls to attempt to weed out interpolated post-Islamic forged material in the corpus; the review of the latter by Ilkka Lindstedt in *Review of Qurʾanic Research*; Sinai, “Religious Poetry from the Quranic Milieu.” A novel argument for the broadly authentic nature of pre-Islamic poetry has recently been made by Ahmad Al-Jallad, who notes that several metaphors in the poetry, which puzzled early Muslim commentators on the poems, can only be understood in light of solidly pre-Islamic practices recoverable from epigraphic and archaeological finds, rather than literary sources. See Al-Jallad, “Pre-Islamic Arabia, Epigraphy, and Arabic,” 26:10.

¹⁴² Maymūn b. Qays, *Dīwān al-Aʿshā al-kabīr*, 186.

¹⁴³ EI3, s.v. “ʿAdī b. Zayd.” My source for these lines, including their translation, is Dmitriev, “An Early Christian Arabic Account of the Creation of the World,” 376. On the authenticity of the poem in which these lines occur, see the references provided by Sinai, *Key Terms*, s.v. “*ajal*.”

There are several possible conclusions to be drawn from these verses. An *e silentio* argument could be constructed that *ḥikmah* was not a common theme in the literature of the time. If valid, the contrast between the exceedingly rare occurrence of *ḥikmah* in pre-Islamic poetry and its relatively frequent occurrence in the Qur'an would be striking, an example of what Bauer has termed "negative intertextuality,"¹⁴⁴ and would point to the influence of or engagement with a different, non-poetic register and vocabulary. Clearly, one needs to exercise caution here, as we have no way of knowing how representative the surviving pre-Islamic poetry corpus is of the total poetry of the time, much less of the local non-Judaeo-Christian discourses of pre-Islamic Arabia. More significantly, the couplet of 'Adī b. Zayd indicates the presence of an association between the Gospel and *ḥikmah* among Arab Christians in the pre-qur'anic era. As we have seen in chapter 1, the Qur'an maintains this association. Further, 'Adī juxtaposes *mulk* and *ḥikmah*, a combination also made in Q 2:251, 4:54, and 38:20.

Although the evidence is admittedly scant, it does point in the same direction – the importance of Christian discourse on wisdom, perhaps at least partially transmitted into Arabia through the cultural centre of Hira. (As we will see, this same 'Adī also mentions Ahiqar in his poetry.) This suggests that we should look to biblical and post-biblical

¹⁴⁴ Bauer, "The Relevance of Early Arabic Poetry for Qur'anic Studies," 704–706. Such negative intertextualities are evident in several similar discontinuities, such as the frequent mention of *dahr* ("time/fate") in pre-Islamic poetry as compared to its single occurrence in the Qur'an in the sense of "fate" (Q 45:25). This mismatch can be understood as part of the Qur'an's reconfiguration of the Arabian moral framework. For *al-dahr* in pre-Islamic poetry, see Jamil, "Time," in *Ethics and Poetry in Sixth-century Arabia*, 93–114, and for the Qur'an's reworking of this concept, see Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts in the Qur'ān*, 47–48, and Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity*, 263. More broadly, on the Qur'an's reworking of *Jāhili* concepts, see Jamil, *Ethics and Poetry in Sixth-century Arabia*, 8–16; Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity*, 422–424. In the case of *ḥikmah*, the negative intertextuality does not seem to be motivated by such theological motivations, and is better explained by the Qur'an drawing on a biblically oriented tradition rather than indigenous Arabian notions.

traditions, and in particular Christian traditions, to provide the background against which to understand the origins of qur'anic *ḥikmah*.

3.11. CONCLUSION

Just as wisdom became a conduit through which pagan ideas were absorbed into various forms of Judaism and Christianity, and assimilated with biblically inspired discourses on wisdom, so too in the Qur'an, I will argue, wisdom is a point of contact with multiple late antique discourses. These various and overlapping discourses therefore all need to be brought under consideration when examining qur'anic *ḥikmah*.

CHAPTER 4

Wisdom and Apocalypse (Q 54:1–5)

4.1. INTRODUCTION

As mentioned in chapter 2, Sūrat al-Qamar (Q 54) contains perhaps the chronologically earliest mention of *ḥikmah* in the Qur'an. The opening section of the *sūrah* is given below:

¹ The Hour has drawn near, and the moon has split.

² But if they see a sign, they turn away and say, "Never-ending¹ deception (*siḥr*)!"

³ They have denied and followed their own whims. But every affair is settled.

⁴ Indeed reports (*anbā'*) have come to them wherein is a restraining reproof,

⁵ Far-reaching wisdom (*ḥikmah bālighah*), but the warnings do not avail.

The opening verse declares that the Hour is close at hand, and, as a sign of the final eschatological cataclysm, that the moon has split. (The verb "to split," *inshaqqa*, is in the suffix conjugation, which could be read as the prophetic perfect, and as such would have to be translated as "will split"; I will consider this alternative reading below.) Verses 2–3 denounce the unbelievers for rejecting the signs that they see,

¹ As Bell correctly indicates, translators are divided on whether to translate *mustamirr* here as "ongoing/continuous/never-ending," or the exact opposite, "passing/transitory." *The Qur'an: Translated*, 2:544, n. 2. Neuwirth, for example, translates it as "continuous" ("The Qur'an's Enchantment of the World," 133), whereas Rubin translates it as "transient" ("Muḥammad's Message in Mecca," 41), with neither acknowledging the other possibility, and both basing their respective interpretations of the passage to a considerable extent on their translation choice. I believe we can resolve the matter. The word *mustamirr* is used in one other place in the qur'anic text, which, fortuitously, is also in Sūrat al-Qamar: "We let loose on them [ʿĀd] a tempestuous wind (*arsalnā ʿalayhim rīḥan ṣarṣaran*) on a day of never-ending calamity (*fī yawmi naḥsin mustamirr*)" (v. 19). *Mustamirr* here can hardly mean "transient," and Jones's translation of it as "never-ending" fits far better. Moreover, there is a parallel passage in Q 41:16, "So We let loose on them a tempestuous wind (*arsalnā ʿalayhim rīḥan ṣarṣaran*), in calamitous days (*fī ayyāmin naḥisātin*)."¹ The *mustamirr* day of calamity in Q 54:19 has been replaced by the plural "calamitous days" in Q 41:16. This strongly favours translating *mustamirr* as "ongoing/continuous/never-ending."

including, presumably, the recent splitting of the moon that they have observed. Their dismissal of the signs as a “never-ending” (*mustamirr*) deception is a little opaque. Plausibly, it means that every sign they might be shown, one after the other, would be serially rejected. The *sūrah* then announces that “news” (*anbā*) in which there is “restraining reproof” (*muzdajar*) has come to the unbelievers (v. 4). This is identified as *ḥikmah bālighah* (“far-reaching wisdom”) and, once again, the unbelievers are castigated for not benefitting from these warnings (v. 5). The opening section thus combines appeals to signs in nature (v. 2) with appeals to scripture (vv. 4–5), a frequent qur’anic conjunction, e.g., Q 37:13–14 and Q 12:104–105, both of which conjoin scriptural *dhikr* (“reminder”) with natural *āyāt* (“signs”).

The *sūrah* then turns to the terrors of the eschaton:

⁶ Turn from them. On the day when the summoner gives the summons
for an abominable thing,

⁷ They will come forth from the tombs with downcast eyes as if they were
scattered locusts,

⁸ Hastening towards the summoner. The unbelievers will say, “This is a
difficult day.”

After this introduction, the *sūrah* moves to the punishment stories, which occupy the bulk of the remainder (vv. 9–42). The veiled threat that underpins these stories is, near the end of the *sūrah*, explicitly directed towards the Prophet’s Meccan opponents: “Are the unbelievers among you better than these?” (v. 46). The final section contrasts the damned (vv. 47–53) and the saved (vv. 54–55).²

From all this it is reasonable to infer that the “news” (*anbā*, singular *naba*) mentioned at the start of the *sūrah* (v. 4) is both the news of the impending

² For the *sūrah* structure, see Neuwirth, *Studien zu Komposition der mekkanische Suren*, 286; Robinson, *Discovering the Qur’an*, 149–150.

catastrophe of the hereafter and the worldly fate of nations that rejected their messengers. This is in keeping with the use of *naba'* elsewhere in the Qur'an: it is used for both reports of the destruction of bygone nations (e.g., Q 11:100) and of the final judgement (e.g., Q 78:2). This news of worldly and eschatological punishment, which together I shall call "apocalyptic revelation," is called *ḥikmah* in v. 5.

Not only is this *sūrah* probably the first to use the term *ḥikmah* in the Qur'an, it is perhaps also the first to give detailed punishment stories of the destroyed nations.³ Its identification of *ḥikmah* with apocalyptic revelation is therefore all the more significant. Although there are no other cases where *ḥikmah* so unambiguously has this meaning in the Qur'an, keeping this use of *ḥikmah* from the earliest layer of the text in mind can certainly illuminate later *ḥikmah* pericopes, as we shall see.

To appreciate how it is that "wisdom" came to be used to mean apocalyptic revelation in the Qur'an, we must consider pre-qur'anic developments resulting from the interaction between biblical wisdom and post-biblical apocalyptic literature, a trend introduced in chapter 3. Apocalyptic literature is a genre of writings that first emerged within Judaism during the Hellenistic era, with the earliest example (parts of 1 Enoch) perhaps dating back to the third century BCE.⁴ I will outline some

³ This is again based on Sinai's mean verse length analysis. The earliest *sūrahs* to make mention of the destroyed nations before Q 54, on the basis of Sinai's analysis, are Q 89, Q 37, Q 69, Q 53, and Q 51, in that order. Nöldeke's chronology agrees with Sinai's insofar as it, too, places all the aforementioned *sūrahs* before Q 54, except for Q 37, which Nöldeke places chronologically after Q 54. All of these five *sūrahs* that include some reference to destroyed nations mention the latter only in passing, except Q 37, which however is concerned with the salvation of the prophets and their followers, and God's preservation of their legacy, rather than the destruction of the rejectors as such. *Sūrat al-Qamar* is, under both Sinai's and Nöldeke's chronologies, therefore the first to provide systematic and sustained narratives regarding the destructions. For *sūrah* chronology, see chapter 2, n. 7.

⁴ Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 31. Collins's book is the standard introduction to the genre. Also useful are the collection of articles in idem, *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*.

relevant aspects of this literature and its incorporation of wisdom motifs before considering its connection to the Qur'anic milieu. But first, we need to consider the opening section of Sūrat al-Qamar itself in greater detail, and in particular what the splitting of the moon in the first verse refers to.

4.2. THE SPLITTING OF THE MOON

Most *tafsīr* works connect the opening verse of Sūrat al-Qamar to a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet miraculously split the moon before the Meccan pagans in response to their demand for a miracle.⁵ There is also a minority opinion among the *mufasssīrūn* that the verse refers to a *future* splitting of the moon, as part of the cosmic upheaval heralding the onset of the eschaton.⁶ This latter interpretation avoids the tension that would otherwise arise between the Prophet's opponents having been shown a miracle, and the repeated insistence in the Qur'an that the Prophet will not perform any miracle to satisfy the demands of his opponents – all they will be given is the Qur'an itself (e.g., Q 29:50–51).⁷ Moreover, the verb *inshaqqa* is elsewhere clearly used to describe the future rending apart of heavenly bodies at the Final Hour (e.g., Q 69:16; 84:1).⁸ As Blachère notes, in Arabic the suffix conjugation does not have to refer to past events, but may also be used to refer to future events whose occurrence is certain.⁹ This so-called “prophetic perfect” is common in biblical

⁵ This is the only opinion recorded by al-Ṭabarī, for instance; *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 22:103–112, *ad* Q 54:1.

⁶ The opinion is recorded by, e.g., al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 4:325, *ad* Q 54:1. This is also the view favoured by Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*, 29, and Blachère, *Le Coran*, 561. For the reception history of the verse, see Rubin, “Muḥammad's Message in Mecca,” 46–59.

⁷ For the Qur'an's attitude to Prophetic miracles, see *EQ*, s.v. “Miracles.” See also Rubin, “Muḥammad's Message in Mecca,” 45.

⁸ Rubin, “Muḥammad's Message in Mecca,” 44.

⁹ Blachère, *Le Coran*, 561.

Hebrew,¹⁰ and is certainly a feature of Qur'anic Arabic too, for example, from Sūrat Qāf (Q 50):

- ¹⁹ The agony of death *will come* (*jā'at*) in truth. That is what you have been avoiding.
²⁰ There *will be a blast* (*nufikha*) on the trumpet. That is the day of the threat.
²¹ Each soul *will come* (*jā'at*) accompanied by a driver and a witness....
²³ His companion *will say* (*qāla*), "This is what I have ready."...
²⁷ His companion *will say* (*qāla*), "Our Lord, I did not make him insolent. He was in distant error."
²⁸ He *will say* (*qāla*), "Do not dispute in My presence. I have already sent you the threat."

All the transliterated verbs in the above passage are in the suffix conjugation, while nonetheless clearly indicating the future.

Further, as Hannelies Koloska notes, the Qur'an and its audience are familiar with lunar eclipses (as I will come to below, this is how several recent scholars have understood the "splitting" of the moon), for which the text uses the root *kh-s-f* (Q 75:8). (Indeed, there are strong indications in the Qur'an, as well as in pre-Islamic poetry and the North Arabian inscriptional record, that the Qur'anic milieu was highly attuned to astronomical phenomena, including for example planetary retrograde motions and the rising and setting times of major asterisms.¹¹) Koloska, like Blachère, thus sides with the opinion that *inshaqqa* is a prophetic perfect, announcing a future event.¹²

Reading *inshaqqa* as a prophetic perfect does however seem jarring in light of it being coordinated with *iqtaraba*, which is straightforwardly used here for the past

¹⁰ Joosten, *The Verbal System of Biblical Hebrew*, 207–208.

¹¹ Hussain, "The Prophet's Visions."

¹² Koloska, "Sure 54." I am grateful to the author for providing me with her draft.

tense.¹³ Furthermore, the cosmic signs heralding the end times in early Meccan *sūrahs* tend to be a part of an *idhā* series (e.g., Q 81:1–13).¹⁴ The most serious obstacle to reading *inshaqqa* as a prophetic perfect, however, are the subsequent verses, in which the Qur'an's audience is accused of rejecting every sign (*āyah*) that they might see, and dismissing them as “never-ending deception,” strongly suggesting that the opening verse is referring to a specific incident that the audience had witnessed.

Among Western scholars who have examined the passage, Neuwirth, Bell, and Rubin align with the majority of *mufassirūn*, insofar as they understand the verse to refer to an observable event that took place over the skies of Mecca, namely a partial lunar eclipse. In such an occurrence, around half of the moon would have darkened over, thus phenomenologically appearing to be split.¹⁵ I believe this understanding of the verse is correct. Let us first consider the appropriateness of *inshaqqa* to describe such a phenomenon. The verb is used three times in the Qur'an to refer to the splitting of the sky as part of the heralding of the Final Judgement (Q 55:37; 69:16; 84:1). Its cognate and synonym *tashaqqaqa* is similarly used once for the splitting of the sky (Q 25:25) and once for the splitting of the Earth (Q 50:44). Neither verb however is used in connection with the eschatological splitting of the

¹³ Paret, *Der Koran*, 463. It is possible that *iqtaraba* is also intended as a prophetic perfect (as held by Koloska, “Sure 54”), which would render the first clause of verse: “The Hour *will* draw near.” This is unlikely in light of parallel verses, e.g., Q 21:1.

¹⁴ Koloska, “Sure 54.”

¹⁵ See Neuwirth, “The Qur'ān's Enchantment of the World,” 133; Bell, *The Qur'ān*, 2:544; Rubin, “Muḥammad's Message in Mecca,” 44.

moon. Indeed, while the darkening of the moon is a common trope in biblical, apocalyptic, and Syriac Christian literature, the splitting of the moon is not.¹⁶

On the other hand, cognates from the root *sh-q-q* are also used to describe natural processes in *this* world: Q 80:26 refers to the splitting of the earth as vegetation comes out of it, and Q 2:74 refers to rocks splitting and producing spring water. Additionally, in pre-Islamic poetry attributed to Nābighah al-Dhubyānī, *inshaqqa* describes another inner-worldly cosmological phenomenon, namely, how the vertical dawn light that appears on the Eastern horizon splits the night sky:

fa-nshaqqa 'anhā 'amūdu l-ṣubḥi jāfilatan
'adwa l-nuḥūṣi takhāfu l-qāniṣa l-laḥimā

Then the column of dawn split (*inshaqqa*) before her while she was racing, as a powerful she-camel runs, fearing the meat-loving hunter.¹⁷

All of this lends credence to the possibility that the splitting of the moon in Sūrat al-Qamar may have readily been understood by the Qur'an's audience to refer to a partial lunar eclipse, particularly if they had recently experienced one. Examining the data for historical lunar eclipses in NASA's *Five Millennium Canon of Lunar Eclipses: -1999 to +3000* strengthens this reading.¹⁸ Between the years 610 and 622 CE, corresponding to the traditional dates of the Prophet's Meccan career, there were thirty-two lunar eclipses globally. Of these, only four were partial eclipses – the

¹⁶ For the darkening of the moon, see Sinai, "The Eschatological Kerygma," 259. Bell's claim that the splitting of the moon was an apocalyptic motif has been adequately countered by Koloska. See Bell, *Commentary*, 2:323, and Koloska, "Sure 54."

¹⁷ Ahlwardt, *The divans*, 26, line 4.

¹⁸ The most complete list of historical lunar eclipses and their data has been calculated by Fred Espenak and Jean Meeus (NASA's GSFC), details of which are available here: <https://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/SEpubs/5MCLE.html>. Rubin also provides a link to this NASA data, but does not delve into it in any way. As my subsequent discussion will show, many of these eclipses are not relevant. See Rubin, "Muḥammad's Message in Mecca," 44, n. 3.

type that could phenomenologically be described as the moon splitting, in that a portion of the visible moon would have been darkened out, usually for around two to three hours – that would have been visible from Mecca.¹⁹ (Incidentally, it may be that the aforementioned root *kh-s-f* in Q 75:8 refers only to *total* lunar eclipses, as would be consistent with the common biblical and Syriac Christian motif of the complete darkening of the moon in the eschaton,²⁰ thus making the root unsuitable to describe a partial lunar eclipse.²¹)

One of these four is particularly interesting, namely the partial lunar eclipse catalogued as number 06302 in NASA's *Canon of Lunar Eclipses*, which occurred on 1st January 614.²² Viewed from Mecca, the eclipse would have started when the moon was slightly over ten degrees removed from the zenith (the latter being the highest point in the night sky, and directly above the observer).²³ From my analysis of the lunar eclipses in the sixth and seventh centuries in the *Canon of Lunar*

¹⁹ Data for seventh century eclipses are available here: <https://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/LEcat5/LE0601-0700.html> (see n. 18). The catalogue numbers for the relevant eclipses are 06293, 06302, 06306, and 06314. I am excluding total lunar eclipses, where the whole of moon is darkened out, and penumbral lunar eclipses, where the moon passes into the Earth's penumbra, the region in which a part – but not all – of the sun's light is blocked, thus leading to a sometimes almost imperceptible shadow over a part of the surface of the moon, but not a complete darkening. I am also discounting lunar eclipses that were not visible from Mecca, of course.

²⁰ See n. 16.

²¹ One of the several differences posited between the roots *k-s-f* and *kh-s-f* is that the former is for partial eclipses, and the latter for total. See Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2:738, s.v. "1. *khasafa*."

²² This would make the proclamation of *Sūrat al-Qamar* about a third of the way into the Meccan phase of the Prophet's mission according to traditional Islamic dating. Such a dating aligns with Nöldeke's chronology, which places the *sūrah* at the very beginning of his second of three Meccan phases. For Nöldeke's chronology, see chapter 2, n. 7 above.

²³ I have calculated based on the data cited in n. 19. The particular data figure for this eclipse is here: <https://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/5MCLEmap/0601-0700/LE0614-01-01P.gif>. The time of greatest eclipse in terrestrial time (a linear axis of time that does not take into account the cumulative adjustments needed to the Earth's time as a result of slight perturbances in its rotation) was 23:43, which in Mecca would have been 02:43. Converting this to universal time (i.e., time as experienced by observers, for which we have to subtract 4583s for the era in question), we get the time of maximum eclipse over Mecca as 01:27. As the eclipse duration is 168 mins, the eclipse would have begun over the Meccan sky at 00:03, on 1st January 614. The location of the moon at that instance can be determined using the Stellarium program, available from stellarium.org.

Eclipses, this is almost unique – there is only one other partial lunar eclipse more prominent (i.e., closer to the zenith) in the Meccan night sky, occurring in 559 CE.²⁴ As I have argued elsewhere,²⁵ the opening oath in Q 53:1, “By the star (*al-najm*) when it goes down,” refers to the appearance of the Pleiades almost exactly at the zenith in the evening, followed by their setting towards the West. (This is based on the ubiquitous references to the Pleiades as “the star” and the concern with various rising and setting times of asterisms in the ancient Near East, including in pre-Islamic Arabian inscriptions, pre-Islamic poetry, and early Islamic literature.) Furthermore, in seventh century North-West Arabia, the aforementioned evening zenith appearance of the Pleiades would have occurred annually around mid-January,²⁶ within a few days of lunar eclipse 06302. If this is indeed the eclipse referenced in *Sūrat al-Qamar*, then the latter shares with *Sūrat al-Najm* an opening reference to a night-time astronomical phenomenon at almost the same point in the night sky, separated by a few days. There are other features that link the opening sections of the two *sūrahs*, given in table 4.1.

TABLE 4.1. Links between the opening passages of Q 53 and Q 54

Q 54	Q 53
Verse 1 mentions the splitting of the moon.	Verse 1 mentions the falling of the star.

²⁴ Data for sixth century eclipses are available from <https://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/LEcat5/LE0501-0600.htm>. The eclipse in question is the following: <https://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/5MCLEmap/0501-0600/LE0559-11-30P.gif>.

²⁵ Hussain, “The Prophet’s Visions.”

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 111–112.

<p>“But if they see (<i>yaraw</i>) a sign (<i>āyah</i>), they turn away” (v. 2).</p>	<p>“His eye did not swerve nor transgress. / Indeed, he saw (<i>ra’ā</i>) the greatest signs (<i>āyāt</i>) of his Lord” (vv. 17–18).</p>
<p>“They have denied (<i>kadhdhabū</i>) and followed their own whims (<i>ahwā’ahum</i>)” (v. 3).</p>	<p>“Nor does he speak out of whim (<i>hawā</i>)” (v. 3).</p> <p>“His heart has not lied (<i>kadhaba</i>) [about] what he saw” (v. 4).</p>

Although Iṣlāḥī’s contention that Sūrat al-Najm and Sūrat al-Qamar form a complementary *sūrah* pair seems to push the evidence of their connection too far,²⁷ the opening sections nonetheless do appear to be related. (Cf. Sūrat Ṣād [Q 38] and Sūrat Qāf [Q 50] for another example of *sūrahs* that are clearly related in their opening section, but seem otherwise unconnected.) Apart from the evidence already considered, there is also of course the fact that they have been adjacently placed in the canonical order, just as other more clearly linked *sūrah* pairs are (e.g., Q 2 and Q 3, Q 4 and Q 5, Q 73 and Q 73). However, our understanding of *sūrah* ordering is still rudimentary, and there are alternative *sūrah* arrangements reported for Companion codices in none of which are Q 53 and Q 54 sequential, albeit they are consistently placed very close together.²⁸ Their canonical adjacency can only lend limited additional support, therefore, to the thesis that the opening sections are linked.

²⁷ Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur-i Qur’ān*, 8:87. For Iṣlāḥī’s *sūrah* pairs, see Mir, *Coherence in the Qur’ān*, 75–84.

²⁸ For the sequences reported for Ubayy b. Ka’b and ‘Abd Allāh b. Mas’ūd see al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1:222–224. A slightly different order for the two is given by Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 43–45.

Nonetheless, the cumulative evidence supports the proposition that the opening verse of Sūrat al-Qamar refers to a lunar eclipse over the Meccan sky, and the similarities between the opening sections of Q 53 and Q 54 indicate that the eclipse resembled the zenith appearance of the Pleiades referred to in Sūrat al-Najm. This suggests that it was indeed eclipse 06302, with its marked prominence in the night sky and multiple similarities to the evening zenith appearance of the Pleiades, that occasioned the opening verse.

The *sūrah* goes on to describe the aforementioned splitting of the moon as a visible “sign” (*āyah*) that the unbelievers reject as “magic” (*siḥr*) (v. 2). The reference to the unbelievers dismissing every visible sign in v. 2 follows naturally from and supports the interpretation of the opening verse offered above. *Āyah* in the Qur’an usually refers to evidence for the truth of the qur’anic message provided by the world, whether the natural world (as here), the world of man’s lived experiences (e.g., Q 30:20–25), or historical events (e.g., Q 36:41). (It can, of course, simply refer to the verses of the Qur’an themselves, e.g., Q 12:1.²⁹) Potentially more problematic for my preferred reading of v. 1 is the reference to the split moon as *siḥr*, which is frequently translated as “magic” wherever it is used in the Qur’an, and which therefore may suggest that something more profound than a lunar eclipse was believed to have been witnessed. Clearly, where the term *siḥr* occurs in pericopes concerning Moses and the Egyptian sorcerers, it must mean “magic” (e.g., Q 20:57–58, 63, 66, 71, 73). Nonetheless, there are places in the Qur’an where translating *siḥr* as “magic” does not fit. Rather, it seems to mean “deception,” trying to convince

²⁹ For a good overview of the term, see *EQ*, s.v. “Signs”; Graham, “The Qur’ān as a Discourse of Signs”; Sinai, *Key Terms*, s.v. “*āyah*.”

someone of something that is false.³⁰ This is also consistent with the definition of the word in the lexicons.³¹ Consider, for instance, Q 34:43, where the recited signs (*āyāt*) and the truth (*al-ḥaqq*) of scripture is derided by the unbelievers as merely *siḥr*:

When Our signs (*āyātunā*) are recited to them as clear proofs, they say, “This is only a man who wishes to turn you away from what your forefathers used to serve”; and they say, “This is nothing but an invented lie”; and those who disbelieve say of the truth (*al-ḥaqq*) when it comes to them, “This is nothing more than clear *siḥr*.”

The unbelievers also dismiss the “truth” (*al-ḥaqq*) as *siḥr* in Q 43:30 and Q 46:7.

There is nothing in the context of these verses to suggest that the unbelievers are referring to a supernatural miracle with which they have been confounded, and there is thus no need to posit a perceived miraculous occurrence as the background to Q 54:2.

Finally, we must consider whether we should understand the opening section of Sūrat al-Qamar to mean that the Prophet used the occasion of a lunar eclipse as a literal eschatological sign for the nearness of the Hour. David Cook has argued that astronomical phenomena co-occurring with historical events may have been an integral factor in the rise of Islam, though he himself is unable to connect any astronomical reference in the Qur’an to known astronomical events.³² One cannot avoid noticing that the lunar eclipse I have identified as the referent in Q 54:1 occurred at the very start of a new calendar year, in the midst of the Sasanian-

³⁰ Koloska, “Sure 54”; Rubin, “Muḥammad’s Message in Mecca,” 46.

³¹ See, e.g., Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 4:1326, s.v. “1. *saḥarahu*,” where the definitions include “he deceived, deluded, beguiled.”

³² Cook, “Messianism and Astronomical Events,” 45–49.

Byzantine war.³³ (Indeed, a consequence of this study has been that we are able to date Sūrat al-Qamar – and therefore, if we accept his chronology, Nöldeke’s second period, of which Sūrat al-Qamar is the first *sūrah* –³⁴ to probably just after 1st January 614, the date of the lunar eclipse.)

Nonetheless, the Qur’an does not dwell on the eclipse in any sustained way or connect it to the aforementioned war. Further, I am not aware of any evidence that the Roman calendar was known in pre-Islamic Arabia, thus making the 1st January date of the eclipse potentially irrelevant.³⁵ Rubin has I believe correctly argued that the splitting of the moon here “is only a figurative preview of the imminent literal splitting of the moon as well as of the entire heavens.” This is identical to the function many qur’anic oaths have, as Bint al-Shāṭi’ and Angelika Neuwirth have demonstrated, insofar as they depict a physical, observable phenomenon as an analogy for a hidden or future reality.³⁶ Indeed, the placement of the verse at the start of the *sūrah* strongly suggests that it is functionally similar to the common *sūrah*-opening oaths.³⁷ As for whether the whether the Qur’an’s warning of the nearness of the Hour in Q 54:1 (and elsewhere) should be taken at face value to mean that the scripture proclaimed an imminent eschatological unfolding, we will return to that in the conclusion, after considering the relationship between Sūrat al-Qamar and apocalyptic literature.

³³ Although the *anno domini* calendar had only recently been invented by Dionysius Exiguus (d. c. 544) and was gaining in popularity, the use of January as the starting month for a new year dates back probably to 158 BCE. See Richards, *Mapping Time*, 208, 217–219. For the significance of the Sasanian-Byzantine war for contextualising qur’anic proclamations, see Ghaffar, *Der Koran in seinem religions- und weltgeschichtlichen Kontext*, esp. 1–13; Silverstein, “Q 30: 2–5 in Near Eastern Context.” Further studies on this topic are cited in *ibid.*, 11, n. 2.

³⁴ See n. 22.

³⁵ Al-Jallad, “The Month *’dr* in Safaitic,” 154–155.

³⁶ See the discussion in Hussain, “The Prophet’s Visions,” esp. 102, and n. 9 for references.

³⁷ On oath openings, see Robinson, *Discovering the Qur’an*, 101–103.

4.3. WISDOM AND APOCALYPTICISM

Having explored the opening verses of Sūrat al-Qamar in some detail, let us move to the relationship between wisdom and apocalypticism in Jewish and Christian literature to better contextualise the use of *ḥikmah* in v. 5. There are two widely-recognised subtypes of apocalyptic works: the “otherworldly journey,” in which an angelic figure guides the protagonist in a journey through the heavens, and explains the mysterious visions that they encounter; and the “historical” apocalypse, in which swathes of Israel’s political history are revealed as being grounded in otherworldly events, and thus guided by cosmic forces.³⁸ Common to both subtypes, and indeed a defining feature of the genre, is a final judgement in which the wicked are destroyed.³⁹

Scholars have long perceived there to be a connection between the apocalypse and wisdom genres. A good overview of the relationship between the two is provided by Matthew Goff in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*. He notes that the boundary between the two genres is fluid, to the extent that many scholars have questioned the value of retaining distinct labels for the two, though he himself prefers to retain the categories as useful points of departure.⁴⁰

Recall from chapter 3 that traditional Israelite wisdom literature, the parade example being Proverbs, encouraged readers to acquire wisdom, and thus become felicitous, by listening to the words of the wise (such as a sage or a parent), or by contemplating the world around them for themselves. These two are not mutually exclusive – the wise are not imparting esoteric knowledge to which one otherwise

³⁸ Collins, “What is Apocalyptic Literature?,” 2; idem, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 5–7.

³⁹ Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 7–8.

⁴⁰ Goff, “Wisdom and Apocalypticism,” 66–67.

would have no access. Rather, they are teaching you what you could readily come to know yourself if you acquired sufficient experience and were insightful enough.⁴¹

You can, however, learn the dictates of wisdom more quickly by simply accepting the advice of the sages, for they have experienced life and contemplated it in a way that you have not yet had the opportunity to do so.

Broadly speaking, we may identify three ways in which apocalyptic literature incorporates and develops these wisdom themes. First, the object of reflection could be changed from the world of experience to some revelatory vision, such that wisdom is attained not by contemplating the world, but rather by contemplating the vision. This vision may only be accessible to the elite, however. Therefore, anyone who is not part of the privileged few who have direct access to the vision may only acquire this wisdom by trustingly accepting it from the elite. This type of wisdom has variously been called revealed wisdom, heavenly wisdom, and eschatological wisdom.⁴² A clear example of this is 4QInstruction, the lengthiest and one of the most important texts of the Qumran community, as attested to by the number of manuscripts of the text discovered at the site.⁴³ As well as more traditional advice that would be at home in texts like Proverbs (e.g., “If you borrow the wealth of men for your need, there will be no sleep for you day or night, and there will be no rest in your soul until you pay back the creditor his loan” [4Q417 2 i 21–22], cf. Prov 6:1–5),⁴⁴ the reader is exhorted to consider the “mystery that is to be,” or the *rāz nihyeh*. Although the precise meaning of this phrase, which occurs so frequently in the

⁴¹ Dell, *Get Wisdom, Get Insight*, 1.

⁴² Hogan, *Theologies in Conflict*, 43–44, esp. n. 8 for further references.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 45–46.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 47–48; Goff, *Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom*, 143.

Qumran texts, remains obscure, it seems to be a revelatory experience or knowledge given to a select few, who are then commanded to reflect on it in order to increase in wisdom.⁴⁵

A second way that apocalyptic texts incorporate wisdom is by simply designating the content of the apocalypse to be “wisdom.” An example of this is 1 Enoch 92:1, “Written by Enoch the scribe – this complete wisdom teaching...”⁴⁶ Although this is also referred to in scholarship as “revealed wisdom,” there is a key difference between it and the sort of revealed wisdom represented by 4QInstruction discussed above. In the latter case, the author of the text is not recording his visions and experiences per se, but rather reflecting on them, and exhorting others who have access to the same visions (e.g., visions of the *rāz nihyeh*), to do the same, and through that process of reflection to gain wisdom. There is thus a gap between the revelation itself and the wisdom to be gained, unlike in texts such as 1 Enoch 92:1 discussed above, where the recorded apocalyptic revelation is more straightforwardly identified as wisdom.⁴⁷

A third way in which wisdom and apocalypse intersect is for sapiential instruction to motivate the reader not by appealing to the advantages that he or she will accrue in this world by adhering to wise instruction, but rather to the benefits to be gained in the next. To some extent, the Gospels already do this. Goff argues that this understanding of how wisdom and apocalypticism interact can illuminate our study of the sayings source: “It is useful to understand Q, or at least its putative formative layer, as a sapiential instruction against the backdrop of the wisdom and

⁴⁵ Hogan, *Theologies in Conflict*, 52.

⁴⁶ All translations of 1 Enoch are taken from Knibb and Ullendorff, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch*.

⁴⁷ Goff, *Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom*, 26, 40–41, 47–51.

apocalyptic traditions of early Judaism.”⁴⁸ He agrees with earlier scholarship in designating this synthesis “‘the wisdom of the kingdom,’ ... an ascetic call to focus on heavenly affairs rather than the basic necessities of this world,”⁴⁹ the latter being the focus of Proverbs. See, for example, Matthew 6:25–34 and Luke 12:22–34, and note that Solomon, the quintessential biblical sage, is specifically mentioned in both passages as not being able to attain in this life what God has prepared for those who work for Him rather than worry about fulfilling their own needs.

For the Sūrat al-Qamar wisdom pericope, I will argue that the second and third of these three ways in which wisdom and apocalyptic literature merged are the most relevant, i.e., the revelation of an apocalyptic unfolding that is itself referred to as wisdom, and the promise of reaping the benefits of wisdom not in this life, but the hereafter. Of the texts that use wisdom in these two ways, 1 Enoch is of particular importance, and I shall use it as representative of apocalyptic literature when comparing the latter to the Qur’an.

4.4. 1 ENOCH AND THE QUR’AN

The historical significance of 1 Enoch on Second Temple Jewish and later Christian thought is well documented. It was one of the best-known Jewish texts in the Second Temple period, leaving an indelible mark on the New Testament, and it continued to be popular with church fathers until the fourth century, even after which it was

⁴⁸ Goff, “Wisdom and Apocalypticism,” 63–64.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

clearly known to some degree by Syriac-speaking Christians throughout late antiquity,⁵⁰ and formed a part of the Ethiopic canon.⁵¹

Before considering the *ḥikmah* passage in Sūrat al-Qamar, a brief word on the general relevance of 1 Enoch to the Qur'an is in order. The most comprehensive survey of Enochic intertexts in the Qur'an remains that of Patricia Crone, who discusses five examples of the Qur'an's overlaps with the Book of Watchers, the first part of 1 Enoch (viz., chapters 1–36).⁵² Although this is not the place to discuss the parallels in any detail, suffice it to say that all of the parallels she identifies are plausible, but certainly do not point to a textual affinity between the Qur'an and 1 Enoch.⁵³ As she acknowledges, details from the Book of Watchers circulated widely, including for example in rabbinic literature, despite the rabbis having decidedly turned against Enochic traditions.⁵⁴

One example will suffice. In Q 2:30, after God announces His decision to the angels to create man (referred to in the verse as a *khalīfah*),⁵⁵ the angels question why God would create “someone who will cause corruption in it [the Earth] and shed blood.” John Reeves first suggested a connection between this complaint and Genesis 6:11, “Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence.” The passage narrates why God decided to wipe out most of humanity

⁵⁰ Jacob of Edessa (d. 708), Theodore bar Konai (fl. 8th/9th c.), and Michael the Syrian (d. 1199) all refer to the Book of Enoch, and the latter quotes it from an otherwise unknown Syriac translation. Reeves and Reed, *Enoch from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, 313–314; Brock, “A Fragment of Enoch in Syriac,” 626. Enoch is also mentioned, possibly with a quotation from 1 Enoch, in a Syriac amulet variously dated from the sixth to the tenth century. Korsvoll and Lied, “Enoch and Baruch.”

⁵¹ Uhlig, “Enoch,” 311.

⁵² Crone, “The *Book of Watchers* in the Qur’ān.”

⁵³ For a challenge to Crone’s main thesis in the article that the qur’anic ‘Uzayr is traceable to the Book of Watchers (ibid., 41–51), see Hussain, “Jonah, Job, Elijah, and Ezra.”

⁵⁴ Crone, “The *Book of Watchers* in the Qur’ān,” 36.

⁵⁵ On the word *khalīfah*, see Sinai, *Key Terms*, s.v. “*khalīfah*.”

in the flood. Significantly, in 1 Enoch 9:9, it is the angels who utter this complaint. Although the context is still that of the flood, it seems to be a step closer to the Qur'anic fall story. Tommaso Tesei argues that the final step, namely the transfer of this mytheme associated with the flood to the creation story, is part of a systematic Qur'anic strategy of locating the beginning of man's fall in the Adam story rather than the flood.

Yet, virtually every step in the creation of this Qur'anic parallel to 1 Enoch seems questionable. First, the objection that man is a sower of corruption is amply attested throughout the Qur'an, dating back to its Meccan layer (e.g., Q 7:56, 11:85, 12:73, among very many others), and with no evident Enochic subtext. Second, the angelic concern on the occasion of God's announcing His plan to create man is also attested in rabbinic literature, including their foreknowledge that he would cause strife.⁵⁶ Thus, the tortuous root from the Genesis critique of humankind at the flood in Genesis 6:11 to the words then being put in the mouths of the angels in 1 Enoch and finally the angelic dialogue being moved back to the creation of Adam seems unnecessary.

Furthermore, in his study of supposed intertexts with pseudepigraphic literature in the Qur'an, David Hamidović reaches a decidedly guarded conclusion about the presence of Jewish pseudepigrapha in the Qur'an:

Les écrits apocryphes juifs ne sont qu'un élément du sous-texte coranique parmi d'autres. En l'état, on ne peut nier l'existence d'un tel sous-texte mais l'ampleur de celui-ci sous le Coran interroge. L'étude présentée ici pour les écrits apocryphes juifs témoigne d'une relation lointaine avec l'écriture du Coran. À de rares exceptions près (l'histoire d'Abimélech et un aphorisme de la version arabe de la *Sagesse d'Aḥiqar*), le texte du Coran ne mobilise pas

⁵⁶ Zellentin, "Triological Anthropology," 125.

explicitement ou implicitement un écrit apocryphe juif, ne serait-ce que par bribes. Il demeure, néanmoins, le pressentiment d'une connaissance de quelques traditions juives par le milieu coranique, traditions dont on ne sait si elles ont été médiatisées ou non par des milieux chrétiens ou autres dans la péninsule Arabique ou ailleurs. L'impression l'emporte sur les indices textuels, parce que ces derniers font défaut.... En conséquence, il nous semble que les écrits apocryphes juifs jouent un rôle marginal dans le sous-texte du Coran, mais que les traditions juives en général — reprises ou non dans les traditions chrétiennes — constituent une grande partie du sous-texte du Coran.⁵⁷

Although the significance of 1 Enoch may therefore have been overstated in some recent studies, there is no reason to think that it might not yield important intertexts for our study of the Qur'an. As mentioned above, it continued to be read by both Syriac and Ethiopic Christians, and the significance of Ethiopic Christianity in particular as a formative influence on the qur'anic milieu (beyond the few qur'anic lexical items that have tentatively been identified as owing their etymology to Ge'ez) remains to be explored.⁵⁸

In the following section, I propose that the opening section of Sūrat al-Qamar shares several striking features with 1 Enoch. To be sure, the parallels are imprecise, and devoid of any clear linguistic (as opposed to broad thematic) overlaps. 1 Enoch clearly does not lie directly behind the opening of Sūrat al-Qamar. Further, even in the absence of the Enochic intertexts considered below, the earlier discussion of the intersection between wisdom and apocalyptic discourse already provides a compelling background to the Qur'an's naming its apocalyptic revelations as *ḥikmah*

⁵⁷ Hamidović, "Les écrits apocryphes juifs et le Coran," 1:534–535.

⁵⁸ Kropp and Dye, "Le Christianisme Éthiopien," 1:420, where they single out Enochic literature in particular as requiring further study for possible parallelisms with the Qur'an. More broadly on the significance of Ethiopic Christianity, I am grateful to Holger Zellentin for introducing me to the scholarship on the Ethiopic Garima Gospel manuscripts, which had been paleographically dated to the tenth century, but which recent Carbon-14 dating place squarely in the pre-Islamic era. See Bausi, "Translations in Late Antique Ethiopia," 75.

in Q 54:5. Yet, what Sūrat al-Qamar shares with 1 Enoch is nonetheless impressive enough, I believe, to cement the proposition that Sūrat al-Qamar is drawing on the wisdom/apocalyptic intersection, and can provide us with a deeper understanding of qur’anic *ḥikmah*.

4.5. 1 ENOCH AND THE SŪRAT AL-QAMAR WISDOM PERICOPE

The opening section of 1 Enoch extends from chapter 1 through to the end of chapter 5, after which we have a fairly extended passage on Noah’s flood. In table 4.2 I provide a structural breakdown of these first few chapters. This is my own, impressionistic analysis, although the sectional dividers as I have suggested them do seem to be quite clear.⁵⁹

TABLE 4.2. Structure of the opening chapters of 1 Enoch

Section	Chapter, verses	Theme
A	1:1–2	Introductory remarks concerning Enoch’s vision.
B	1:3–7	A vision of judgment, when God appears with his angels, all are afraid, and the earth is destroyed.
C	1:8–9	The righteous are saved, and the impious are destroyed.
D	2:1–5:3	An imperative to consider creation, including the movement of the heavenly bodies, the earth, the seasons, the trees, and in all of this God’s regularity year after year.

⁵⁹ See also Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 58–61.

E	5:4–9	The destruction of those who transgressed the law and were hard-hearted, and the salvation of the chosen ones, who will be given wisdom upon salvation.
F	6–10	The destruction of the wicked at the time of Noah.

Let us revisit now the structure of the opening section of *Sūrat al-Qamar*, and see how it compares to 1 Enoch. The *sūrah* commences with a declaration that “the Hour has drawn near” (v. 1a). The time of the eschaton similarly features in section A of 1 Enoch, except that we have a contrast, with Enoch declaring that his visions are “not for this generation, but for a distant (*rahūq*) generation which will come” (1 En. 1:2).

The opening verse of the *sūrah* next describes a visible prelude of the eschatological destruction scene, mirroring the apocalyptic destruction in section B of 1 Enoch. For example:

1 En. 1

⁶ And the high mountains will be shaken, and the high hills will be made low, and will melt like wax before the flame,

⁷ And the earth will sink and everything that is on the earth will be destroyed, and there will be judgement upon all, and upon all the righteous.

The *sūrah* continues with a complaint that the rejectors turn away from every sign they might be shown, and instead follow their desires, which they will only be allowed to do so for a period of time (vv. 2–3), corresponding to sections D and E respectively in 1 Enoch, which describe how nature, in particular its regularity (cf.,

the acknowledgement of the signs of nature being *mustamirr*, or never-ending, in Q 54:2), points to God's work, and how, despite these wonders, man continues to transgress against God's law, and will eventually face the consequences. For example:

1 En. 2

¹ Contemplate all the events in heaven, how the lights in heaven do not change their courses, how each rises and sets in order, each at its proper time, and they do not transgress their law.

² Consider the earth, and understand from the work which is done upon it, from the beginning to the end, that no work of God changes as it becomes manifest.

³ Consider the summer and the winter, how the whole earth is full of water, and clouds and dew and rain rest upon it.

1 En. 5

⁴ But you have not persevered, nor observed the law of the Lord. But you have transgressed, and have spoken proud and hard words with your unclean mouth against his majesty. You hard of heart! You will not have peace!

Next in Sūrat al-Qamar we come to our *ḥikmah* verses (vv. 4–5), which finds a parallel in section E in 1 Enoch. Chapter 5 of the latter concludes by averring that those to whom wisdom has been given will be saved from the miseries that will befall those who have not observed the law.

1 En. 5

⁸ When wisdom is given to the chosen, they will all live, and will not again do wrong, either through forgetfulness, or through pride. But those who possess wisdom will be humble.

⁹ They will not again do wrong....

Clearly, in this passage (as opposed to other places in the text, e.g., 1 En. 92:1 cited above: "Written by Enoch the scribe – this complete wisdom teaching..."), wisdom

does not refer to the apocalyptic revelation itself. Nonetheless, even here there is a striking overlap with the *ḥikmah* of Sūrat al-Qamar: in 1 Enoch 5:8–9, wisdom prevents the chosen ones from falling into sinful behaviour, and it is precisely this aspect of wisdom that Sūrat al-Qamar highlights, where the apocalyptic revelation is described as being a “restraining reproof” (*muzdajar*).

The *sūrah* then describes the fate of the rejectors at the eschaton (vv. 6–8), which continues to parallel the section E diptych of 1 Enoch. Finally, the *sūrah* moves on to the destruction stories, starting with Noah, just as we find in section F of 1 Enoch. Taken together, the overlapping progression is impressive: a declaration of the nearness/distance of the eschaton (Q 54:1, 1 En. 1:2), then allusions to eschatological destruction (Q 54:1, 1 En. 1:3–7), then the signs of God in nature, with particular attention to their regularity, through which He ought to be known (Q 54:2, 1 En. 2–5:3), then the denial of the unbelievers, their following their desires instead of God’s law, and their perdition (Q 54:3, 1 En. 5:4–7), then a reference to wisdom that prevents wrongdoing (Q 54:4–5, 1 En. 5:8–9), and finally the story of Noah (Q 54:9–16, 1 En. 6–10).

Prominent instances where the two texts diverge are understandable when we consider that 1 Enoch is interested in presenting an eschatological diptych, whereas Sūrat al-Qamar is warning the rejectors. Thus, section C in 1 Enoch has no equivalent in the qur’anic passage at all, and the parallel to section E is curtailed to describe the fate of the rejectors only. There is however one divergence, already noted, that is particularly worthy of attention: the meaning of “wisdom” in the two texts, which we will consider below.

4.6. WISDOM IN 1 ENOCH AND SŪRAT AL-QAMAR

As we have seen, wisdom in 1 Enoch 5:8 does not refer to apocalyptic revelation, but the ability to be righteous and avoid sin. This is more in keeping with traditional Israelite wisdom than apocalyptic wisdom.⁶⁰ Elsewhere in 1 Enoch, however, wisdom is indeed used for apocalyptic revelation. As mentioned above, 1 Enoch is actually a composite work made up of several smaller units, one of which is the Astronomical Book, or 1 Enoch 72–82. This is among the oldest layers of 1 Enoch, and is thus one of the earliest attested examples of apocalyptic literature.⁶¹ As its name suggests, the work is primarily concerned with revelations regarding cosmology, partly astronomical and partly mythological. An eschatological concern, which typifies apocalyptic literature, is discernible too however, particularly in the closing chapters. Thus, chapter 80 describes the inversion of the natural world that will take place, when, for example, “the moon will change its customary practice, and will not appear at its proper time” (1 En. 80:2), as a result of which “many evils will overtake them, and punishment will come upon them to destroy them all” (1 En. 80:8). Chapter 81 then mentions the death of the righteous and unrighteous, and blesses “the man who dies righteous and good, concerning whom no book of iniquity has been written, and against whom no guilt has been found” (1 En. 81:4). Together, chapters 80 and 81 therefore describe the destruction of sinners in this life, and their judgement in the next.

Significantly, in the closing chapter 82, Enoch addresses his son Methusaleh:

1 En. 82

⁶⁰ Indeed, as Collins observes chapters 2–5 draw heavily on wisdom themes. *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 60.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

² I have given wisdom to you and to your children, and to those who will be your children, that they may give (it) to their children for all the generations for ever – this wisdom (which is) beyond their thoughts.

³ And those who understand it will not sleep, but will incline their ears that they may learn this wisdom, and it will be better for those who eat (from it) than good food.

Here, we have news of an apocalyptic event, a final destruction of the wicked (1 En. 80:8) and subsequent judgement (1 En. 81:4), repeatedly described as “wisdom.”⁶²

The overlap with *Sūrat al-Qamar*, where the news of an earthly destruction followed by an otherworldly judgment is called *ḥikmah*, is plain.

One other wisdom passage from 1 Enoch, from the part of the composite work known as the Epistle of Enoch (1 En. 91–108), is pertinent to our study. The Epistle is primarily concerned with contrasting the sinners, who are repeatedly cursed, and the righteous, who are exhorted to remain steadfast in piety. Much of this contrast consists of polemical attacks against sinners who think that they have got away with their unrighteousness, having lived a life of plenty and having died rich, and a reassurance to the righteous that their suffering was not for naught, and that they will be rewarded. Chapter 102 sets up this dilemma, e.g., “But when you die, the sinners say about you: ‘As we die, the righteous have died, and of what use to them were their deeds?’” (v. 6). This is resolved in chapter 103, in which Enoch describes what he has read in the “tablets of heaven” (v. 2):

1 En. 103

⁴ And the spirits of you who have died in righteousness will live, and their spirits will rejoice and be glad, and the memory of them (will remain) before the Great One for all the generations of eternity. Therefore do not fear their abuse.

⁶² Note that the Ethiopic root designating “wisdom” in the excerpts translated in this section, namely *ṭ-b-b*, is found in Aramaic fragments of the Book of Enoch as the root *ḥ-k-m*. See Milik, *The Books of Enoch*, 377.

⁵ Woe to you, you sinners, when you die in your sin, and those who are like you say about you: “Blessed were the sinners; they saw all their days.” ...

The sinners and the righteous are not equal, whatever the appearances of this world, as the righteous will ultimately be rewarded for their good deeds, and the sinners punished for their wickedness. Crucially, it becomes clear on close inspection that it is knowledge of this truth that is meant by the term “wisdom” in the Epistle. This is suggested in several verses, such as 1 En. 100:4, “And the wise men will see the truth, and the sons of the earth will understand all the words of this book, and they will know that their riches will not be able to save them in the overthrow of their sin.” More clearly, chapter 92 describes the teaching that is about to be delivered (which, as we have seen, centres on just reward and punishment in an apocalyptic future) as “wisdom” (1 En. 92:1), and chapter 104 is clear that although the sinners may “write books in their (own) words” (1 En. 104:10), in other words concoct their own arguments about why they believe they will escape the final judgement, nonetheless the wise will receive books of wisdom (1 En. 104:12) to make them rejoice (1 En. 104:15). In line with the central concern of the Epistle, this will evidently be because these wisdom books will inform them that their suffering has not been to no avail, and that their righteousness will be rewarded, just as the sinners will receive due punishment for their wrongdoing.

Earlier in this chapter we considered the various confluences between wisdom and apocalyptic discourse: (1) wisdom could be acquired by reflecting on apocalyptic revelations rather than the natural world; (2) the content of apocalyptic revelation could be called “wisdom”; and (3) the reader could be motivated to acquire wisdom

for the benefit not of worldly gain, but of the hereafter. We have seen how the Astronomical Book and the Epistle of Enoch both use wisdom primarily in the second sense, i.e., an apocalyptic revelation of the destruction of the wicked and the salvation of the righteous, but also (as we saw in the previous section) in the third sense of motivating righteous behaviour for the rewards that it will reap in the hereafter. While these two uses are kept separate in 1 Enoch, they are creatively fused in the single use of *ḥikmah* in Q 54:4–5.

There is an additional parallel between Sūrat al-Qamar and 1 Enoch in their presentation of wisdom. Despite both texts referring to their apocalyptic revelation as wisdom, they attempt to exclude the sinners/unbelievers from being counted among the wise simply by virtue of having read or heard these texts. We have already seen how 1 Enoch 104:10–13 accomplishes this, by proclaiming that although the sinners may have access to this book, they will not understand it. Similarly, Q 54:5 states: “Far-reaching wisdom, *but the warnings do not avail.*” As in 1 Enoch, the unbelievers will not become wise despite ready access to this wisdom.

The final point to consider is the epistemology of revealed wisdom. In traditional Israelite wisdom, such as Proverbs, wisdom is universally accessible (see chapter 3). Knowledge such as “hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses” (Prov 10:12) may be learned by anyone through their own experience – books such as Proverbs merely offer a shortcut by presenting the life experience of the sage.⁶³ Is the same true of revealed wisdom? As discussed above, this does not seem to be the case for the type of revealed wisdom represented by 4QInstruction.⁶⁴ In the latter,

⁶³ Goff, *Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom*, 43.

⁶⁴ Hogan, *Theologies in Conflict*, 48–52. See also n. 47.

wisdom is a two-step process: first, the addressee is assumed to have access to the esoteric vision of the *rāz nihyeh*, “the mystery that is to be,” and, second, he is to reflect on it.⁶⁵ This is called “wisdom” because it is analogous to conventional wisdom, in that the latter is a result of contemplation on the natural world and the world of everyday lived experience, just as the former is a result of contemplation on esoteric revelation.

The second of type of revealed wisdom, however, as represented by 1 Enoch, in which an apocalyptic revelation is called wisdom, may in theory be knowable through contemplation on the natural and experienced world. While 1 Enoch is not clear on this point, it seems the Qur’an does regard knowledge of the eschaton in this way – i.e., as knowable from reflection on the observable world. In Q 54:2, the unbelievers are presented as dismissing the countless signs of creation, or rather the argument that these signs point to a future eschaton, as a delusion. The way in which the workings of the heavens point to the reality of the hereafter is made explicit in several other places in the Qur’an. To give but one example, Sūrat Yā Sīn (Q 36) describes how a nation who rejected its messengers was destroyed, and insists that “each one will be a group arraigned before Us” (v. 32). Several groups of signs are then adduced as evidence for the truth of this eschatological announcement, each introduced by the formula: “And a sign for them is (*wa-āyatun lahum*),” including how the dead earth comes to life through rain (v. 33), a standard qur’anic argument for resurrection.

⁶⁵ Goff, “The Pedagogical Ethos of 4QInstruction,” 65.

4.7. CONCLUSION

Ḥikmah as it occurs in Q 54:4 is apocalyptic revelation of worldly destruction and the judgement that the eschaton will herald against the unbelievers (and, by implication, the reward that will be given to the believers), which should function to avert the audience from sinful behaviour. Further, it is news that confirms what the Qur'an's audience should already know through observation. The striking parallels with apocalyptic literature, and in particular 1 Enoch, confirm the thesis that *ḥikmah* in the Qur'an – or at least in Sūrat al-Qamar – stands in continuity with elements of the Judaeo-Christian wisdom tradition (in this case, the apocalyptic genre).

The overlaps with apocalyptic literature also serve to highlight what is unique to the Qur'an, namely: the visions of the eschaton that apocalyptic literature reserves for an elect few are, in Sūrat al-Qamar, transformed to a universally visible sign, the eclipse of the moon above Mecca. This is in line with the declaration in vv. 4–5 that *ḥikmah* has come to all of the scripture's audience (i.e., not just the righteous), though of course the unbelievers do not benefit from it, as they refuse to heed it. We may detect here a move away from the esoteric wisdom so characteristic of the apocalyptic genre in all its forms; in Sūrat al-Qamar, the unbelievers are seeing what the Prophet sees, and hearing the wisdom that is revealed to him.

The connection we have established between Sūrat al-Qamar and apocalyptic literature can also illuminate what the opening verse of the *sūrah* means by the Hour being close. I will discuss this topic only briefly, as although it builds on the analysis presented above, it does not contribute significantly to our understanding of *ḥikmah*. Recent scholarship has seen a renewed interest in the Qur'an's apparent

imminent eschatology, and in particular how verses such as Q 54:1, which declare the nearness of the final judgement, were intended to be understood.⁶⁶ It seems to me that, in assessing this issue, the conventions of the apocalyptic genre need to be given greater consideration than has hitherto been the case. Eschatological imminence is one of the primary features of apocalyptic writings (and indeed features in Syriac homiletic contexts too),⁶⁷ and one should thus expect to find this topos in apocalyptic texts and examine to what end a particular work employs it, rather than casually assume that the author of every apocalyptic text or passage throughout the history of the genre, from antiquity to modernity, was convinced of the nearness of the end. Among the various possible uses of the imminence motif, scholars have identified the fostering of a state of “psychological imminence” in the audience, in order to inculcate morally upright behaviour,⁶⁸ or the idea of “avertive apocalypticism,” i.e., that the end is nigh unless you behave in a certain way.⁶⁹ Indeed, just as the Qur’an draws on the apocalyptic motif of eschatological imminence, it elsewhere clarifies that the actual date of the end is unknown, and

⁶⁶ Stephen Shoemaker has most insistently drawn attention to this. See, for his most developed ideas on this issue, Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*. A succinct presentation of his thesis is in idem, “Muḥammad and the Qur’ān,” 1090–1099. In what follows, I consider only the issue of the imminence of the Hour. More broadly, for a challenge to Shoemaker’s thesis that eschatological imminence is a particularly significant feature of qur’anic proclamations, see Ghaffar’s monograph on middle-Meccan eschatology and apocalyptic, *Der Koran in seinem religions- und weltgeschichtlichen Kontext*. For a challenge to Shoemaker’s claim that this theme was widespread in late antique literature approximately contemporaneous with the Qur’an, see Cameron, “Patristic Studies and the Emergence of Islam,” 261–262; eadem, “Late Antique Apocalyptic: A Context for the Qur’an?”

⁶⁷ Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 15. For the use of the eschatological imminence motif more broadly in Syriac literature, see Sinai, “The Eschatological Kerygma of the Early Qur’an,” 258.

⁶⁸ Allison, “Apocalyptic Ethic and Behavior,” 226.

⁶⁹ Wessinger, “Apocalypse and Violence,” 426. For reading New Testament apocalyptic passages as part of a strategy of fostering psychological imminence of the eschaton, rather than as literally predicting the immediacy of the final judgement, see Borg, Crossan, and Patterson, “Jesus Was Not an Apocalyptic Prophet,” 61.

may in fact not be that close from a human perspective (see esp. Q 22:47; 72:25),⁷⁰ suggesting strongly that the Qur'an is employing a rhetoric of "psychological imminence" in the verses that declare the Hour's nearness.

Finally, we should note that although the parallels between the opening sections of Sūrat al-Qamar and 1 Enoch are suggestive and illuminating, it would be easy to make too much out of them. We cannot conclude, for example, that the qur'anic milieu was familiar with the text of 1 Enoch. There are other apocalyptic works with a similar opening structure to 1 Enoch, such as 4QInstruction, which, at least according to one reconstruction of the fragments, begins by drawing attention to the natural order and then moves to scenes of an eschatological judgement.⁷¹ Although this is the reverse of 1 Enoch and Sūrat al-Qamar, it is a reminder that themes such as God's mastery over creation and the judgment of the wicked are common in apocalyptic literature, and it is no surprise that some apocalypses have sections that overlap with various qur'anic passages. The main point to be derived from the intertexts is not that the qur'anic milieu was familiar with any given apocalypse, but rather that the intersections are sufficiently compelling to conclude that the wisdom *discourse* found in apocalypses like 1 Enoch was familiar enough to the qur'anic community for it to be drawn upon and, as I have argued, reshaped.

⁷⁰ Shoemaker has suggested, in line with New Testament scholarship, that such verses are post-Prophetic interpolations. *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 127–131. In light of the overwhelming manuscript and literary evidence in favour of a closed corpus dating to 'Uthmān, in line with the Islamic tradition, such speculation seems unhelpful. See in particular Van Putten, "The Grace of God' as Evidence for a Written Uthmanic Archetype"; Sidky, "On the Regionality of Qur'ānic Codices"; Sinai, "When Did the Consonantal Skeleton of the Quran Reach Closure? Part I"; idem, "When Did the Consonantal Skeleton of the Quran Reach Closure? Part II."

⁷¹ Goff, *4QInstruction*, 45–46.

CHAPTER 5

David the Wise Judge (Q 38:17–26) and the Divorce Laws (Q 2:228–231)

This chapter examines two *ḥikmah* pericopes. In keeping with the broadly chronological structure of the present study, the first passage examined here is from the second Meccan Sūrat Ṣād (Q 38). The other passage, however, is from the Medinan Sūrat al-Baqarah (Q 2), which is clearly significantly later than the remaining Meccan *ḥikmah* verses to be examined over the coming chapters. I hope that this somewhat untidy wrinkle in the otherwise straightforwardly chronological layout of this study will ultimately prove to be justified as we examine the two passages serially and consider their unified presentation of *ḥikmah* and its relationship to positive law.

5.1. THE ḤIKMAH OF DAVID

The David pericope in Sūrat Ṣād is the first of three prophetic narratives in the *sūrah*; the subsequent two concern Solomon and Job. The narratives are situated near the start of the *sūrah*, after an introductory polemical section against the Prophet's opponents who reject both his status as a messenger and the Qur'an's claim of divine unicity (vv. 1–16). The verses that relate to David are given below:

¹⁷ Be patient over what they say and remember Our servant, David, [the man] of strength. He was indeed penitent.

¹⁸ We disposed the mountains to glorify with him at evening and dawn,

¹⁹ and the birds, mustered [in flocks]; all echoing him [in a chorus].

²⁰ We strengthened his kingdom (*mulk*) and gave him wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*) and decisive speech (*faṣl al-khiṭāb*).

²¹ Has there come to you the account of the disputants when they scaled [the wall into] the sanctuary?

²² When they entered into the presence of David, he was alarmed by them. They said, “Do not be afraid. [We are only] two disputants: one of us has abused the other. So judge justly between us and do not exceed [the bounds of justice], and show us the right path.”

²³ “This brother of mine has ninety-nine ewes, while I have only a single ewe, and [yet] he says, ‘Commit it to my care (*akfilnīhā*),’ and he browbeats me in speech.”

²⁴ He said, “He has certainly wronged you (*zalamaka*) by asking your ewe in addition to his own ewes, and indeed many partners (*al-khulaṭā*) abuse (*yabghī*) one another, except such as have faith and do righteous deeds, and few are they.” Then David knew that We had tested him, whereat he pleaded with his Lord for forgiveness, and fell down in prostration and repented.

²⁵ So We forgave him that, and he has indeed [a station of] nearness with Us and a good destination.

²⁶ “O David! We have indeed made you a vicegerent (*khalīfah*)¹ on the earth. So judge between people with justice, and do not follow your desire, or it will lead you astray from the way of God. There is indeed severe punishment for those who stray from the way of God, because of their forgetting the Day of Reckoning.”

To understand what is intended by *ḥikmah* in v. 20, some analysis of the passage is required. David has been given a glorious form of worship, such that mountains and birds sing God’s praise with him morning and evening (vv. 18–19). In addition, he has been given what he needs to be a just king: sovereignty, wisdom, and decisive speech (v. 20). Two disputant parties are then introduced, who need to scale a wall to reach David in his sanctuary (v. 21). David is alarmed to see them; they calm him and lay their case before him (v. 22). One of the disputants complains that he has only one ewe, and his brother, who has ninety-nine, is harassing him to entrust his sole ewe to him (v. 23). David rules in favour of the poorer brother, and upon doing so realises that this was all a test from God, falls into prostration, and repents (v. 24).

¹ For translating *khalīfah* as “vicegerent,” see Sinai, *Key Terms*, s.v. “*khalīfah*.”

God accepts his repentance (v. 25), and reminds him of his duty as God’s appointed ruler on earth (v. 26).

David’s “decisive speech” in v. 20 should probably be read as an epexegetic elaboration of how his *ḥikmah* was realised. Note the connection between *ḥikmah* and speech, specifically *maw’izah* (“admonition”), elsewhere in the Qur’an (Q 31:12; 2:231; 16:125).² On such a reading, when later in vv. 22–24 David adjudicates in the case brought before him by the two disputants with his “decisive speech,” his judgement illustrates his *ḥikmah*. Further support in favour of this interpretation is that the combination of decisive speech, wisdom, and settling disputes seems to be a Qur’anic reworking of a pre-Islamic Luqmān theme. I will explore this in greater detail in chapter 8, but consider briefly here verses ascribed to Bint Wathīmah.³ Mourning the death of her father, or perhaps her brother, the poetess describes him as follows.

I found him the refuge of widows,
and the guardian of orphans.

And the repeller of obstinate foes (*khaṣm*),
when mutual faults were revealed in quarrel.

With the tongue of Luqmān the son of ‘Ād,
and the decisiveness of his wise speech (*faṣli khuṭbatihī l-ḥakīmah*).

It would restrain them, after mutual pushing

² For a useful overview of the use of the epexegetic *wa*, or *al-‘atf al-tafsīrī*, in the Qur’an, see al-Tamīmī, “*al-‘Atf al-tafsīrī*.” As al-Tamīmī shows, in *tafsīr* works recourse to an epexegetic understanding of both the *fa* and *wa* conjunctions when expounding upon a verse increased over time. He notes that the epexegetic use of *fa* is not recorded in the classical works on Arabic grammar (ibid., 252), though he does not mention that this also seems to be true of the epexegetic *wa*. Medieval grammarians do nonetheless list several closely related uses of *wa* (e.g., *‘atf al-‘āmm ‘alā l-khāṣṣ wa-‘aksuhu*, “the coordination of a general item with a specific item and its reverse” – see, e.g., Ibn Ḥishām, *Mughnī al-labīb*, 4:363). ‘Abbās Ḥasan (d. 1978) is a rare exception among major modern *naḥw* experts in that he does discuss this use of *wa*, albeit briefly. *Al-Naḥw al-wāfī*, 2:144. See also the example cited by Reckendorf, *Arabische Syntax*, 324. See also chapter 10.

³ Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, 1:183.

and pulling, in sound judgement (*ḥukūmah*).

We will explore the multiple clear connections between these lines and the Sūrat Ṣād David pericope when we consider the Luqmān *ḥikmah* pericope. For now, note the connection between Luqmān’s decisive and wise speech, and his settling disputes, the same combination that we find in Q 38, suggesting the interrelatedness of these characterisations.

Let us return to the David pericope. The story bears clear echoes of the biblical account of David and Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11–12, which I explore elsewhere.⁴ David’s ability to judge the brothers’ dispute (vv. 23–24), as argued in the preceding analysis, are a demonstration of his wisdom. The poorer brother complains that the richer one is harassing him to hand over his lone ewe, ostensibly to be kept under the care of the richer, but with the obvious fear of misappropriation. David declares that as business associates frequently violate each other’s rights – particularly, as is implied, where there is such a wealth and power gap between the richer and poorer parties – the richer brother should not have demanded that the two enter into a partnership.⁵

David thus bases his judgment on his experience of human nature. He reasons that normal human behaviour (“indeed many partners abuse [*yabghī*] one another,” v. 24) is such that otherwise legitimate business arrangements may become oppressive, and, where the circumstances are such that the chance of wrongdoing is

⁴ Hussain, “The Function of David, Solomon and Job in Q 38.”

⁵ Indeed, power is one of the central themes of this *sūrah*. David is introduced as a temporal ruler with dominion (*mulk*, v. 20), who is has been made a vicegerent in the earth (*khalīfah*, v. 26); we encounter Solomon inspecting war horses (v. 31) and praying for a dominion (*mulk*, v. 35) the likes of which will never be seen again; and David, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are described as being “possessed of strength” (*ulī l-aydī*, vv. 17, 45).

elevated, should be avoided.⁶ This is David’s *ḥikmah* with which the passage earlier characterised him. Significantly, it is clear that David is not receiving revelation or proclaiming scripture when he gives his ruling, but rather this display of his *ḥikmah* is rooted in his own experience, reasoning, and sense of justice. This does not quite meet the definition of natural morality as given in chapter 3 – there is no suggestion that David understood naturally, rather than through revelation, the moral wrong of transgressing against another’s rights, variously called *ẓulm* and *baghy* in v. 24. Instead, it is closer to practical reasoning, what Aristotle called *phronesis*, the virtue that enables one to correctly deliberate how to bring about a desired moral end.⁷ Nonetheless, we see here that David’s moral reasoning had a role to play in determining the correct course of action. In the next section, we will see that qur’anic *ḥikmah* demands that similar moral reasoning be employed to determine how qur’anic positive law itself should be executed. As I will argue, this brings us closer to an understanding of *ḥikmah* as natural morality.

5.2. IMPLEMENTING GOD’S LAW WITH ḤIKMAH

Verses 228–232 in Sūrat al-Baqarah (Q 2) legislate divorce laws for the community, in far greater detail than is found anywhere else in the Qur’an. The topics addressed

⁶ David is not ruling against business partnerships per se. Indeed, the passage is rich in language that would become specialised vocabulary for Muslim jurists: (*akfilnīhā*) (“commit it to my care”) from *kafālah* (“guarantee”) in v. 23 and *khulaṭā’* (“business partners”) in v. 24. See Wizārat al-awqāf, *al-Mawsū’ah al-fiqhiyyah*, 10:39 and 19:24. Although we do not know whether the original audience would have identified these as overtly commercial terms, it certainly is true that the Qur’an makes frequent use of the language of commerce. EQ, s.v. “Trade and Commerce.” Although traditional portrayals of the nature and extent of Meccan trade have been effectively re-examined by Patricia Crone, it remains the case that the Quraysh certainly were traders. Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 149. Indeed, the Qur’an actively promotes trade, going so far as to encourage believers to be moderate in their devotional prayers so that they may have time to engage in business (e.g., Q 62:10, 73:20).

⁷ Becker and Becker, *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, s.v. “phronesis.”

include how a divorce is to be given, the conditions under which it can be revoked, and the possibility of remarriage to one's former spouse. Near the end of the passage we come to our *ḥikmah* verse.

²²⁸ Divorced women shall wait for three menstrual cycles (*qurū'*), and it is not lawful for them to conceal what God has created in their wombs if they believe in God and the Last Day; and their husbands have a greater right to restore them during this [duration], if they desire reconciliation. They [the wives] have rights similar to the obligations upon them, in accordance with honourable norms (*bi l-ma'rūf*); and men have a degree above them, and God is mighty and wise.

²²⁹ [Revocable] divorce may be only twice; then [let there be] either an honourable retention (*imsāk*), or a kindly release (*tasrīḥ*). It is not lawful for you to take back anything from what you have given them, unless the couple fear that they may not maintain God's boundaries. But if you fear they would not maintain God's boundaries, there is no sin upon them in what she may give to secure her own release. These are God's boundaries, so do not transgress them, and whoever transgresses the boundaries of God – it is they who are the wrongdoers.

²³⁰ And if he divorces her, she will not be lawful for him thereafter until she marries a husband other than him; then if he divorces her, there is no sin upon them to remarry if they think that they can maintain God's boundaries. These are God's boundaries, which He clarifies for a people who know.

²³¹ When you divorce women and they complete their term [of waiting], then either retain them (*amsikūhunna*) honourably or release them (*sarriḥūhunna*) honourably, and do not retain them maliciously (*ḍirāran*) such that you transgress; and whoever does that certainly wrongs himself. Do not take the signs of God in mockery, and remember God's blessing (*ni'mah*) upon you, and what He has sent down to you of the scripture (*al-kitāb*) and wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*), to admonish you therewith. Be wary of God, and know that God has knowledge of all things.

Verse 228 specifies that divorced women must wait – i.e., as we see from Q 65:1 and Q 2:228, remain in their former marital homes and not marry another man – for a length of three menstrual cycles (*qurū'*) in order to determine whether they are

pregnant, a period of time called *'iddah* in Islamic law.⁸ The verse also gives the husband the right to revoke a divorce. Verse 229 establishes that divorce can be given only twice with the possibility of going back on one's decision and retaining (*imsāk*) one's wife. After the third divorce, no such possibility remains. Verse 230 then reiterates that after the third divorce there is no longer a possibility of remarriage, unless the wife marries another man who subsequently divorces her.

Verse 231 provides additional guidance on the issue of a husband revoking his divorce and retaining (*amsikūhunna, tumsikūhunna*) his wife. The revocation must not be done "maliciously (*dirāran*) such that you transgress." The exegetical tradition as far back as Muqātil has overwhelmingly interpreted this to mean, or at least include, revoking a divorce near the end of the woman's post-divorce *'iddah* term simply for the purpose of soon thereafter issuing a subsequent divorce, and thereby making her endure another *'iddah*.⁹ In the verse itself, the precise nature of the harm is not made explicit. It is possible that the verse is proscribing divorce revocation followed by an ongoing abusive relationship, rather than revocation for the purpose of immediately issuing another divorce to reset the clock on the *'iddah*. However we interpret the prohibition against malice and transgression in the verse, it is clearly aimed at a husband who makes recourse to the dispensation granted to him to revoke a divorce during the *'iddah* period without intending to fully reconcile with his wife; he intends only to cause her harm.

⁸ Outside of Sūrat al-Baqarah, further details on the length of the waiting period for women who do not experience menstruation or are pregnant are given in Q 33:49 and 65:4. On the meaning of *qurū'*, specifically whether it refers to three cycles of menstrual purity or menstrual impurity (i.e., menses), see al-Sāyis, *Tafsīr āyāt al-aḥkām*, 184–185.

⁹ Muqātil, *Tafsīr Muqātil*, 1:196. See also the several narrations affirming this interpretation given by al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 4:179.

The second half of v. 231, beginning with “do not take the signs of God in mockery,” therefore seems to be a meta-legal reflection on the laws of divorce revocation, and a recognition that the latter are open to abuse. The verse offers a safeguard against such an outcome, namely, that alongside the *kitāb* (“scripture”), one remember *ḥikmah*. This bears clear affinity to the use of *ḥikmah* suggested for Q 38:20 above. For the latter, I argued that *ḥikmah* referred to David’s sense of how otherwise licit financial arrangements may become inadvisable. Here, it seems to be invoking the audience’s moral sense to alert them to a situation in which despite remaining within the letter of the law, they might nonetheless be guilty of wrongdoing.

There are two immediate complications to this reading. Firstly, *ḥikmah* in the present verse is part of what is “sent down,” i.e., revelation. How then can *ḥikmah* in Q 2:231 refer to the audience’s moral sense? As suggested in chapter 1, *ḥikmah* in the Qur’an is both a component of scripture as well as a human faculty; verse 231 suggests that it is that particular component of scripture that addresses the audience’s moral sense. Although this is a somewhat distinct use from *ḥikmah* in the Sūrat Ṣād passage (in which *ḥikmah* was given to David, and was clearly non-revelatory), the two instances are related: whereas *ḥikmah* in Sūrat Ṣād referred to David’s practical moral reasoning, in the present verse it refers to scriptural exhortation to moral behaviour, which is effective because it assumes an innate moral disposition in the audience.

Second, the relevant phrase in v. 231, “and remember God’s blessing upon you, and what He has sent down to you of the scripture (*al-kitāb*) and wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*), to admonish you (*ya’izukum*) therewith,” couples *ḥikmah* with *kitāb* (a

pairing that was absent in Q 38:20). What grounds are there for holding that it is specifically the term *ḥikmah* in the verse that refers to that part of scripture that invokes the audience's natural morality? This requires a somewhat lengthy elaboration. I will consider the emergence of the *kitāb* and *ḥikmah* combination in the Medinan Qur'an in more detail chapter 10. For now, I will try to show how key words and phrases in v. 231, read in the context of the *sūrah* as a whole, indicate that it is indeed the term *ḥikmah* here that encapsulates the verse's demand that divine positive law be understood through the audience's own moral filter.

Let us begin with the structure of Sūrat al-Baqarah. Several studies of the *sūrah* concur that the turning point, or at least the central and key point in the *sūrah* is either the story of Abraham and the building of the Meccan sanctuary (vv. 124–141), or the change of the prayer direction for the believing community to Abraham's Meccan sanctuary (vv. 142–152). These passages split the *sūrah* into two approximately equal halves.¹⁰ The first half (more precisely, vv. 40–123) addresses the Jews and recounts their shortcomings in keeping their covenant with God, and the second half addresses the believers, who after being told to take the Meccan sanctuary as their direction of prayer, are provided with legislation on a diverse range of topics. Thus, the *sūrah* structure serves to convey the message that one Abrahamic community is displacing another as the bearers of God's revealed scripture.

¹⁰ See in particular Farrin, "Surat Al-Baqara: A Structural Analysis," 23–25; Reda, *The Al-Baqara Crescendo*, 120–121; Sinai, *Historical-Critical Introduction*, 103. A very useful summary and synoptic comparison of structural studies of Sūrat al-Baqarah is provided by Marianna Klar, "Text-Critical Approaches to Sura Structure: Part One," and eadem, "Text-Critical Approaches to Sura Structure: Part Two." All of the structural analyses of Sūrat al-Baqarah that Klar engages with postulate a central Abraham / *al-masjid al-ḥarām* section, though they differ as to where to draw its boundaries.

Let us next consider the distribution of the terms *kitāb* and *ḥikmah* in Sūrat al-Baqarah. As I will argue in chapter 10, there are two *kitābs* that the Qur'an refers to: itself, and the *kitāb* of Moses. The reference to these two scriptures exhibits a symmetry in Sūrat al-Baqarah that reinforces the *sūrah's* key message. Not including the phrase "those with scripture" (*ahl al-kitāb*)¹¹ and cognate locutions, such as "those given the scripture," the multiple references to Moses's *kitāb* (vv. 44, 53, 78, 79, 85, 87, 89, 101, 113, 121, 174) and Muhammad's *kitāb* (vv. 2, 89, 129, 151, 159, 176, 231) are respectively almost all before and then after the Abraham passage (the exceptions being vv. 2 and 174).

As for *ḥikmah*, it occurs six times in Sūrat al-Baqarah, which is a significant portion of its total twenty occurrences in the Qur'an, and far higher than in any other *sūrah*, suggesting it is a *Leitwort* whose occurrences should shape our structural understanding of the *sūrah*. Its first appearance is in v. 129, where Abraham prays:

"Our Lord, raise among them a messenger from among them, who will recite Your signs to them and will teach them scripture (*al-kitāb*) and wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*) and will purify them. You are the mighty, the wise."

¹¹ This is my preferred rendering of *ahl al-kitāb*. The traditional "People of the Book" and the more recent suggestion of "Scripture People" both attempt to provide a direct equivalent of the Arabic *ahl*, which in both cases produces a somewhat awkward result. Instead, we should note that *ahl* can function like *aṣḥāb* in a construct state, in that it picks out those individuals closely associated through a relationship of ownership or possession or characterisation with the following genitive noun, which is not always best rendered into English as "people," such as in the locutions *ahl al-shā'* (literally, "the people of sheep," but better translated "owners of sheep") and *ahl al-ḥilm* (lit. "the people of forbearance," but better rendered "those with/of forbearance"). For "Scripture People," see Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 29. The locutions *ahl al-shā'* and *ahl al-ḥilm* are both from Imru' al-Qays. See Ahlwardt, *The Divans*, 153, 205. See also Q 4:58; 11:73; 18:71. For the lexicographic evidence, see Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:121, s.v. "*ahl*."

This occurs at the aforementioned juncture in the *sūrah*, after the polemical first half in which the Israelite audience is castigated for their repeated failure to adhere to their covenant with God, and before the regulations addressed to the believers. It is closely followed by the second occurrence of *ḥikmah* in the *sūrah* at v. 151:

Thus We have sent to you a messenger from among yourselves, who recites to you Our signs, and purifies you, and teaches you scripture (*al-kitāb*) and wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*), and teaches you what you did not know.

The phraseological parallels between Abraham’s prayer in v. 129 and its fulfilment by God sending Muhammad in v. 151 are clear.¹² To reiterate, the prayer and its fulfilment occur at the very point in the *sūrah* where the address changes from the Israelites to the believers. The content of the prayer is thus key to appreciating what is central and distinctive in this new message: whereas Muhammad, like Moses, is bringing a *kitāb* to his community, in fulfilment of Abraham’s legacy, he is also bringing *ḥikmah*. We will explore this theme in detail in chapter 10.

With that background in mind, let us return to the *ḥikmah* verse, Q 2:231. There are several phraseological overlaps between the verse and earlier verses in *Sūrat al-Baqarah*. The most prominent is the phrase: “Do not take the signs of God in mockery” (*lā tattakhidhū āyāti llāhi huzuwan*), which echoes the conversation between the Israelites and Moses in v. 67: “And when Moses said to his people, ‘God commands you to slaughter a cow,’ they said, ‘Are you mocking us (*a-tattakhidhunā huzuwan*)?’ He said, ‘I seek God’s protection lest I should be one of the ignorant!’”

¹² Robinson, *Discovering the Qur’an*, 209–211; Reda, *The Al-Baqara Crescendo*, 80.

This verse, from which the *sūrah* gets its name, introduces an extended dialogue between Moses and the Israelites, in which the latter repeatedly ask Moses for ever greater specificity regarding the type of cow to be slaughtered. Moses obliges each request, though continually warns them to simply do as they have been commanded.

⁶⁷ And when Moses said to his people, “God commands you to slaughter a cow,” they said, “Are you mocking us?” He said, “I seek God’s protection lest I should be one of the ignorant!”

⁶⁸ They said, “Invoke your Lord for us, that He may clarify for us what she may be.” He said, “He says, ‘She is a cow, neither old nor young, of a middle age.’ Now do what you are commanded!”

⁶⁹ They said, “Invoke your Lord for us, that He may clarify for us what her colour may be.” He said, “He says, ‘She is a cow that is yellow, of a bright hue, pleasing to the onlookers.’”

⁷⁰ They said, “Invoke your Lord for us, that He may clarify for us what she may be. Indeed, all cows are much alike to us, and if God wishes we will surely be guided.”

⁷¹ He said, “He says, ‘She is a cow not broken to till the earth or water the tillage, sound and without blemish.’” They said, “Now have you come up with the truth!” And they slaughtered it, though they were about not to do it.

The passage has attracted much interest as to what the relevant intertexts are, as it seems to draw on several antecedent sources.¹³ The core message of the passage however has received less recognition,¹⁴ despite it being widely recognised by the *mufassirūn*: it is a criticism of excessive Jewish legalism.¹⁵ Now, although it is the Israelites who at the beginning of the passage question whether Moses is mocking them by commanding them to slaughter a cow, it seems that the question is

¹³ Reynolds, *The Qur’ān and the Bible*, 52; Maghen, *After Hardship Cometh Ease*, 123–145.

¹⁴ Speyer, for example, sees it as a polemic against Jewish hubris. *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 345.

¹⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 2:78. See Maghen, *After Hardship Cometh Ease*, 143–145.

ironic, as the subsequent verses make clear that in fact it is the Israelites themselves who are making a mockery of God's commandments. This is consistent with the imputation of mockery to the *ahl al-kitāb* earlier in Sūrat al-Baqarah (v. 14),¹⁶ as well as elsewhere in the Qur'an, e.g., Q 5:57–58 (in both verses with the phrase *ittakhadhū ... huzuwan*). With that in mind, the connection between v. 67 and v. 231 as established by the command not to make a mockery of God's signs seems to be that both passages present instances of how *not* to keep the law.

Let us summarise the evidence thus far. Sūrat al-Baqarah is a *sūrah* of two halves: an address to the Israelites, followed by and an address to the believers, with substantial legal discourse in both parts. The first half presents Moses and the Israelites as recipients of a *kitāb*, and the second half affirms that the Prophet and the believers are also recipients of a *kitāb*. Both halves of the *sūrah* present examples of how it is possible to keep God's law yet in an improper way, with some phraseological overlaps between the two key examples, suggesting a parallel reading: the *baqarah* incident for the Israelites and the three divorce laws for the believers. Following the latter, the Qur'an urges the believers to remember God's bounty in sending them not just the *kitāb*, which the Israelites also received through Moses, but also *ḥikmah*, which is never associated with Moses's *kitāb*, either in Sūrat al-Baqarah or elsewhere (see chapters 2 and 10). Unlike Moses's *kitāb*, then, the Qur'an contains not only law, but admonition and exhortation regarding following

¹⁶ Verses 8–20 of the *sūrah* have often been taken to be refer to the *munāfiqūn*. However, the latter do not feature elsewhere in the *sūrah*, and the polemics in these verses tie in well with the *sūrah*'s later criticism of the Israelites: compare, for example, vv. 14 and 76 (see also Q 3:72, 5:61), and 10 and 74. It may in fact be more accurate to say that there is considerable overlap in the Qur'an's portrayal of the *munāfiqūn* and the *ahl al-kitāb*. See Zellentin, "Triological Anthropology," 60, incl. n. 2.

the law in a morally praiseworthy manner. Given the progression of the *sūrah* and the literary connections between its various parts, I believe there is a strong case to be made that the Qur'an uses the term *ḥikmah* in Q 2:231 specifically for that feature of the revelation that calls the believers to the weightier matters of the law; in other words, *ḥikmah* is the Qur'an's moral teaching.¹⁷

¹⁷ The Qur'an is thus all too aware of what it regards as the pitfalls of legalism, as indeed, before the Qur'an, we already find in Jesus's insistence on the "weightier matters of the law" in Matthew 23:23. Note that Jesus probably did not seek thereby to abolish the details of the law altogether. See Zellentin, "Jesus and the Tradition of the Elders." For more on the Matthean pericope, see chapter 7.

CHAPTER 6

The *ḥikmah* of Jesus (Q 43:57–65) and Abraham (Q 16:121–125)

6.1. INTRODUCTION

In the present chapter we shall consider two of the Qur'an's *ḥikmah* verses. In Q 16:125, the Prophet is commanded, "Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*)."¹ As I shall argue in the final section of this chapter, this is connected to a return to Abrahamic religion. Most of the chapter, however, will be taken up by close analysis of Q 43:63, in which Jesus declares to the Israelites, "I have brought you wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*), and (I have come) to make clear to you some of the things that you differ about."¹ On the surface, this seems to be a straightforward continuation of Jesus's portrayal as a teacher of wisdom already in the New Testament, e.g., "I will give you words and a wisdom (*sophian*) that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict" (Luke 21:15). Wisdom continued to be an important hallmark of apostolic teaching after Jesus too (see Acts 6:10; 1 Cor 2:6; Col 3:16). However, a closer reading of the Jesus pericope in Sūrat al-Zukhruf can reveal more about both why Jesus is portrayed as a teacher of wisdom, and what precisely the Qur'an means by *ḥikmah* here.

Sūrat al-Zukhruf records and responds to an objection raised by the Meccans to the Qur'an's favourable portrayal of Jesus. The pericope in which the objection is

¹ A more literal rendering of the verse would be: "I have come to you (*ji'tukum*) with wisdom, and to make clear...."

recorded is the first and only time that Jesus is mentioned in the *sūrah*, and therefore the opponents' objection must have been occasioned by a chronologically earlier *sūrah*. As the number of times Jesus is mentioned in the Meccan corpus is very limited, it is possible to recreate a plausible chronology of qur'anic proclamations, audience objections to those proclamations, and qur'anic counter-objections, that eventually led to the Sūrat al-Zukhruf Jesus pericope. The latter passage is given below:

⁵⁷ When the Son of Mary was cited as an example, behold, your people raised an outcry.

⁵⁸ They said, "Are our gods better or he?" They cited him to you only for the sake of contention. They are indeed a contentious lot.

⁵⁹ He was just a servant whom We blessed, and We made him an example for the Children of Israel.

⁶⁰ Had We wished We would have made from you angels to be [your] successors on the earth.

⁶¹ [Say,] "He is indeed knowledge (*'ilm*) of the Hour; so do not doubt it and follow me. This is a straight path.

⁶² Do not let Satan bar you [from the way of God]. He is indeed your manifest enemy."

⁶³ When Jesus brought clear proofs (*al-bayyināt*), he said, "I have brought you wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*), and (I have come) to make clear to you some of the things that you differ about. So be wary of God and obey me.

⁶⁴ Indeed God is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him. This is a straight path."

⁶⁵ But the factions differed among themselves. So woe to the wrongdoers for the punishment of a painful day.

Jesus is mentioned in five Meccan *sūrahs*: Q 6, 19, 23, 42, and 43. Of these, his occurrence in Q 6:85 and Q 42:13 is simply as part of a list of prophetic figures, and in Q 23:50 he receives a cursory mention in a single verse: "And We made the son of Mary and his mother a sign and sheltered them in a level highland with flowing water." Leaving these casual references to Jesus aside, we are left with Sūrat Maryam (Q 19) and Sūrat al-Zukhruf (Q 43). Sūrat Maryam presents an extensive

narrative of the annunciation to Mary and the birth of Jesus (from v. 16), part of which is Jesus's defence of the chastity of his mother while still an infant, followed by a proclamation to the Israelites of his own exalted status before God (vv. 29–33). In the absence of any other suitable candidates, the Meccan objection in Sūrat al-Zukhruf was almost certainly occasioned by the extended Jesus and Mary pericope in Sūrat Maryam. (Indeed, the brief mention of Jesus in Sūrat al-Mu'minūn cited above probably also builds on the chronologically earlier Sūrat Maryam birth story.) This is also the conclusion reached by Neuwirth and developed by Saleh,² though neither of them points out how the scarcity of the Jesus material in the Meccan qur'anic corpus undoubtedly strengthens their case. Note also that the designation of Jesus as "the son of Mary" in Sūrat al-Zukhruf (Q 43) and Sūrat al-Mu'minūn (Q 23), without his name being mentioned, further indicates that they are building on the chronologically earlier Sūrat Maryam passage, in which, prior to the secondary additions to the *sūrah* (i.e., vv. 34–40 – see below), Jesus was similarly not mentioned by name, a point to which we shall return.³

Neuwirth goes on to argue that Q 19:34–40, which denounces the belief of God having taken a son, is a later insertion into the *sūrah* to clarify Jesus's status, and was therefore also occasioned by the Meccan associators' objections recorded in Sūrat al-Zukhruf. She points to the significant lexical overlap between the Sūrat al-Zukhruf Jesus pericope and Q 19:34–40, with the latter seemingly modelled on the

² Neuwirth, "Imagining Mary, Disputing Jesus," 345–347; Saleh, "Meccan Gods, Jesus' Divinity," 97–98.

³ Boisliveau correctly notes that the locution "son of Mary" in Sūrat al-Zukhruf is to polemicize against the idea that he was the Son of God. "Sourate 43," 2b:1426. While this is undoubtedly a factor in the oft-repeated locution "son of Mary" throughout the Qur'an, he is usually referred to as "Jesus, the son of Mary," rather than merely "son of Mary." The absence of Jesus's name both from Sūrat al-Zukhruf and Sūrat al-Mu'minūn thus requires additional explanation, as is offered here.

former – e.g., Q 43:64 and 19:36 are virtually identical: “Indeed God is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him. This is a straight path” (*inna llāha [huwa] rabbī wa-rabbukum fa-‘budūhu hādhā širātun mustaqīm*, with the additional *huwa* in Q 43 not affecting the translation). In Sūrat al-Zukhruf the verse is embedded in a clear address by Jesus to the Israelites, whereas in Sūrat Maryam one has to infer that these are Jesus’s words, suggesting that the Sūrat al-Zukhruf passage is the model of the Sūrat Maryam insertion. There is also the obvious change in rhyme scheme in Q 19:34–40 (-ūn/-īn/-īm) compared to the rest of the *sūrah* (-ā).⁴

Prior to the vv. 34–40 insertion, Sūrat Maryam still presented an anti-Christian polemic, albeit a more subtle one, through paralleling Mary and Jesus with Zechariah and John, and through presenting Jesus not as the culmination of salvation history, but rather as merely one prophet among many.⁵ The message was evidently too subtle for the Meccan associators,⁶ who seized upon the apparent absurdity in the Prophet denouncing their angelic gods while invoking Jesus as a parable. It is not immediately clear what precisely the Meccans’ objection to Jesus was. It may well have been, as Saleh (and before him al-Zamakhsharī) infers, that they believed that their divinities, whom they held to be God’s angelic children (see, e.g., Q 6:100;

⁴ Neuwirth, “Imagining Mary, Disputing Jesus,” 343, 347. The status of Q 19:34–40 as a later insertion has been made by several scholars; see Reynolds, *The Qur’ān and The Bible*, 480; Nöldeke et al., *The History of the Qur’ān*, 106; Bell, *The Qur’ān*, 1:287. Robinson notes that vv. 34–40 are well integrated into the rest of the *sūrah*. *Discovering the Qur’an*, 147. This may suggest that they were part of the initial proclamation, but in fact the thematic overlaps Robinson identifies are rather generic, e.g., the reality of the hereafter, and in any case, we would expect secondary insertions to at least partially echo the language and themes of the text into which they are embedded. See Sinai, *Historical-Critical Introduction*, 102–104.

⁵ Sinai, *Historical-Critical Introduction*, 85–86.

⁶ It continues to be the case in some modern scholarship that the pre-expanded text of Sūrat Maryam is read as virtually a Christian hymn, and its anti-Christian tones are missed. See, for example, Dye, “The Qur’ān and Its Hypertextuality,” 4; idem, “Lieux saints communs,” 63–64.

43:19),⁷ were more worthy of worship than the man-god Jesus.⁸ Alternatively, they may have taken offence at a foreign god being invoked in the Qur'an at the expense of their local deities – their devotion to their forefathers and to their local customs are explicitly mentioned in vv. 19–24 and 29–33. We shall return to the issue of how the Meccans viewed Jesus below. In any case, in response to the challenge posed by the associators, the Qur'an for the first time had to articulate its own message of exactly who Jesus was.

6.2. THE *SŪRAH*-SPECIFIC CONTEXT OF THE JESUS PERICOPE

As well as there being an inter-*sūrah* context for the *Sūrat al-Zukhruf* Jesus pericope (namely, the prior proclamation of *Sūrat Maryam*), there are also more immediate intra-*sūrah* considerations, which go beyond a response to the Meccans' objections to *Sūrat Maryam*. Consider the two sections immediately prior to the Jesus pericope,⁹ vv. 40–45 and 46–56, which for convenience I will call the “threat pericope” and the “Moses pericope” respectively.

Threat pericope

⁷ Crone, “The Religion of the Qur'ānic Pagans,” 156–157; Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam*, 52–54.

⁸ Saleh, “Meccan Gods, Jesus' Divinity,” 106–107. Saleh's position here does not appear to be entirely consistent, as he goes on to argue that, in fact, the Meccans were *not* saying that their gods, being angels, were more worthy of worship than Jesus, but rather “that there is no difference and as such they are not going to replace their gods with any new God.” Ibid. But this latter position does not appear to be supported by the text, nor by the exegetes whom Saleh cites. It seems clear that the Meccans, at least as presented in the pericope, *do* argue that their gods are more worthy of worship; the question “Are our gods better or is he” (v. 58) is clearly rhetorical, with the expected answer: “Of course our gods are better!” Note also that this question is parallel to the obviously rhetorical question posed by Pharaoh in the previous pericope (v. 52) as to whether he, Pharaoh, is greater than Moses. See below for more on the relationship between the Jesus and the Moses pericopes.

⁹ Verses 40–45 are set off as a discrete section by a switch to the singular address to the Prophet, maintained throughout the section, but absent from the several verses that precede and follow, and by the thematic shift to the unbelievers' obstinacy in face of the inevitability of the final punishment. The section concludes with an exhortation to the Prophet. Verses 46–56, the Moses pericope, are more easily identifiable as a discrete section.

⁴⁰ Can you, then, make the deaf hear or guide the blind and those who are in plain error?
⁴¹ We will indeed take vengeance on them, whether We take you away
⁴² or show you what We have promised them, for indeed We hold them in Our power.
⁴³ So hold fast to what has been revealed to you. You are indeed on a straight path.
⁴⁴ It is indeed a reminder for you and your people, and soon you will be questioned.
⁴⁵ Ask those of Our apostles We have sent before you: Did We set up any gods to be worshiped besides the Merciful?

Moses pericope

⁴⁶ Certainly We sent Moses with Our signs to Pharaoh and his courtiers. He said, "I am indeed an apostle of the Lord of all the worlds."
⁴⁷ But when he brought them Our signs, they indeed laughed at them.
⁴⁸ We did not show them any sign but it was greater than its predecessor, and We visited on them punishment so that they might come back.
⁴⁹ They would say, "O magician! Invoke your Lord for us by the covenant He has made with you (to remove this scourge). We will indeed be guided (when it is removed)."
⁵⁰ But when We lifted the punishment from them, behold, they would break their pledge.
⁵¹ And Pharaoh proclaimed to his people, saying, "O my people! Do not the kingdom of Egypt and these rivers that run at my feet belong to me? Do you not see?
⁵² Am I not better than this wretch who cannot even speak clearly?¹⁰
⁵³ Why have no bracelets of gold been cast upon him, nor any angels accompany him as escorts?"
⁵⁴ Thus did he mislead his people and they obeyed him. They were indeed a transgressing lot.
⁵⁵ So when they roused Our wrath, We took vengeance on them and drowned them all.
⁵⁶ Thus We made them a bygone people and an example for posterity.

After the opening warning to the unbelievers in the threat pericope, the Prophet is exhorted to hold fast (*fa-stamsik*) to the revelation (v. 43). This sets the

¹⁰ The Arabic here is a little difficult, as the verse commences with the particle *am*, which suggests that it is disjunctive, having the meaning of *bal*, "rather." This appears to me to be the majority view of the *mufassirūn*, but it is not the most plausible reading of the verse. I concur with al-Farrā' here, that it simply introduces a question. *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān*, 3:35. Phrasing this as a negative question in translation ("Am I not better...") serves to bring out its rhetorical function.

Prophet apart from the unbelievers, who have no scriptural basis for their religion – earlier in the *sūrah* we read, “Did We give them a scripture (*kitāb*) before this, such that they are holding fast to it (*mustamsikūn*)?” (v. 21). The threat pericope concludes with an insistence that it can never be legitimate to worship gods beside the Merciful, *al-Raḥmān*. The associators had, in the same *sūrah*, tried to justify exactly this: “Had the Merciful (*al-Raḥmān*) wished, we would not have worshiped them (i.e., their gods),” (v. 20; see also vv. 14–15, 19–20, 22). The threat pericope leaves them in no doubt: the worship of their gods will not save them from the punishment that awaits them.

The Moses pericope that follows (vv. 46–56) provides a demonstration from biblical history that the warning in the threat pericope is not idle. Pharaoh and his hosts were shown sign after sign (v. 48), but persisted in their rejection of Moses (c.f. v. 40 from the threat pericope, “Can you, then, make the deaf hear or guide the blind?”). The threat that the Qur’an made against the unbelievers in v. 41, “We will indeed take vengeance (*muntaqimūn*) on them,” is illustrated to have previously been realised against Pharaoh in v. 55, “So when they roused Our wrath, We took vengeance (*intaqamnā*) on them and drowned them all.”

Finally, the Jesus pericope (vv. 57–65) picks up on the claim at the end of the threat pericope, “Ask those of Our apostles We have sent before you: Did We set up any gods to be worshiped besides the Merciful” (v. 45). As we have seen above, the associators were using Jesus as a counterexample to the Qur’an’s insistence that only strict monotheism is acceptable. The Moses and Jesus pericopes therefore jointly complete the threat pericope, by, respectively, providing historical evidence that the threat of punishment against the unbelievers should be taken seriously, and

dealing with the objection that other gods can be of any avail against such a threat. But a closer reading reveals that the Jesus pericope is not merely an addendum to the threat pericope; it also echoes the Moses pericope in significant ways. These are shown in table 6.1.

TABLE 6.1. Comparison between the Moses and Jesus pericopes in Sūrat al-Zukhruf.

Moses pericope (vv. 46–56)	Jesus pericope (vv. 57–65)
“Am I not better (<i>am ana khayr</i>) than this wretch” (v. 52).	“They said, ‘Are our gods better (<i>ālihatunā khayr</i>) or he (<i>am huwa</i>)?’” (v. 58).
“who cannot even speak clearly (<i>yubīn</i>)” (v. 52).	“When Jesus brought clear proofs (<i>al-bayyināt</i>), he said ‘I have brought you wisdom, and (I have come) to make clear (<i>wa-li-ubayyina</i>) to you some of the things that you differ about’” (v. 63).
“Why have no bracelets of gold been cast upon him, nor any angels accompany him as escorts?” (v. 53).	“Had We wished We would have made from you angels to be [your] successors on the earth” (v. 60).
“Thus did he mislead his people and they obeyed him (<i>aṭā’ūhu</i>)” (v. 54).	“So be wary of God and obey me (<i>aṭī’ūni</i>)” (v. 63).
“Thus We made them (<i>ja’alnāhum</i>) bygone people and an example (<i>mathal</i>) for posterity” (v. 56).	“He was just a servant whom We blessed, and We made him (<i>ja’alnāhu</i>) an example (<i>mathal</i>) for the Children of Israel” (v. 59).

Jesus’s ministry is thus depicted, to a certain degree, to be parallel to the ministry of Moses. This technique is familiar from Sūrat Maryam, where Jesus was portrayed as just one in a series of several messengers, and where he was shown as having a parallel life and teaching to John the Baptist (see above).

Let us now analyse the Jesus pericope directly. We see that the *sūrah* mentions four things regarding Jesus and his ministry: (1) he was “just a servant” (*‘abd*) and

“an example” (*mathal*) for the Israelites (v. 59); (2) had God wished, He could make the angels inherit the Earth from us; (3) Jesus was “knowledge of the Hour” (v. 61), a difficult expression that I shall explore below; and (4) he brought wisdom (*ḥikmah*), and came to clarify the disputes (*ikhtilāf*) that the Israelites had fallen into (v. 63). We will consider these four items in turn.

6.3. A SERVANT AND AN EXAMPLE TO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

The immediate response to the unbelievers’ polemical challenge is a straightforward denial of what they are insinuating: the Qur’an does not speak approvingly of a divinity besides God because Jesus was merely an *‘abd* (“servant”). His being a *mathal* (“example”) is probably a reference to his virgin birth and what its true significance is – not a sign of his divinity, but rather a miracle for the Children of Israel to benefit from.

This understanding of *mathal* is evident both from the fact that this passage is responding to criticisms that arose following the proclamation of the Sūrat Maryam annunciation story, and from how the argument is developed in the following verse (v. 60), that had God wished, He “would have made from you (*ja’alnā minkum*) angels to be [your] successors on the earth” (see the following section); in other words, God is able to create any creation out of any other. He can make angels from mankind and bring forth a child from a virgin – both are just manifestations of His creative power. The virgin birth is therefore not, as the associators evidently knew that the Christians were arguing, a sign of Jesus’s divinity.

Further, Q 43:59 seems to echo Jesus’s own words in the chronologically earlier Sūrat Maryam:

Sūrat Maryam

³⁰ He said, “I am indeed a servant (*‘abd*) of God! He has given me the scripture and made me a prophet.”

Sūrat al-Zukhruf

⁵⁹ He was just a servant (*‘abd*) whom We blessed, and We made him an example (*mathal*) for the Children of Israel

In both his Sūrat Maryam speech and in its Sūrat al-Zukhruf echo, Jesus is affirmed to be a servant (*‘abd*) of God. As Jesus delivers this speech from the cradle in Sūrat Maryam, in response to the Israelite accusations of unchastity against his mother following his virgin birth, the overlaps between the two verses again suggests that it is this miracle of the virgin birth (along with his speaking in the cradle) that is being recalled as an example (*mathal*) for the Israelites in Sūrat al-Zukhruf.

The crucial point to note here – and it is a point to which we shall return several times – is that the Sūrat al-Zukhruf Jesus pericope is squarely focussed on denying Jesus’s divinity. The method employed by the Qur’an in its polemic against Christian doctrine is also noteworthy: it subverts the argument for Jesus’s divinity by altering the significance of the issue at hand. Thus, in v. 59, Jesus’s virgin birth becomes nothing more than an illustration of God’s power for the benefit of the Israelites.

6.4. THE ANGELIC SUCCESSORS

Verse 60 reads, “Had We wished We would have made from you (*ja‘alnā minkum*) angels to be [your] successors on the earth.” Al-Zamakhsharī is, I believe, correct that the placement of the verse here is to make the point that God could have

humans beget angels just as easily as he made a virgin give birth to Jesus.¹¹ (For similar uses of the *ja'ala min* construction, see Q 5:60; 32:24.) While this explains the logical flow of the verses, the question as to why this particular hypothetical illustration of God's power was chosen over any other remains unanswered.¹² If we keep sight of the context of this pericope however, which is to respond to claims of Jesus's divinity, we can suggest some solutions.

The first possibility is that the verse is responding to a Christian angelomorphic Christology, i.e., a Christology which envisioned Jesus as a supreme angel made human.¹³ There is abundant evidence of an angel-Christology in the New Testament and early Christianity.¹⁴ Although it does not appear to have persisted past the fourth century,¹⁵ angelomorphic Christology enjoyed a revival of sorts in the writings

¹¹ Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 4:261.

¹² Blachère comments on this verse, "Ce vt. résiste à toute tentative sérieuse pour le relier au contexte." *Le Coran*, 523. Similarly Paret, "Der Vers ist an sich leicht zu übersetzen, aber in seinem Zusammenhang mit dem Kontext schwer zu verstehen." *Der Koran*, 441. Boisliveau notes an interesting parallel with Matthew 3:9 (and also Luke 3:8), "And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham," but why the Qur'an might allude to that passage remains unexplained. "Sourate 43," 2b:1427.

¹³ The possibility of an angelomorphic Christology in the Qur'an has also been raised by Carlos Segovia, although he does not examine the verse here under consideration. He locates his qur'anic angelomorphic Christology in his highly revisionist (and, it must be said, fantastical) analysis of several early Meccan *sūrah*s, which he interprets as being communicated by an angel who is at the same time "One with God," basing his argument largely on the Qur'an's frequent change of pronouns in referring to God. See Segovia, *The Quranic Jesus*, 119–128.

¹⁴ The secondary literature documenting the angelomorphic Christology in the New Testament and its Jewish roots is vast. See in particular Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 94–95; Hurtado, "Monotheism, Principal Angels, and the Background of Christology," 557–563; idem, *One God, One Lord*, esp. chaps. 4 and 5; Collins, "Powers in Heaven"; Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels*, esp. 231–236. An encyclopaedic collection of the evidence for an angelomorphic Christology up until Nicaea is given by Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Theology*. See however Hurtado, "Monotheism, Principal Angels, and the Background of Christology," 559, for a brief critique of Gieschen's handling of primary source evidence, an issue that I too touch on in n. 27 below.

¹⁵ There is evidence that angelomorphic Christology was adopted by Jewish Christian groups. See Hannah, *Michael and Christ*, 173–179. The continued existence of such groups remains possible, perhaps in the remote corners of Arabia up until the time of the Qur'an's proclamation, but there is no compelling evidence. For arguments in favour of the presence of Jewish Christians in the Qur'an's milieu, see Crone, "Jewish Christianity and the Qur'ān (Part I)" (in which she also presents a useful digest of the history of the Jewish Christianity thesis in Qur'anic Studies on pp. 228–231, though see Griffith, "Jewish Christians and the Qur'ān," 103–104, who traces the Jewish Christian thesis in

of Pseudo-Dionysius in the late-fifth and early-sixth centuries. Pseudo-Dionysius's works met with widespread acclaim, and were rapidly translated into Syriac.¹⁶ His admirers included Severus of Antioch (d. 538 CE), "the most important Greek theologian of the 6th cent., and ... along with Philoxenos, the main authority on christology for the Syriac Orthodox tradition."¹⁷ In Severus's extant writings we have the earliest citations of Pseudo-Dionysius,¹⁸ and his own works were rapidly translated in the sixth century into Syriac.¹⁹ According to Pseudo-Dionysius, Christ is the "transcendent Cause of those beings that live beyond this world," i.e., the highest spiritual orders of angels (*Celestial Hierarchy* 4.4 [= 181C]).²⁰ Moreover, because Jesus, like the angels, communicates God's will to us, "he himself entered the order of the revealers and is called the 'angel of the great counsel' (Isaiah 9:6

Western scholarship even further back than Crone has documented, to John Toland's 1718 monograph, *Nazarenes, or Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity*) and "Jewish Christianity and the Qur'ān (Part II)," and see also the robust response by Griffith, "Jewish Christians and the Qur'ān." Alongside responding to the Jewish Christian thesis, Griffith draws attention to the very problematic category of "Jewish Christianity" in the first place. *Ibid.*, 110–114. See also *ibid.*, 110–111, nn. 27–28, and Dye, "Jewish Christianity," 12, n. 2, for further studies on the issue. Various aspects of the thesis of Jewish Christianity are discussed in the edited volume by Sánchez, *Jewish Christianity and the Origins of Islam*. See in particular Dye's suggestion of late antique "Jewish Christian sensitivities" that are not the result of the ongoing presence of heretical groups hidden from the historical record, but rather simple believers forming ideas about faith through an amalgamation of exposure to scripture, its various interpretations, and their own understanding. Dye, "Jewish Christianity," 26–29. Note also Zellentin's important observation, "When discussing the Qur'ān's negation of God's fatherhood, and in turn of Jesus' sonship, we should note how broad the range of Christological positions continued to be even after Nicaea and Chalcedon. For the Qur'ān, it may be especially important to note that adoptionist theology ... is by no means pre-Nicene alone, but continues to be developed in response to the Trinitarian debates after Nicaea." Azaiez et al., *The Qur'an Seminar Commentary*, 336. Of particular importance to the question of Jewish Christianity are a series of studies by Zellentin, in which he argues for the ongoing existence throughout late antiquity of what he terms a Judaeo-Christian legal culture as part of mainstream Christian identities, and not as an obscure remnant of an early sect of Jesus followers. Zellentin, *The Qur'ān's Legal Culture*; *idem*, *Law as Literature: From the Bible to the Qur'an*. The existence of such a legal culture is not evidence, of course, for an ongoing angelomorphic Christology that may have been characteristic of earlier Jewish Christian groups.

¹⁶ Barsoum, *The Scattered Pearls*, 123–128.

¹⁷ GEDSH, s.v. "Severus of Antioch."

¹⁸ Grillmeier et al., *Christ in Christian Tradition ... The Churches of Jerusalem*, 340.

¹⁹ Millar, "The Evolution of the Syrian Orthodox Church," 65–66.

²⁰ Quotations for Pseudo-Dionysius are from 1987 translation by Luibheid and Roemer, *Pseudo-Dionysius*. The critical edition of the *Celestial Hierarchy* (as well as rest of the Dionysian corpus except *On the Divine Names*) is the 2012 edition of Heil and Ritter, *Corpus Dionysiacum II*.

LXX). Indeed, when he announced what he knew of the Father, was it not as an angel?" (*Celestial Hierarchy* 4.4 [= 181D]). It would certainly be incorrect to say that this was a return to the full-blown angelomorphic Christology of early Christianity, but, nonetheless, the strong neo-Platonic element in Pseudo-Dionysius favoured a cosmology of hierarchical beings cascading down from the One.²¹ Pseudo-Dionysius depicts God's revelations to humanity as mediated through a hierarchy of celestial beings, starting with those closest to God, and then successively passed down to lesser angels, until finally communicated to man.²² It is a small step from such a cosmology to seeing Jesus as the highest, most divine angel.²³

Further evidence for an ongoing interest in angelomorphic Christology that may have informed the Qur'anic milieu comes from the Pseudo-Clementines.²⁴ Although the two recensions of the text (the Recognitions and the Homilies) date back to the at least the fourth century, the Pseudo-Clementines are nonetheless witness to a late antique Christian legal culture that the Qur'an seems to be in conversation with, as has been extensively explored by Holger Zellentin.²⁵ It thus

²¹ For an overview of Pseudo-Dionysius's debt to Neoplatonism, see Marenbon, *Early Medieval Philosophy*, 13–19. For in-depth studies, see Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*; Wear and Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite*.

²² See the citations in n. 21. See also the very useful introduction and commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius in Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 47–90.

²³ The echoes of an angelomorphic Christology in Pseudo-Dionysius are only occasionally acknowledged. See, for example, Hoffmann, *The Destroyer and the Lamb*, 3–4.

²⁴ Often described as the first Christian novel, the Pseudo-Clementines tell the story of Clement of Rome and his association with the apostle Peter. For a brief introduction, see ODCC, s.v. "Clementine Literature." The Homilies survive in the original Greek, whereas the Recognitions survive only in translations into Latin and Syriac. The critical editions of the Greek and Latin recensions are Rehm and Strecker, *Die Pseudoklementinen I: Homilien* and idem, *Die Pseudoklementinen II: Rekognitionen*. The earliest Syriac manuscript dates to 411 CE, and a second manuscript dates to the sixth century. See GEDSH, s.v. "Clement of Rome and Pseudo-Clementine literature." The critical edition of the Syriac Clementines is Frankenberg, *Die syrischen Clementinen*, which includes a hypothesised reconstruction of the Greek original. The English translation of the Syriac Clementines is by Jones, *The Syriac Pseudo-Clementines*.

²⁵ See the citations in n. 15.

remains plausible that the Christology they preserve, despite its pre-Nicene tone, is also relevant to understanding the Qur'an's presentation of Jesus.²⁶ The Pseudo-Clementines inherit and continue the oldest layer of the angelomorphic Christology tradition in equating Jesus (whom the text calls the True Prophet) with the Angel of Lord. For instance, in *Recognitions* 1.32, the text describes how an angel approached Abraham and "testified to him concerning his election." In the very next chapter, it is rather the True Prophet that testifies to Abraham.²⁷

The second possibility for why Q 43:60 invokes the possibility of angels being begotten by humans as within God's creative capacity is that the associators had a pre-conceived notion that Jesus was revered as an angelic-*cum*-divine being by the Christians that did not derive from any contemporaneous Christian Christology. The eclectic nature of the Meccans' beliefs incorporated elements from the surrounding monotheistic cultures, such as a belief an all-powerful Creator God, and the casting of their lesser goddesses, the "Daughters of God," as angels.²⁸ It is entirely plausible that they made the reverse move too, by imposing their own familiar categories of

²⁶ See also Dye's and Zellentin's observations cited in n. 15.

²⁷ See also *Recognitions* 1.52 and 2.48, and see Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Theology*, 209–212. Not all the citations Gieschen provides to demonstrate an angelomorphic Christology in the Pseudo-Clementines are convincing. For instance, his claim that *Recognitions* 2.42 equates Christ with the greatest archangel does not seem to stand to scrutiny. Furthermore, his claim that *Recognitions* 2.42 has the True Prophet appearing to Moses, as an example of the tradition whereby Jesus is equated with the Angel of the Lord, is based on Rufinus's Latin translation of the *Recognitions*: "the True Prophet appeared to Moses" (*apparuit verus propheta Moysi*). The Syriac translation, which on the whole better reflects the Greek original, has "the prophet of truth, Moses, came to them" (*etā lwāthūn nbīyā de-šrārā mūše*). See Frankenberg, *Die syrischen Clementinen*, 124.

²⁸ Sinai, *Historical-Critical Introduction*, 69–72. For similar examples of eclecticism practised in late antiquity, and their relevance for understanding the Meccan associators, see Anthony, "Why Does the Qur'an Need the Meccan Sanctuary?," 25–27. Note also the Qur'an's angelomorphic pneumatology: the Spirit (*rūh*) or Holy Spirit (*rūh al-qudus*) who brings the revelation to the Prophet in the Meccan corpus (e.g., Q 16:102; 26:193; 40:15; 42:52) is eventually assimilated to the angel Gabriel (Q 2:97). Such an identity is already suggested in the Meccan Q 19:17, where the "Our Spirit" (*rūhanā*) is sent for the annunciation to Mary, whereas in the Gospel narrative this function is performed by Gabriel (Luke 1:26). It may be that angelomorphic pneumatology and angelomorphic Christology are part of the same principle of parsimony in the Qur'an, whereby the scripture simplifies a complex pre-qur'anic supernatural cosmos. See EQ, s.v. "Holy Spirit."

divine hierarchies onto a faith relatively foreign to them. Given the quite limited evidence of a Syriac angelomorphic Christology, this option might seem to be the more preferable.

In either case, the verse and its placement in the pericope can only be grasped if we take some sort of angelomorphic Christology to lie in the background, however it might have arisen. It is possible that an echo of this same Christology is found in Q 4:172, “Christ would never disdain being a servant of God, nor would the angels brought near (Him) (*al-malā’ikatu l-muqarrabūn*).” This is the only place in the Qur’an where the phrase *al-malā’ikatu l-muqarrabūn* is employed. The co-ordination of this phrase with “Christ” suggests some degree of affinity between the two in the mind of the audience. In the Sūrat al-Zukhruf Jesus pericope, just as the significance of Jesus’s virgin birth was reformulated as nothing more than a demonstration of God’s power, so now rather than explicitly denying the possibility of Jesus being an angel, the associators’ beliefs about Jesus’s significance to the Christians is instead used as an illustration of God’s omnipotence.

6.5. KNOWLEDGE OF THE HOUR

After the significance of Jesus’s miraculous birth and possible angelomorphic beliefs concerning him have been recast to demonstrate God’s power rather than Jesus’s divine status, the Qur’an goes on to give the true significance of Jesus’s life: “He is indeed (*innahu*) knowledge (*‘ilm*) of the Hour” (v. 61). The use of *‘ilm* here has caused considerable difficulty for interpreters medieval and modern. Al-Ṭabarī

records two opinions:²⁹ either the pronoun *innahu* at the start of the verse refers to Jesus, and the verse is referring to his second coming, by which will be known that the final hour has drawn near,³⁰ or the pronoun refers to the Qur'an (and thus should be translated "it" rather than "he").³¹ Contextually, the second reading is not very convincing.³² The entire passage is concerned with the status of Jesus rather than. But in this case, is it plausible to understand his being "knowledge" (*'ilm*) of the hour as referring to his second coming? Neuwirth, recognising the difficulty, prefers the non-canonical reading *'alam*, "sign."³³

Before attempting to interpret the verse, we must appreciate that the context has not changed: the Qur'an is still responding to the associators' objection that the Prophet accepts one figure who is worshipped as a god, viz., Jesus, while simultaneously rejecting the associators' angelic gods. After directly rebuffing the notion of Jesus's being God (v. 59), the passage has engaged with and subverted thus far two arguments in support of his divine status: his miraculous birth, and his status as an angel. It seems therefore that the Qur'an's claim that Jesus is "knowledge of the Hour" should also be understood as a polemical response to an existing Christian doctrine regarding his divinity.

Intriguingly, both of the abovementioned examples of post-Nicene angelomorphic Christology, viz., Pseudo-Dionysius and the Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions, connect their description of Jesus as an angel with his role as a bringer

²⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 20:631–634.

³⁰ So also Reynolds, *Qur'an and Bible*, 738.

³¹ Saleh supports this second reading in "Meccan Gods, Jesus' Divinity," 103.

³² Paret, *Der Koran*, 441. This was also recognised by Mawdūdī, *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, 4:547.

³³ Neuwirth, "Imagining Mary, Disputing Jesus," 342. Boisliveau also favours this reading; "Sourate 43," 2b:1427.

of knowledge, particularly of God and the hereafter: Pseudo-Dionysius asks (as I have already cited above), “Indeed, when he announced what he knew of the Father, was it not as an angel?” (*Celestial Hierarchy* 4.4 [= 181D]); and in the *Recognitions*, immediately after the angel who appeared to Abraham has been identified as the True Prophet, we are told that “he revealed everything to him, and he assured him also regarding God, the origin of the world, its dissolution, the immortal soul, and the ways that are pleasing to him; also that the dead will rise, that there will be a judgment, and that those who are found in virtue will receive hidden good things for eternity, while those who are evil will suffer the punishment of the eternal fire” (*Recognitions* 1.33).

So the Qur’an follows a clear precedent in connecting allusions to Jesus’s angelic status with his role as a bringer of knowledge. I suggest the key to understanding how the current verse functions as an anti-Christological polemic is by paying attention to its seemingly unusual phraseology. Where it could have said that Jesus taught or warned about the Hour, the verse instead has Jesus himself as “knowledge of the Hour.” The only comparable phrase I am aware of in patristic discourse on Jesus is that he is “knowledge of God,” and I tentatively suggest that it is this latter description of Christ that the qur’anic phrase is targeting and replacing. The designation that Jesus is “knowledge of God” is sufficiently widely attested among the church fathers for it to have been amenable to such a recasting.³⁴

³⁴ After arguing that v. 62 must be referring to Jesus, and not the Qur’an (see n. 32 above), Paret further notes that regarding the word *‘ilm*, “Der Wortlaut bleibt allerdings auch bei einer solchen Deutung etwas rätselhaft. Das ‚Wissen um die Stunde‘ (*‘ilm as-sā‘a*) [sic.] war anscheinend schon zu einem so festen Begriff geworden, daß Jesus als eine für das eschatologische Geschehen entscheidende Person geradezu identifiziert werden konnte.” *Der Koran*, 441.

The seeds of such a description of Jesus are present in the New Testament already. Jesus is an embodiment of the knowledge of God, being His image (e.g., Col 1:15; 2 Cor 4:4), His Logos (e.g., John 1:1), and His Wisdom (e.g., 1 Cor 1:24, 30). More explicitly, consider the following passages: “No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him,” (Matt 11:27; see also Luke 10:22); “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ” (Cor 4:6); and “The Son is the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15). See also John 17:25–26.

As for the church fathers, a few citations will suffice. I include two early church fathers – Irenaeus (d. c. 202) and Clement of Alexandria (d. 215)³⁵ – both of whom emphasised the role of the incarnate Logos as a means through whom the Father can be known, and two from the Syriac tradition, Aphrahat (fl. first half of 4th cent.)³⁶ and Severus of Antioch.³⁷ Throughout, the emphasis is my own.

Irenaeus

For no one can know the Father, unless through the Word of God, that is, unless by the Son revealing [Him].... Wherefore the Son reveals the knowledge of the Father through His own manifestation. *For the manifestation of the Son is the knowledge of the Father.* (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.6.3)

The knowledge of the Father is the Son, and the knowledge of the Son of God is through the Holy Spirit; and, according to the good pleasure of the Father, the Son ministers and dispenses the Spirit to whomsoever the Father wills and as He wills. (*Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 6)

Clement of Alexandria

³⁵ The translations from both Irenaeus and Clement are from the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*.

³⁶ Translations for Aphrahat are from the 2010 Lehto edition.

³⁷ For a detailed study of Severus’s understanding of Jesus as the means and embodiment of the knowledge of God, see Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies*, 36–44.

The face of God is the Word by whom God is manifested and made known. (*Christ the Educator* 1.7)

God, then, being not a subject for demonstration, cannot be the object of science. But the Son is *wisdom, and knowledge*, and truth, and all else that has affinity thereto. (*Miscellanies* 4.25)

But the knowledge of God is a thing inaccessible to the ears and like organs of this kind of people. Hence the Son is said to be the Father's face, being the revealer of the Father's character to the five senses by clothing Himself with flesh. (*Miscellanies* 5.6)

Aphrahat

So it is with the knowledge of God. Though people take from it, there is no deficiency in it.... The treasure is never diminished: it is the wisdom of God, and the Steward is our Lord Jesus Christ, as he testified when he said, "Everything has been committed to me by my Father." He is also the Steward of Wisdom, as the apostle said: "Christ is the power and the wisdom of God." *This wisdom is portioned out to many, yet is not diminished, just as I explained to you above that the prophets received from the Spirit of Christ yet Christ was not lessened.* (*Demonstrations* 10.8)

Severus of Antioch

The knowledge which relates to the Holy Trinity was also inaccessible to men and intangible. But this one of the Trinity, the Word of God, after he incarnated without change and became man, humiliating himself voluntarily, presented to us the knowledge which relates to Himself, and to the Father, and to the Holy Spirit, when he stammered with us, as with children, because of his resemblance to us, and because he participated in the same essence as us except in sin, and that he truly became a man. This is why, in fact, he called himself the Door and the Way, by showing that He had become the entry and the beginning of the understanding in relation to the Trinity and of the *Knowledge of God* which is in everything.³⁸

Some of these citations are more direct than others. Thus, whereas Irenaeus states unambiguously that "The knowledge of the Father is the Son," Aphrahat first describes the knowledge of God as never diminishing, then equates it with the

³⁸ Homily 98 (*Patrologia Orientalis* 25, 159–160, my translation).

wisdom of God, then equates the latter with Jesus, and finally reiterates that Christ is never diminished. In all of the citations, however, the core thesis is the same: Christ himself is a physical manifestation of the knowledge of God. Note also the conjunction of wisdom and knowledge in Clement and Aphrahat when describing Jesus, a point to which we shall return.

Perhaps the clearest indication that the qur'anic locution "knowledge of the Hour" for Jesus is a reworking of the Christian motif of Jesus as "knowledge of God" is that it performs an analogous reconfiguration of Jesus's identity in Q 3:49. Following the annunciation to Mary, the Qur'an has Jesus address the Israelites:

And [he will be] an apostle to the Children of Israel, (declaring,) "I have certainly brought you a sign (*āyah*) from your Lord: I create (*akhluqu*) for you the form of a bird out of clay (*al-tīn*), then I breathe (*anfukhu*) into it, and it becomes a bird by God's leave. I heal the blind and the leper and I revive the dead (*uhyī l-mawtā*) by God's leave. I tell you (*unabbi'ukum*) what you have eaten and what you have stored in your houses. There is indeed a sign in that for you, should you be faithful.

While the diverse range of intertexts for the list of miracles in this verse have been well documented,³⁹ I wish to focus on a seemingly innocuous detail: Jesus declares these miracles to be a "sign" (*āyah*). Although sign-miracles are also attributed to other prophets in the Qur'an,⁴⁰ no other qur'anic prophet draws such pronounced attention to his own miraculous performances. It seems legitimate therefore to investigate if there is an antecedent tradition here, too, that the Qur'an is alluding to. In the Gospel of John, both Jesus and his audience (uniquely among

³⁹ Reynolds, *The Qur'an and the Bible*, 121–122.

⁴⁰ *EQ*, s.v. "Signs"

the canonical Gospels) call his miracles “signs,” or *’ātā* (plural *’ātwātā*) in the Peshitta,⁴¹ cognate to the Arabic *āyah*. This includes Jesus’s healing the blind (John 9:16, cf. “I heal the blind” in Q 3:49) and raising the dead (John 12:18, cf. “I revive the dead”).

Indeed, the miraculous signs that Jesus performs in the Gospel of John are central to the evangelist’s message. Over the course of his ministry, Jesus is portrayed as revealing his own divinity through these signs.⁴² This is also the purpose of the miracles in the Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions. Before a list of Jesus’s miracles, which are again referred to as “signs” (*’ātwātā*), and which partly overlap with the list in Q 3:49 (viz., reviving the dead, and healing the leper and the blind), we are told that the purpose of the miracles was so that “the one who did those things might be believed to be full of divinity (*’alāhūtā*)” (Recognitions 1.6).

Interestingly, the Recognitions prefaces the miracles by saying that it was “as if his authority (*šūlṭāneh*) was from God.” This of course echoes several New Testament passages that speak of Jesus’s authority from God (e.g., Matt 7:29; 28:18), but also bears a striking resemblance to the qur’anic phrase “by God’s permission (*idhn*).”

Thus far, we have a partially overlapping list of miracles in Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān (Q 3) on the one hand, and in the Gospel of John and in the Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions on the other, which are called signs in all the texts. The latter two present the signs as evidence of Jesus’s self-revelation as a divine being, analogous therefore to his being an embodiment of the “knowledge of God.” In Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān

⁴¹ The Greek is *sēmeion*, plural *sēmeia*.

⁴² There are alternative explanations for the centrality of the signs in John’s Gospel, such as that they point to an eschatological future. For a robust defence of the signs as indicators of Jesus’s identity and his relationship with the Father, see Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1:521–525, and Lee, “Symbolism and ‘Signs’ in the Fourth Gospel,” 265–269.

however, as I will argue below, Jesus's miracles point instead to the reality of the hereafter. This reconfiguration is parallel to my suggestion that Jesus's description as "knowledge of the Hour" in the Sūrat al-Zukhruf Jesus pericope is a conscious rejection his being "knowledge of God." If my reading of Q 3:49 as presented below is correct, it would thus support my interpretation for the locution "knowledge of the Hour."

As Neal Robinson has noticed, the language of the miracles listed in Q 3:49 is usually reserved for God's creative power.⁴³ Thus, creation from clay and breathing life into it is strongly reminiscent of God's creation of man, with the same vocabulary of *khalq* ("creation," used throughout the qur'anic corpus for God's creative activity), *ṭīn* ("clay"; see Q 6:2; 7:12; 17:61; 23:12; 32:7; 37:11; 38:71, 76), and *nafkh* ("breathing"; see Q 15:29; 32:9; 38:72; see also Q 21:91; 66:12). There is also an obvious overlap in both theme and wording between Jesus's bringing the dead to life and God's eschatological resurrection of the dead (e.g., Q 2:73, 260; 22:6; 36:12, among very many others). Most *mufassirūn* and modern scholars have focussed on the repeated phrase "by God's permission," which is clearly intended to counter any argument that might be put forward for the divinity of Jesus based on his miraculous deeds.⁴⁴ While that is clearly an important part of the text's message, we still need to explain why these four miracles in particular have been chosen.

It seems that the miracles trace out the entire life cycle of humanity, from creation to final judgement. We have already seen how the first miracle is reminiscent of the beginning of man's creation from clay, followed by God's

⁴³ Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, 155. See also Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and the Bible*, 122.

⁴⁴ Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, 144; Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and the Bible*, 122.

breathing His spirit into him. The second miracle, that Jesus cured the blind and the leper, can be read as an echo of the Qur'an's description of the physical development of a human being, from a weak and helpless foetus to full strength. For example: "It is God who created you from (a state of) weakness, then He gave you power after weakness...." (Q 30:54); and "God has brought you forth from the bellies of your mothers while you did not know anything. He invested you with hearing, sight, and the hearts, so that you may give thanks." (Q 16:78; see also Q 32:9; 67:23)

Following this second miracle, which parallels birth and maturity, the third one – the revivification of the dead – represents the progression to death and then resurrection. This of course has innumerable qur'anic parallels with God as the subject. In Sūrat Āl 'Imrān alone, see vv. 27 ("You bring forth the living [*al-ḥayy*] from the dead [*al-mayyit*] and You bring forth the dead from the living.") and 156 ("But God gives life [*yuḥyī*] and brings death [*yumīt*]").

The final miracle, of Jesus informing (*unabbi'ukum*) the Israelites of what they consume and hoard in the privacy of their homes, parallels the final judgement, when God will inform humanity of what they had been doing. The verb used in the miracles verse, *nabba'a*, "to inform," is predominantly used in the Qur'an for this final eschatological recounting of a person's deeds, with some version of the phrase "To God will be the return of you all, and He will inform you (*yunabbi'ukum*) concerning what you have been doing" recurring formulaically several times (e.g., Q 5:105; 6:60, 108, 159; 9:94, 105).

Jesus's miracles, therefore, which in the Gospel of John and the Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions point to his divinity, have been reweven to point to a single reality: after the human being's creation, birth and maturity, death and resurrection,

there will be a final reckoning. Jesus, through the miracles he performs, has thus become a living allegory of human life on earth, ending with judgement before God; he is the embodiment of “knowledge of the Hour.”

6.6. THE BRINGER OF WISDOM AND THE CLARIFIER

The primary purpose of the preceding sections has been to demonstrate the significant degree to which the Sūrat al-Zukhruf Jesus pericope is steeped in anti-Christological polemics, and the consistent way various Christologically significant doctrines are addressed, namely, through some level of affirmation followed by subversion and reformulation of the same doctrines, such that ultimately they indicate God’s power rather than Jesus’s divinity. Verse 63, which provides the final proclamation in the Sūrat al-Zukhruf Jesus pericope about Jesus’s status and mission (before the conclusion in v. 64), states that he brought wisdom, and that he clarified the disputes that the Israelites fell into. I have already indicated some New Testament intertexts at the start of this chapter, which, like v. 63, portray Jesus as a teacher of wisdom. But the question remains why this particular characteristic of Jesus is cited here, in the context of anti-Christological polemics, and what precisely the Qur’an means by it. In this section, I will begin by considering the relation between Jesus and wisdom first in the New Testament and patristic literature. I will then return to the Sūrat al-Zukhruf Jesus pericope and examine the significance of Jesus as bringer of wisdom in the context of Christian discourse, the immediate pericope, and other *ḥikmah* passages.

Jesus in the New Testament is much more than merely a teacher of wisdom – he is Wisdom personified. This depiction of Jesus is a continuation of the interest in

divine hypostases, including God's Wisdom, Word, Presence, Glory, and Spirit, prevalent in Second Temple Judaism. The significance of pre-Christian discourse on wisdom for the theology of the New Testament is evident from comparing those New Testament passages that may indicate Christ's pre-existence to early Jewish wisdom literature. As Dunn observes:

In compiling a list of passages which seem clearly to express a doctrine of Christ's pre-existence few could ignore John 1.1-18, I Cor. 8.5-6, Col. 1.15-17 and Heb. 1.1-3a. Likewise within the Synoptic traditions of Jesus' ministry most would agree that the highest christology is to be found in Matt. 11.27-30. But all these passages have been influenced to a significant degree by Wisdom terminology; all express what can properly be called a Wisdom christology in one form or other.⁴⁵

The parallels between the New Testament depictions of Jesus and early Jewish wisdom discourse are in fact so evident, according to Dunn, that they would have been eminently clear to the early Christians familiar with that body of literature.⁴⁶

Although the primary identity of Christ affirmed and expounded upon by the earliest church fathers, particularly in the East, was his being the Logos, this was frequently used interchangeably with his being Wisdom.⁴⁷ This is in keeping with the vocabulary of the New Testament, in which Logos is virtually synonymous with Wisdom.⁴⁸ Origen seems to have been the first Church Father to really emphasize Jesus as an incarnation of Wisdom,⁴⁹ seemingly preferring that title to Logos.⁵⁰ Whereas before Origen Wisdom was often equated with the Holy Spirit (just as the

⁴⁵ Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 164, 209–212.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 167, 200–206; Grant, *Jesus after the Gospels*, 29–31.

⁴⁷ Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 214; Grant, *Jesus After the Gospels*, 70–71.

⁴⁸ Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 215.

⁴⁹ The elementary Wisdom Christology of the New Testament only began to be developed into something more systematic in the second half of the second century. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "σοφία, σοφοσ".

⁵⁰ Waers, "Wisdom Christology," 103–105.

Logos was identified with Jesus), after Origen, in the fourth century, describing Jesus as Wisdom personified became commonplace, and Proverbs 8:22 was frequently cited in this connection: “The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago” (see chapter 3).⁵¹

A corollary of Jesus being Wisdom incarnate for the church fathers was that he was the greatest teacher of wisdom, which of course has a precedent in the New Testament too, as mentioned above. In particular, Jesus’s identity as God’s Wisdom meant that he taught the correct interpretation of Jewish law, an idea that again has its roots in the New Testament.⁵² Additionally, we frequently find in patristic writings that Jesus’s portrayal as Wisdom, or as a teacher of wisdom, went alongside his portrayal as God’s knowledge, or at least as the means to God’s knowledge. We thus have in the writings of the church fathers the triad of wisdom, knowledge, and teaching that we also find in *Sūrat al-Zukhruf*.

We will suffice here with citations from one of the foremost of the logos theologians, Clement of Alexandria, and again from Severus of Antioch:

Clement of Alexandria

For He was the Wisdom in which the Sovereign God delighted (Prov 8:30). For the Son is the power of God, as being the Father’s most ancient Word before the production of all things, and His Wisdom. He is then properly called the Teacher of the beings formed by Him. (*Miscellanies* 7.2)

Severus of Antioch

⁵¹ Ayers, “Scripture in the Trinitarian Controversies,” 440–441.

⁵² There are several studies of what one might call Jesus’s legal philosophy. An excellent resource for checking the Jewish background to Jesus’s teachings, legal and otherwise, is Levine and Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*. For a theoretical overview of how Jesus engaged with Pharisaic legal methodology, see Zellentin, “Jesus and the Tradition of the Elders”; Saiman, “Jesus’ Legal Theory: A Rabbinic Reading”; and the review of the latter article by Skeel, “What Were Jesus and the Pharisees Talking about?”

When the Word, the unique Wisdom and Power of the Father, was incarnate, it was for us that he was created, in that he was made man. But he has been created for the beginning of his ways, to the end that he make us go up, who were in error, toward the Father and the right way of the virtues.... [But] “the way” is the direction and teaching of knowledge and virtue, by which “the works,” i.e. ourselves, have been newly formed and adapted to the good.⁵³

We can see that for Severus, part of what it meant for Jesus to be Wisdom incarnate was that he was a teacher of the law of virtue. For Severus, this meant a return to the spiritual law that Adam was endowed with before the Fall, and that was only dimly reflected in the explicitly formulated laws of Moses, which in fact were an outgrowth of the spiritual laws. With Jesus, the complete restoration of the spiritual law was effected.⁵⁴ This in fact is a recurring theme among several of the Church fathers, and a topic to which we will return in the next chapter when we consider the Qur’an’s reformulation of the Mosaic Decalogue, and the continuity of that reformulation with Christian discourse on the Ten Commandments.

For the moment, one final citation from Severus will suffice to demonstrate this patristic motif in a particularly interesting manner. Commenting on the different practices that arose within the Jewish community following the Babylonian exile and subsequent return, Severus writes:

In this way all those who afterwards lived in these regions of the land and built houses necessarily hated the coarseness, the confused mixture, and the unclarity of the manners of worship.... So those who were from Jerusalem approached Jesus ... (those) who take (lit. “name”) very seriously the tradition of the elders, and who condemn as a great fault people who eat with unwashed hands.

⁵³ Homily 52 (*Patrologia Orientalis* 12, 35; translation from Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies*, 44). For more on Severus’s combination of Jesus’s wisdom and knowledge, see Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies*, 39.

⁵⁴ Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies*, 45–47.

What does Jesus, God, the Word, the Wisdom of the Father answer and say? He does not begin openly condemning, though he could have said to them, “There is no need for the disciples to wash the hands of body, as they have borne their cross and have followed me, and are pure from all evil action.”⁵⁵

Severus is here discussing the Pharisaic requirement of washing hands as an act of purification before eating, a ritual which Jesus condemned as being non-scriptural (Mark 7:1–8, Luke 11:37–40; Matt 15:2–3).⁵⁶ Severus goes on to explain how the way Jesus responded was the most efficacious in making the Pharisees understand their errors. It becomes clear that Severus’s reference to Jesus as the “the wisdom of the Father” is no casual honorific here, but serves to prepare the reader for Jesus’s way of teaching. The passage is also remarkable in that it opens with how the Jews fell into dispute regarding Torah observance, and the inadequacy of the Pharisaic legalistic solution to the problem. Ultimately, only Jesus’s teaching, filled with wisdom, was able to adequately resolve their Torah disputes. Compare this with Q 43:63, “I have brought you wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*) and (I have come) to make clear to you some of the things that you differ about.” The parallels between the homily and the qur’anic verse are abundantly clear.

Thus far, we have seen: (a) the consistent association between Jesus, wisdom, and knowledge from the New Testament to the church fathers – just as they are uniquely combined for him in the Qur’an in the Sūrat al-Zukhruf Jesus pericope – and the manner in which the church fathers utilised that connection to demonstrate Jesus’s pre-existence; and (b) the frequent association in the same patristic writings between Jesus’s being Wisdom and him bringing clarifying teaching to the Jews

⁵⁵ Homily 79 (*Patrologia Orientalis* 20, 304, my translation).

⁵⁶ Zellentin, “Jesus and the Tradition of the Elders,” 388–391.

regarding Mosaic law, again as in the Sūrat al-Zukhruf pericope. In light of this, Jesus's words in Q 43:64 necessarily take on a new significance.

Recall again that this Jesus pericope is chronologically the earliest direct Qur'anic engagement with the issue of Jesus's divinity, and, as we have seen, consistently alludes to and subverts motifs that for contemporaneous Christians were indicative of his divinity. Just as Jesus's virgin birth and his being the embodiment of God's knowledge were reconceptualised, so now, it seems, is his being the Wisdom of God. He is a bringer of wisdom, rather than the pre-existent *sophia* of Proverbs 8.

In chronologically earlier *ḥikmah* pericopes, Qur'anic wisdom has thus far consisted primarily of two things: knowledge of basic moral truths and news of an apocalyptic unfolding, the latter implying eschatological accountability. Further, we have seen that the Qur'an suggests that the knowledge of moral truths is natural, in that it is attainable prior to revelation. This suggests that Jesus's wisdom teaching consisted of preaching this natural moral knowledge and apocalyptic news to the Israelites. Indeed, we have already seen that Jesus is described in v. 61 as "knowledge of the Hour," which aligns with his being a bringer of wisdom, in so far as wisdom can mean apocalyptic news.

What more can we say about the *ḥikmah* that Jesus is credited with bringing to the Israelites? Let us reconsider the relevant verse: "I have brought you wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*), and (I have come) to make clear to you some of the things that you differ about (*takhtalifūn*)" (v. 63). The matter of dispute, or *ikhtilāf*, between the Israelites is clearly the *kitāb* previously given to them by Moses, as mentioned in several places in both Meccan and Medinan *sūrahs*. For example: "Certainly We gave Moses

the scripture (*al-kitāb*), but differences arose (*fa-khtulifa*) about it (Q 41:45; see also Q 11:110; 2:213).⁵⁷ The combination of “wisdom” and “the things that you differ about” can thus be paraphrased as “wisdom (*ḥikmah*) and the scripture (*kitāb*).” This is therefore a forerunner of the standardised *kitāb wa-ḥikmah* formula pervasive in Medinan *sūrahs*, including twice in association with Jesus (Q 3:48, 5:110). The *kitāb wa-ḥikmah* formula will be considered in chapter 10. We will see there that there is good reason to believe that where the formula is used in relation to Jesus, *kitāb* refers to the Torah, and *ḥikmah* to the Gospel message. It seems that the genesis of that idea is here in *Sūrat al-Zukhruf* (if not before the Qur’an, as suggested in the poetry attributed to ‘Adī b. Zayd – see chapter 3).

In the present pericope, more so than will be the case in the Medinan *sūrahs*, we are given some indication of the relationship between *kitāb* and *ḥikmah*. In Jesus’s phrase, “I have brought you wisdom, and (I have come) to make clear to you some of the things that you differ about,” the *wa* (“and”) conjunction before the phrase “to make clear” should probably be understood as syntactically redundant. The phrase is thus best translated: “I have brought you wisdom to make clear to you....” In support of this, consider first some of the numerous cases of a syntactically redundant *wa* conjunction in the Qur’an.⁵⁸ Compare Q 6:92 and Q 7:42:

This is a blessed scripture (*kitāb*) that We have sent down, confirming what was [revealed] before it, that you may warn (*wa-li tundhira*) the mother of settlements and those around it. (Q 6:92)

⁵⁷ Note that this verse is in the same group of *sūrahs* as Q 43 that are collectively referred to in the Islamic tradition as the *ḥawāmīm*, Q 40–46, as they all begin with the isolated letters *ḥ-m*. On the multiple points of connection between these *sūrahs*, see Dayeh, “Al-Ḥawāmīm: Intertextuality and Coherence in Meccan Surahs.”

⁵⁸ The *mufasssīrūn* provide a range of explanations for these constructions; see Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ*, 6:459–460.

Thus have We revealed to you an Arabic recitation that you may warn (*li-tundhira*) the mother of settlements and those around it (Q 42:7)

The similarity between the two verses makes it clear that the *wa* in Q 6:92 is syntactically redundant. Further instances of this construction may be found, e.g., in Q 6:105 and 14:52.

Next, consider a verse that employs a similar phrase to Q 43:63, “We did not send down the scripture (*al-kitāb*) to you except that you may make clear (*li-tubayyina*) for them what they differ about (*ikhtalafū fīhi*)” (Q 16:64; see also Q 16:44). Compare this to Jesus’s words in Q 43:63, “I have brought you wisdom and to make clear (*wa-li-ubayyina*) and (I have come) to make clear to you some of the things that you differ about (*takhtalifūna fīhi*).” The parallels are not precise, but provide some support the *wa* conjunction being read as redundant in the latter verse.

Recall the earlier observation of the overlap between the Moses and Jesus passages in Sūrat al-Zukhruf, which I suggested showed that Jesus’s message complements the message of Moses. We are now able to say more about the relationship between the two qur’anic prophets and their respective messages: Jesus came with *ḥikmah* to clarify the disputes the Israelites had fallen into regarding Moses’s *kitāb*. Consideration of the following verses suggests that this clarification consisted in making licit to the Israelites things that had been made impermissible:

Because of wrongdoing on the part of the Jews, We forbade them (*ḥarramnā ‘alayhim*) good things (*ṭayyibātin*) that had been lawful to them; and because of their turning many from God’s way. (Q 4:160)

[Jesus said,] “And (I have come) to confirm the Torah that there was before me and to make lawful to your some of that which was forbidden to you (*ḥurrima*

'alaykum). I bring you a sign from your Lord; so fear God and obey me (*fa-ttaqū llāha wa-aṭī'ūn*).” (Q 3:50)

As Holger Zellentin and Michael Pregill have shown in the most recent scholarship on these verses, the Qur'an here continues a Christian theme whereby the stringencies of the *halakhah* were imposed as a punishment upon the Jews that Jesus (and, in the Qur'an's presentation, Muhammad) came to relieve.⁵⁹ This applies in particular to the food laws, as indicated by the use of *ṭayyibāt* in Q 4:160, which is used primarily for pure food in the Qur'an (see also Q 3:93).⁶⁰ But the legal implications seem broader than merely dietary reform. *Ṭayyibāt* in Q 2:267 clearly does not refer to food, but to licit earnings (see chapter 10). Further, the passage in which Moses tells the Israelites to sacrifice a cow (discussed in chapter 5) suggests that there is a broader polemic against the harshness of Jewish law in the Qur'an.⁶¹ I would add to Zellentin's and Pregill's observations that in the chronologically earliest verse in which the Qur'an considers Jesus's relationship to the Torah, viz., Q 43:63, it calls his reforming agenda *ḥikmah*. Significantly for our purpose, Jesus's reform of Jewish law is presented in Christian discourse as a return to the Decalogue, which in turn equated with natural law in patristic writings and *ḥikmah* in the Qur'an (see

⁵⁹ Zellentin, *The Qur'an's Legal Culture*, esp. 140–154 (see p. 140, n. 15 for a bibliography of earlier scholarship on the same theme); Pregill, *The Golden Calf*, 412–414.

⁶⁰ Zellentin, *The Qur'an's Legal Culture*, 145.

⁶¹ As Pregill notes, the stringencies of Jewish law are variously presented as either a punishment from God or as self-imposed. *The Golden Calf*, 373, n. 105. It seems plausible to me that the Qur'an deliberately conflates these two themes, such that the self-imposition is also a punishment from God. This would be akin to God's use of humans to achieve His purposes described elsewhere in the Qur'an, such as Q 17:4–7, where the destruction of the two Temples is attributed both to God's decision and to human agents. See also Q 8:17. Incidentally, this rhetorical attribution of human actions to God may also explain the otherwise puzzling Q 5:32, where rabbinic exegesis of the Cain and Abel story is given approval by it being God and His scripture itself.

next chapter). We thus see another instance of a wisdom / natural law / Decalogue nexus that I described in chapter 3.

To summarise, Sūrat al-Zukhruf's portrayal of Jesus as a bringer of wisdom can be read as a continuation of the same role Jesus occupies in the Gospels. However, in light of the polemically charged context of the passage, and several indications that it is engaging with New Testament and patristic wisdom Christology, it seems that Jesus's role as a bringer of wisdom in Sūrat al-Zukhruf is not simply an echo of a similar function attributed to him in the New Testament, but is rather a subversion and repurposing of wisdom Christology, a technique the passage has repeatedly used to this point. As to what the Qur'an itself means by Jesus's *ḥikmah*, in its immediate context, it is his clarification of the Mosaic message, regarding which the Israelites had fallen into dispute. Parallel verses that deal with the relationship between the Israelites, Jewish law, and Jesus suggest further that this *ḥikmah* clarification included a lightening of the requirements of the law. Considering *ḥikmah* as used thus far in the Qur'an's chronologically ordered proclamations, we may further infer that this reform was grounded in a conception of the law as being necessarily natural, a view confirmed by the fact that the same reform is presented in Christian sources as a return to the natural law of the Decalogue.

6.7. WISDOM AND THE RELIGION OF ABRAHAM

In this final section, we will consider a passage near the end of Sūrat al-Naḥl (Q 16).

¹²⁰ Abraham was an exemplar,⁶² obedient to God, of upright faith (*ḥanīfan*), and was not one of those who associate [others with God],

⁶² For the translation of *ummah* as "exemplar," see Sinai, *Key Terms*, s.v. "*ummah*."

¹²¹ Thankful for His blessings. He chose him and guided him to a straight path.

¹²² And We gave him good in this world, and in the world to come he will be among the righteous.

¹²³ Then We gave you [singular] inspiration, “Follows the religion (*millah*) of Abraham as a man of upright faith (*ḥanīfan*), who was not one of those who associate [others with God].”

¹²⁴ The Sabbath was only appointed for those who differed about it (*ikhtalafū fīhi*). Yours Lord will surely judge between them on the Day of Resurrection, concerning that about which they used to differ.

¹²⁵ Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*) and fair admonition, and dispute with them with what is better. Your Lord is well aware of those who stray from his way, and He is well aware of those who follow the right path.

After praising Abraham as a model or exemplar (*ummah*), v. 123 commands the Prophet to follow his religion (*millah*).⁶³ Verses 120 and 123 both describe Abraham as *ḥanīf*, which suggests, particularly in light of the contrast between Abraham’s being *ḥanīf* on the one hand and the Jews and Christians on the other in Q 2:135 and 3:67,

a virtue that transcends the petty and uninformed squabbling for which Jews and Christians are condemned in Q 3:65–66. What Q 2:135 and 3:67 are advocating, then, is not primarily membership of a religious community or movement distinct from Judaism and Christianity but rather a supra-confessional stance of rigorous monotheism. Further corroboration of this interpretation is provided by Q 30:30, which links the stance of a *ḥanīf* with conformity to the “God-given creaturely disposition” (*fiṭrata llāhi*) with which humans have been innately endowed by their creator (*allatī faṭara l-nāsa ‘alayhā*).⁶⁴

Verse 124 then pivots to the Sabbath. As recognised by the *mufassirūn*, the point of the verse is that an admonition to follow the religion of Abraham does not equate to

⁶³ For the translation of *ummah* as “model” and “exemplar,” and the translation of *millah* as “religion,” see Sinai, *Key Terms*, s.v. “*ummah*” and s.v. “*millah*.”

⁶⁴ Sinai, *Key Terms*, s.v. “*ḥanīf*.”

following the Sabbath, as the latter was only given to the Jews, who in any case fell into dispute (*ikhtalafū*) over the correct way to observe it (cf. Q 2:65; 7:163–166).⁶⁵

Following this polemical rejection that the religion of Abraham includes the Sabbath, the passage picks up the address to the Prophet once again, and commands him to “call to the way of your Lord with wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*) and fair admonition.” The flow of the passage, whereby the Prophet is told to follow Abraham’s religion and that this does not include the Sabbath, would suggest then, that calling to God’s way with *ḥikmah* is means to calling to the way of Abraham.

As with the Sūrat al-Zukhruf Jesus pericope, we have a combination between the differing (*ikhtilāf*; Q 16:124 and Q 43:63) that the Jews fell victim to, which is contrasted with the *ḥikmah* that Jesus (Q 43:63) or Muhammad (Q 16:124) now offer. On the basis of several suggestive verses in the Qur’an along with prevalent Christian discourse, I suggested above that Jesus’s law-reforming *ḥikmah* equated to natural morality. In Sūrat al-Naḥl, Muhammad’s Sabbath-rejecting *ḥikmah* seems to be a return to Abraham’s way, which once again, as we shall see in the following chapter, was equated in Christian discourse with natural law.

⁶⁵ E.g., al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li-aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, 10:199.

CHAPTER 7

Wisdom and the Decalogue (Q 17:22–39)

7.1. INTRODUCTION

Sūrat al-Isrā' (Q 17) includes a passage of particular significance for understanding what the Qur'an means by *ḥikmah*. At the conclusion of a section that spans vv. 22–39 (marked off by the inclusio: “Do not set up any other god with God, lest you ...”¹) we come to the verse, “That is from what your Lord has revealed to you of *ḥikmah*” (v. 39). The demonstrative pronoun at the start of the verse is clearly referring back to the whole section. In this pithy instance of qur'anic self-referentiality, the Qur'an provides us, if not with a definition, then at least an extensive list of concrete examples of what it means by *ḥikmah*. The present chapter will, therefore, consider this Sūrat al-Isrā' *ḥikmah* passage in some detail. The full passage is given below:

²² Do not set up any other god with God, lest you sit reviled and forsaken.

²³ Your Lord has decreed that you not worship other than Him and show kindness to your parents. If one or both of them reach old age with you, do not say “fie” to them, and do not chide them, but speak to them with kindness;

²⁴ And lower over them the wing of humility, out of mercy, and say, “My Lord, have mercy on them in the same way that they brought me up when I was young.”

²⁵ Your Lord is well aware of what is in your hearts. If you are righteous, He is ever forgiving to those who turn to Him.

²⁶ Give the kinsman his due, and the destitute, and the traveller. And do not squander.

²⁷ Those who squander are brethren of the devils, and Satan is ungrateful to his Lord.

²⁸ If, while seeking some bounty that you expect from your Lord, you turn them down, speak to them with gentle words,

²⁹ And do not keep your hand chained to your neck nor open it fully, lest you sit rebuked and denuded.

¹ The inclusio is noted by Mortensen, “Sourate 17,” 669, and Dye in Azaiez et al., *The Qur'an Seminar Commentary*, 204. While a comprehensive guide to the Qur'an's structural devices remains outstanding, a significant number of scholars have noted and utilised inclusios as markers of structure in the Qur'an. For a recent discussion, see Klar, “Structural Dividers in the Qur'an.”

³⁰ Your Lord gives ample provision to those whom He wishes [or] He is sparing. He is informed and observing of His servants.

³¹ Do not slay your children through fear of poverty. We shall make provision for you and for them. Killing them is a great sin.

³² Do not come near to fornication. It is an abomination and evil as a way.

³³ Do not slay the soul that God has forbidden, unless by right. Whoever is slain wrongfully, We give authority to his heir, but let him not go to excess in killing. He will be helped.

³⁴ Do not approach the property of the orphan, save in the most virtuous manner, until he is of age. And fulfil the covenant. The covenant will be called to account.

³⁵ Fill the measure when you measure, and weigh with the straight balance. That is better and fairer as a course.

³⁶ Do not follow that of which you have no knowledge; the hearing, the sight, and the heart – all of these will be questioned about it.²

³⁷ And do not walk in the land in exultation. You will not split open the earth nor reach the mountains in height.

³⁸ The evil of all that is hateful to your Lord.

³⁹ That is from what your Lord has revealed to you of *ḥikmah*. Do not set up any other god with God, lest you are cast into Hell, rebuked and rejected.

This passage, as has been identified by both medieval Muslim exegetes and several Western scholars, and as I will argue for below, gives the Qur'an's version of the Decalogue.³ This may at first blush seem surprising, given the observation in chapter 2 that Moses is conspicuously absent from the list of prophetic figures

² "All of these" translates *kullu ulā'ika*, which refers to the preceding hearing, sight, and heart. The use of a plural pronoun, rather than a feminine singular, to refer to a collection of inanimate objects may be for one of two reasons: either it is because the hearing etc. are being personified, being subject to interrogation (see, for example, al-Shawkānī, *Faḥḥ al-Qadīr*, 3:270), or because the demonstrative plural pronouns *hā'ulā'i* and *ulā'ika* are utilised for both the masculine and the feminine plurals; as inanimate objects may be pronominally referenced using a feminine plural, the use of these pronouns to refer to hearing, sight, and the heart is unproblematic. Cf. Q 17:102. On the use of feminine plural pronouns and adjectives to refer to inanimate plurals, see Ḥasan, *al-Naḥw al-wāfi*, 3:446–448, incl. n. 3, and 1:264–265; D'Anna, "Collectives in the Qur'ān Revisited," esp. 148, 153; Belnap and Shabaneh, "Variable Agreement with Nonhuman Controllers"; Dror, "Adjectival Agreement in the Qur'ān," esp. 57.

³ Hirschfeld, *New Researches*, 81; Günther, "The Ten Commandments and the Qur'an" – see this article for the early reception history of the qur'anic Decalogue passages among the *mufassirūn*; Neuwirth, "A Discovery of Evil in the Qur'an"; Lowry, "When Less is More"; Brinner, "An Islamic Decalogue"; Pregill and Toorawa in Azaiez et al., *The Qur'an Seminar Commentary*, 205–206. The earliest *tafsīr* source that Günther identifies as connecting this passage with the biblical Decalogue is al-Tha'labī (d. 427/1035); see Günther, "The Ten Commandments and the Qur'an," 33. Before him, however, al-Samarqandī (d. 375/985) reported from Ibn 'Abbās that "these eighteen verses (i.e., vv. 22–39) were in the tablets of Moses." See Abū Layth al-Samarqandī, *Baḥr al-'ulūm*, 2:264.

associated with *ḥikmah*. However, the Qur'an is presenting its own *reformulation* of the Decalogue, rather than the Mosaic Decalogue, as *ḥikmah*. In this chapter, I will pursue two seemingly independent lines of inquiry regarding how *ḥikmah* came to be associated with the Decalogue: one primarily Christian, and the other primarily Jewish. Through the history of this association, we will arrive at a better understanding of what the Qur'an means by *ḥikmah* here.

The first inquiry relates to the association of the Decalogue itself with wisdom, especially in Second Temple Jewish and late antique Christian interpretations and reworkings of the Decalogue. We will see that such reformulations have a long pre-qur'anic history, and that the qur'anic Decalogue is located firmly within a historical trend of how the Decalogue was understood that spans from at least the Hellenistic era to late antiquity. Such a study is, in fact, long overdue. Although there are now several scholarly contributions examining the qur'anic Decalogue, those that compare the qur'anic version to its antecedents almost invariably take the Exodus and Deuteronomy versions of the Ten Commandments as their points of departure, and wholly neglect to take into consideration the rich and varied development of the Decalogue in the Hebrew Bible itself, and beyond that in Second Temple Jewish literature, the New Testament, and rabbinic and patristic writings.⁴ Conversely, biblical scholars who have worked on the

⁴ Holger Zellentin is exceptional here, in that in his analysis of the Qur'an's treatment of the Decalogue, both in *Sūrat al-Isrā'* and other *sūrah*s, he emphasises the necessity of looking at how qur'anic law stands in continuity with late antique Christian legal traditions, particularly as represented in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*. He connects many of the laws in the *Sūrat al-Isrā'* Decalogue segment to legal injunctions in the *Didascalia* (though not to any passage within the latter that expands specifically on the Decalogue), and also notes the similarity between the Qur'an and the *Didascalia* in their presentation of the Decalogue's centrality to law. See Zellentin, *The Qur'ān's Legal Culture*, 55–76, esp. 72–73; idem in Azaiez et al., *The Qur'an Seminar Commentary*, 207.

reception history of the Decalogue routinely omit the Qur'an's (and indeed its commentaries') contribution to that history.⁵

The second line of inquiry looks more broadly at various themes in *Sūrat al-Isrā'*, and considers their connection to wisdom in a family of late antique Jewish mysticism, or "*merkabah*" texts,⁶ which have hitherto been largely ignored by Qur'an scholars.⁷ The *merkabah* system has its origins in Ezekiel's visions of a chariot (*merkabah*), his mystical journey to Jerusalem, and visions of the future of the Temple in Ezekiel 1–11 (thus already providing promising intertexts to *Sūrat al-Isrā'*). Glimpses of the late antique *merkabah* mysticism that grew out of Ezekiel's visions are found in both the Yerushalmi and Bavli, but the fullest expression of the *merkabah* system is provided in the so-called *hekhalot* (literally, "chambers") texts, which describe the chambers that the mystic passes through on his ascent to the presence of God. One of the primary purposes of such an ascent is the acquisition of wisdom. As we will see, *Sūrat al-Isrā'* contains a striking number of echoes of the *merkabah* system, with the noteworthy contrast that the possibility of a mystical ascent is explicitly denied (v. 93). As I will argue, the Qur'an seems to be proclaiming

⁵ One example here will suffice: Markl, "The Decalogue in History," surveys the entire history of the Decalogue's reception from the Bible to modern music, drama, and film, but without mention of the Qur'an or works of *tafsīr*.

⁶ I accept the phrases "Jewish/*merkabah* mysticism" from existing scholarship, without examining the appropriateness of describing the late antique texts and passages that fall under this rubric as "mystical."

⁷ There are a few exceptions. A contribution to the influence of *merkabah* on early Islamic literature was made by Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, Appendix II, though much of this is concerned with the *ḥadīth* traditions. Newby also drew on a *merkabah* text, namely 3 Enoch, in trying to understand the cryptic verse that accuses Jews of saying that Ezra is the son of God (Q 9:30). *A History of the Jews of Arabia*, 61–63. I will briefly comment on the dating of this text below. Most recently, and most significantly, Gobillot, "Des textes Pseudo Clementins," uses themes in *merkabah* texts to explore various qur'anic stories, primarily those of Solomon. He does not however look at *Sūrat al-Isrā'*. For more on Gobillot's analysis, see Hussain, "The Function of David, Solomon and Job in Q 38." I am grateful to Holger Zellentin for alerting me to Gobillot's study.

for all the wisdom that the mystics reserved for only the elect few able to undertake the dangerous *merkabah* ascent.

After considering these two paths of the Decalogue's development, I will examine the qur'anic Decalogue directly. From multiple indications throughout Sūrat al-Isrā', it is clear that the Qur'an is drawing on both of these traditions, viz., late antique Jewish mysticism and late antique Christian readings of the Decalogue (themselves grounded in early Jewish readings) – both are relevant to the Qur'an's use of *ḥikmah* here.⁸ Indeed, such a “trialogue” is a common feature of the Qur'an's engagement with Jewish and Christian materials.⁹

I beg the reader's indulgence, then, as the following pages cover the relevant history of the biblical Decalogue and *merkabah* mysticism before we return to the Qur'an's iteration of the Ten Commandments. Although I will frequently indicate the relevance of an intertext to Sūrat al-Isrā', I will leave much of the comparison to the section devoted to the qur'anic Decalogue, where I will also summarise earlier observations.

7.2. THE BIBLICAL DECALOGUE AND ITS EVOLUTION

7.2.1. The Biblical Decalogues

The process of reformulating the Decalogue is already in evidence in the Pentateuch itself, which records three versions of the Ten Commandments given to Moses by God. Two of these, Exodus 20:1–17 and Deuteronomy 5:6–61, are very similar. The third version, the so-called “ritual Decalogue” in Exodus 34:10–26, is significantly

⁸ For a recent study that makes the case for the Qur'an's consistent triologue, i.e., simultaneous engagement with both Jewish and Christian traditions, see Zellentin, “Triological Anthropology.”

⁹ I borrow the term “trialogue” from Zellentin, “Triological Anthropology.”

different, with far more emphasis on establishing rituals, such as how to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (vv. 18–20), the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Ingathering (v. 22), the three pilgrimages to “appear before the Lord God” (vv. 23–24), and the Feast of Passover (v. 25). This version will not be considered in what follows. From a narrative perspective, Exodus 20 recounts the original Decalogue given by God to Moses, Exodus 34 recounts the re-writing of the Decalogue following Moses’s breaking the tablets upon seeing the Israelites worshipping the golden calf (Exod 32:19), and Deuteronomy 5 has Moses reminding the Israelites of the Decalogue he received when they were at Sinai.¹⁰

The Exodus 20 version is given below:

¹ Then God spoke all these words:

² “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery;

³ you shall have no other gods before me.

⁴ You shall not make for yourself an idol....

⁷ You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

⁸ Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy.... ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it.

¹² Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

¹³ You shall not murder.

¹⁴ You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵ You shall not steal.

¹⁶ You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

¹⁷ You shall not covet your neighbour’s house; you shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.”

¹⁰ There is of course an abundance of secondary literature on the biblical Decalogues. For recent and succinct summaries of the scholarship, see Rom-Shiloni, “The Decalogue”; Coogan, *The Ten Commandments*.

There are two interesting differences between this version and the Deuteronomic Decalogue.¹¹ First, in Exodus 20:17 the neighbour's wife is listed alongside his other property, suggesting that she too is part of his belongings and is for that reason off limits. Indeed, there seems to be a diminishing order of importance in the property listed, in which she comes second, after his house, but before his male servant. In Deuteronomy 5:21, however, she is set apart from the list of the neighbour's belongings: "Neither shall you covet your neighbour's wife. Neither shall you desire your neighbour's house, or field...." Second, Exodus 20:11 connects the command to rest on the Sabbath with God's ceasing from His creative activity on the seventh day, whereas in Deuteronomy 5:14 the Israelites are told: "Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm."

Although the matter is not settled in scholarship, there appear to be good reasons for holding that the Deuteronomy version is building on the Exodus version, an excellent summary of the arguments being presented by Rom-Shiloni.¹² If this is correct, there is already in the Pentateuch a trend towards a more humanitarian Decalogue. Indeed, this is part of a broader Deuteronomic concern to recast laws given in Exodus (particularly the Covenant Code, Exodus 20:22–23:33) in a more humanitarian light.¹³

¹¹ Coogan, *The Ten Commandments*, 26–29.

¹² Rom-Shiloni, "The Decalogue," 138, 142–145. See the bibliography he cites for scholarship on the relative dating of the different biblical Decalogues.

¹³ This is well-documented and widely discussed in scholarship. Specifically on the Deuteronomistic reform of the Decalogue, see, for example, Coogan and Chapman, *The Old Testament*, 174; Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 69. More broadly, see, for example, Braulik, "Deuteronomy and Human Rights"; Tsai, *Human Rights in Deuteronomy*; Levin, "Rereading Deuteronomy."

The notion that the trajectory of the Decalogue's presentation was, already in the Hebrew Bible, towards a more humanitarian articulation of its commandments potentially becomes clearer when we look at the occasional references to the Decalogue in the prophetic books.¹⁴ Thus, we find in Jeremiah 7:

⁵ "For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another [lit.: a man and his neighbour (*rē*)], ⁶ if you do not oppress the alien (*gēr*), the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods (*ēlōhîm āḥērîm*) to your own hurt, ⁷ then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors (*bā-`āreṣ `āšer nātattî la-`ābôtêkem l-min `ôlām*) forever and ever.

⁸ "Here you are, trusting in deceptive words to no avail. ⁹ Will you steal (*nāgōb*), murder (*rāṣōah*), commit adultery (*nā`ōp*), swear falsely (*šeqer*), make offerings to Baal and go after other gods (*ēlōhîm āḥērîm*) that you have not known, ¹⁰ and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are safe!'—only to go on doing all these abominations?"

The entire passage is suffused with vocabulary that echoes the Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 4 Decalogues, indicated by the transliterated terms in the above quotation. The phrase "in the land that I gave ... to your ancestors" (*bā-`āreṣ `āšer nātattî la-`ābôtêkem*) echoes God's words to Moses following the Deuteronomy 5 Decalogue, "in the land that I am giving them to possess (*bā-`āreṣ `āšer `ānōkî nōtēn lāhem*)" (v. 31). Verse 9, in particular, with its coordination of "steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, ... and go after other gods" suggests very strongly that it is indeed the Decalogue that the prophet has in mind in this passage.¹⁵

¹⁴ For a discussion on the echoes of the Decalogue in the prophetic books, see Coogan, *The Ten Commandments*, 38–39; Rom-Shiloni, "The Decalogue," 146–147; Weiss, "The Decalogue in Prophetic Literature," esp. 67. See also n. 15 below. On the dating of the prophetic books (specifically, Jeremiah, in which the allusion to the Decalogue is the clearest) relative to the Pentateuch, see Hendel and Joosten, *How Old Is the Hebrew Bible?*, 73–83.

¹⁵ For an argument against such a reference, see Hoffman, "The Status of the Decalogue in the Hebrew Bible," 36–41, and Berger, *Die Gesetzesauslegung Jesu*, 258–259. Both arguments hinge on the possibility that the conjunction of, for example, murder, theft, and adultery, in texts such as

As is evident, Jeremiah 7 quotes selectively from the Decalogue, and adds to it in telling ways. The imperative to avoid other gods is the only commandment from the first half of the Decalogue, which regulates laws between the Israelites and God, that has been retained – there is no mention of making graven images, taking the Lord’s name in vain, or resting on the Sabbath. Additionally, whereas the Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 Decalogues insist that the sojourner among the Israelites rest on the Sabbath too, Jeremiah 7:4 broadens the scope of the expected humane behaviour towards him by prohibiting oppression generally, and includes the orphan and the widow alongside him.

The Decalogue seems also to be alluded to in Hosea 4:

¹ Hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel; for the Lord has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land; ² swearing, lying, and murder (*rāṣōah*), and stealing (*gānōb*) and adultery (*nā’ōp*) break out; bloodshed follows bloodshed.

The framing of God’s complaint as a lawsuit in v. 1 already suggests that the prophet has a covenantal breach in mind. That this is the Sinaitic covenant of the Decalogue is again suggested by the lexical overlap between v. 2 and the Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 Decalogues, as indicated by the transliterated terms. As with Jeremiah, there is no mention of the ritual parts of the Decalogue, and the aspect of the Decalogue that concerns the Israelites’ relationship to each other has been expanded to include swearing and lying.

Jeremiah and Hosea (and, we might add, in several other Hellenistic Jewish texts – see below), represent clusters of commandments transmitted without them being regarded as connected to the Decalogue. It seems to me that the significant linguistic parallels between Pentateuchal Decalogues and the putative prophetic allusions to them, particularly in Jeremiah 7, strongly suggest that the prophets are indeed alluding to the Decalogue.

7.2.2. Early Jewish Literature

Comprehensive studies of the reception of the Decalogue in early Jewish literature have been carried out by Ulrich Kellerman, “Der Dekalog in den Schriften des Frühjudentums: Ein Überblick,” and in greater detail by J. Cornelis de Vos, *Rezeption und Wirkung des Dekalogs in jüdischen und christlichen Schriften bis 200 n.Chr.* Until Philo, the Decalogue is never explicitly referred to in early post-biblical Jewish literature, just as was the case in the biblical prophetic writings discussed above. With few exceptions, early Jewish writings likewise omit most of the commandments from the first half of the Decalogue, viz., making images, taking the Lord’s name in vain, and keeping the Sabbath. Just as in the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible, we thus have a deritualisation of the Decalogue, with a focus instead on its interpersonal, moral dimensions. The Sinaitic context is entirely missing, and instead there is an effort to present the Decalogue, or at least the second half of it, as a universal set of ethical principles, binding on both Jew and Gentile.¹⁶

As with prophetic writings, there remains the problem of trying to identify whether a particular passage in early Jewish literature is indeed referring to the Decalogue, rather than, say, providing a list of vices to avoid inherited from the Hellenistic tradition.¹⁷ There is no easy resolution to this, except perhaps to note Niebuhr’s point that the very difficulty of identifying an exact source for a given commandment in a Hellenistic Jewish text – e.g., whether a prohibition against adultery is recalling the Decalogue, or another part of the Hebrew Bible, or Graeco-

¹⁶ Kellerman, “Der Dekalog,” 175–179.

¹⁷ Tite, *Valentinian Ethics and Paraenetic Discourse*, 167.

Roman lists of ethical vices and virtues – is indicative of the existence of a discourse in which the Decalogue was seen as part of a broader ethical tradition.¹⁸ This being the case, it is plausible that virtue lists that overlap significantly with the Decalogue would have informed the way the Decalogue itself was interpreted in Second Temple Judaism and then late antiquity. On this basis, Kellerman’s suggestion for which texts should be brought under consideration when tracing the history of the Decalogue seems sensible: any text that explicitly refers to the Decalogue, or gives two commandments from the Decalogue in the same order that they appear in the Pentateuch,¹⁹ or gives three or more commandments from the Pentateuchal Decalogue in any order in close proximity.²⁰

Before we examine writings of particular significance to the Qur’anic Decalogue, analysing one example of a text that exhibits the various general trends in how early Jewish literature dealt with the Decalogue may be useful. The Dramatists’ Gnomologium are a series of Jewish forgeries of lines attributed to Greek dramatists, and preserved by early Christian authors.²¹ Among these is the following excerpt, variously attributed to Philomen or Menander:

For man must honourable be
and must not seduce women or commit adultery
nor steal nor slay for sake of gain

¹⁸ Niebuhr, *Gesetz und Paränese*, 8.

¹⁹ It should be noted, however, that there are slight variations in the order of the commandments between the Masoretic text and LXX. See Loader, *The Septuagint, Sexuality, and the New Testament*, 5–7, for the various manuscript traditions of the Decalogue in LXX. See also Lanier, “The Sequences of the Murder–Adultery–Steal Commands,” who problematises any attempt to easily characterise the Masoretic text or LXX as conforming to one order or another. Interestingly, the Qur’anic order in Q 17:32–33 places adultery before murder, an order often associated with LXX, though this is unlikely to reveal much about the relevant traditions that lie behind the Sūrat al-Isrā’ Decalogue, given the extreme rarity with which the Qur’an quotes the biblical text. See Sinai, *Historical-Critical Introduction*, 139–140.

²⁰ Kellerman, “Der Dekalog,” 147–148.

²¹ For an introduction to the work, see Doering, “Excerpted Texts in Second Temple Judaism,” 15–18.

nor look to others' property, nor covet
either a wealthy woman or house
or goods or even a slave or servant lass
or horses, cattle or any beast at all. What then?
Covet not, O friend, even a needle's thread.
For God is nearby and watching you.²²

The combination of adultery, theft, and murder, in the same order as is found in Exodus 20 LXX, with overlapping vocabulary for adultery (*moicheuō*) and theft (*kleptō*), strongly suggests that this is an allusion to the Decalogue. This is confirmed by the advice not to look to or covet others' property, the list of what the latter constitutes having numerous points of overlap with the tenth commandment.²³

Several points bear noting here. First, the text ignores the first half of the Decalogue altogether, and focusses instead on the ethical commandments of the second half. Second, these commandments are put into the mouth of non-Jewish writers, who know them not through the Sinaitic revelation, but as the benchmark for what it means to be honourable, thereby demonstrating the universality of these commandments. Third, the commandments are presented as a sort of summa of good character, everything you need to be "honourable" (*chrēsimos*, usually translated "useful"). Finally, the closing line, "For God is nearby and watching you," is strongly reminiscent of the conclusion to both the Exodus and Deuteronomic Decalogues, which narrate the closeness of Moses and/or the Israelites to God at the time of the proclamation of the Decalogue (see Exodus 20:18–21, where the "the people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God

²² Translated by Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:830. The Greek texts may be found in Denis, *Fragmenta pseudepigraphorum quae supersunt graeca*, 161–174.

²³ These four lines, from "nor look" to "What then?" are absent from Clement, one of the two sources that preserves this document. They are recorded instead by Pseudo-Justin. See Denis, *Fragmenta pseudepigraphorum quae supersunt graeca*, 170.

was,” and Deuteronomy 5:22–27, where it seems the entire congregation is in God’s proximity).

These developments are a good representation of the way the Decalogue is used in early Jewish literature, and clearly prefigure many of the general features of the qur’anic Decalogue (e.g., the deritualisation and the absence of the Sinaitic context). Most significantly for our purpose, the expanded Decalogue is universalised and presented as a sufficient list of precepts (as recognised even by Gentiles) that one must follow in order to be a good person.

There are several texts in early Jewish literature that, either implicitly or explicitly, characterise the biblical Decalogue as “wisdom.” The most obvious examples are texts that themselves are part of the wisdom tradition and that simply incorporate the Decalogue.²⁴ The Wisdom of Solomon may have a brief allusion to the Decalogue,²⁵ as part of a longer list of vices that result from idolatry, which latter of course is itself forbidden by the Decalogue.

They no longer keep either their lives or their marriages pure, but they either treacherously kill one another, or grieve one another by adultery (*notheyō*), and all is a raging riot of blood and murder (*phonos*), theft (*klopē*) and deceit, corruption, faithlessness, tumult, perjury. (Wis 14:24–25)

The tripartite condemnation of adultery, murder, and theft uses the same vocabulary as the LXX Decalogues for murder (*phoneyō*, see Exod 20:15 LXX and Deut 5:17) and theft (*kleptō*, see Exod 20:14 LXX and Deut 5:19).

²⁴ Not included in the following are possible references to the Decalogue in Sir 3:1–16, concerning filial obligations towards one’s parents. Although Vos makes a case in favour of this passage being an allusion to the Decalogue, honouring one’s parents is broadly attested in early Jewish literature, both within and without wisdom writings. See Vos, *Rezeption un Wirkung des Dekalogs*, 173–174.

²⁵ Kellerman, “Der Dekalog,” 158–160.

A clearer and perhaps more relevant incorporation of the Decalogue into wisdom literature is Pseudo-Phocylides.²⁶ This was probably written by a Jew living 100 BCE – 100 CE,²⁷ though a narrower timeframe of 30 BCE – 40 CE has also been suggested, and was attributed to the pre-Socratic Greek gnomic poet Phocylides.²⁸ After a two-verse opening prologue, the work commences as follows.

³ Neither commit adultery nor rouse male passion.

⁴ Neither contrive deceptions nor defile your hands with blood.

⁵ Be not unjustly rich but earn a living from licit means.

⁶ Be satisfied with what you have and refrain from what belongs to others.

⁷ Do not tell lies, but always say things that are true.

⁸ First of all honour God, and thereafter your parents.

These sentences are clearly a rendering of the Decalogue.²⁹ This is more evident here than in many other instances of supposed allusions to the Decalogue in early Jewish literature. As with the *Wisdom of Solomon* and the *Dramatists' Gnomologium*, we find a reference to the Decalogue's adultery-murder-theft cluster in sentences 3–5. There is also a linguistic connection with the biblical Decalogue in sentence 8, with the verb for “to honour,” *timaō*, being the same as in the LXX Decalogues (Exod 20:12, Deut 5:16). The commandment not to covet has here been

²⁶ The critical edition and translation of this work are by Wilson, *Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides*, which also provides an extensive introduction. The translations here of Pseudo-Phocylides are from this edition. An older translation and introduction are provided by Van der Horst, *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides*, the latter also published within Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2. See also *EJ2*, s.v. “Pseudo-Phocylides.” For the appropriateness of considering this work as broadly within the genre of Jewish wisdom literature, see Wilson, *Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides*, 9–11.

²⁷ Wilson, *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides*, 7.

²⁸ Van der Horst, *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides*, 81–82.

²⁹ Wilson, *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides*, 19; Hayes, *What's Divine about Divine Law*, 109. Bockmuehl notes that several scholars link this passage to the Noahide Laws rather than a rewritten Decalogue. *Jewish Laws in Gentile Churches*, 154. However, the earliest articulation of the Noahide Laws is the *Tosefta*, compiled in the third century CE. Prior to that, we have “precedents for only isolated elements [of] the rabbinic conception of Noahide Commandments as presented in t. ‘Abod. Zar. 8””; Hayes, “Were the Noahide Commandments Formulated at Yavne?,” 261–262.

rendered more generally as being “satisfied with what you have and refrain[ing] from what belongs to others.” Later, Philo will offer the same generalised interpretation of the tenth commandment.³⁰ Other features of reworked Decalogues in early Jewish literature are also evident: the absence of an explicit reference to the Ten Commandments, the absence of the Sinaitic context, the omission of commandments 2–4, and a corresponding focus on and expansion of the interpersonal commandments. The first and fifth commandments are given together in sentence 8, and emphasised above the rest of the Decalogue by their introduction: “First of all.”³¹

We find a similar opening in the Sentences of Syriac Menander, a plausibly Jewish collection of wisdom sayings dating to perhaps the third century CE.³² The recension known as the Epitome of the Sentences (MS Or. Add. 14.614) begins thus:

³⁰ See Rofé, “The Tenth Commandment,” 48–49.

³¹ Wilson, *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides*, 74. Wilson notes that this separation of duties into obligations owed to one’s peers (*dikaiosynē* or *philanthrōmia*) and those owed to one’s superiors, including the gods (*eusebeia* or *hosiotēs*) “reflects the common procedure in antiquity”; *ibid.* The Decalogue itself does seem to support such a division, with the fifth commandment (honouring one’s parents) functioning as a bridge between what is owed to God and what is owed to one’s fellow man (noted by many scholars from antiquity onwards; see, e.g., Rom-Dalit, “The Decalogue,” 135), and Philo would later make great use of this division in his analysis of the Decalogue (see Amir, “The Decalogue According to Philo,” 156–157, and Philo’s *The Special Laws*, 2:63, where he explicitly mentions this division). It is doubtful, however, that every instance of such a division of ethics in early Jewish literature is an allusion to the Decalogue. We should thus be wary of Kellerman’s argument in *Der Dekalog*, 156–157, that § 131 of the Letter of Aristeas is a reference to the Decalogue: “Therefore, our lawgiver first defined matters concerning piety (*eusebeias*) and justice (*dikaiosynēs*), explaining each in detail, not only prohibitively but probatively, showing plainly both the damages and the punishments brought by God upon the guilty;” translation by Wright III, *The Letter of Aristeas*, 246. For the critical edition of the text, see Pelletier, *Lettre d’Aristée à Philocrate* (the aforementioned citation is on p. 168). For a detailed critique of Kellerman’s argument, see de Vos, *Rezeption und Wirkungs der Dekalogs*, 164–165. Nonetheless, the existence of such a division in the Hellenistic era may well have influenced how the Decalogue was interpreted (e.g., by Philo), being reinforced by the latter’s internal structure, and it is possible that late antique readers of the Letter of Aristeas, whether or not it refers to the Decalogue as such, could have made a connection between it and the Decalogue (in much the same way that some modern scholars have). Note that the same passage in the Letter is particularly concerned with the importance of being with the wise (*sophois*, § 130, immediately before the references to *eusebeias* and *dikaiosynēs*), and the laws’ compatibility with natural reason (*physikon logon*, § 143).

³² For an introduction to the text, including the manuscripts, history of scholarship, and the issue of dating, see in particular *GEDSH*, s.v. “Menander, Syriac Sentences of”; Baarda, “The Sentences of

Before everything, fear God, and honour whoever is older than you. (Syr. Men. [Epit.] 1)

The older recension, known as the Florilegium (MS Or. Add. 14.658), similarly begins with an imperative to honour God and one's parents. After an interlude on old age, the text continues, "Do not kill" (Syr. Men. [Flor.] 1:3). There then follows a further series of aphorisms on the two topics thus far introduced, viz., honouring one's parents and murder, before the topic for the next few aphorisms is introduced: "And (as to) an adulterous woman, her feet are not stable" (Syr. Men. [Flor.] 1:7), within which there is also a warning against stealing (Syr. Men. [Flor.] 2:3). Thus, we find here much of the second half of the Decalogue, with prominence given to fearing God and honouring one's parents, just as was the case in Pseudo-Phocylides, and as also of course in the qur'anic Decalogue. We then find the tripartite prohibition of murder, adultery, and theft, with a series of related prohibitions appended to each one. The qur'anic decalogue uses the same technique of grouping several prohibitions under the key commandments, which latter provide the overall structure of the qur'anic Decalogue, as we shall see.

Alongside the Decalogue's connection to wisdom, early Jewish literature also made a connection between natural law and the Decalogue, thus creating a nexus of connections between the Decalogue, wisdom, and natural law. Before Philo, who is the Second Temple Jewish writer par excellence to advocate the identification between the Decalogue and natural law, we can already detect this connection

Syriac Menander," esp. 585, 588–589 for the dating of the text; Monaco, *The Sentences of the Syriac Menander*, esp. 24–26 for the dating. The translation and references to the text here are from Monaco's critical edition.

between the two in Aristobulus (fl. first half of second century B.C.E.). This is not surprising. Aristobulus is our first Jewish author who is a self-identifying philosopher. Further, he has been linked to the Stoic tradition (although this remains disputed).³³ One of the main concerns in his work is to provide rational justifications for Jewish Law. He has the following to say about the Sabbath:³⁴

Now, as for what is shown plainly in our code of laws, namely, that God “ceased” working on the seventh day, this does not, as some suppose, substantiate the view that God no longer does anything, but rather means that once he had “ceased” the arrangement of his works, that they were thus arranged for all time. For it signifies that “in six days he made both the heaven, the earth, and everything in them,” that he might show the times and proclaim the order by which one thing precedes another. For, once he arranged all things, he thus holds them together and presides over their movements. Our law code has clearly shown us that the seventh day is an expression of the law of nature (*ennomos*)³⁵ that serves as a symbol of the sevenfold *logos*³⁶ established all around us through which we have knowledge of things both human and divine. (Fragment 5:11–12)

³³ For a summary of Aristobulus’s philosophy and extant writings, see *EJ2*, s.v. “Aristobulus of Paneas”; Vos, “Aristobulus and the Universal Sabbath,” 138–139. A challenge to the Stoic connection is made by Niehoff, *Jewish Exegesis and Homeric Scholarship*, 58–59; for a defence of the connection, see Vos, “Aristobulus and the Universal Sabbath.”

³⁴ Translation adapted slightly from Holladay, *Aristobulus*.

³⁵ There are some translation difficulties relating to fragment 5:12 that should be addressed. The phrase “expression of the law of nature” in the passage translates *ennomos*, which is usually rendered “ordained by law,” or “legally binding.” Here, however, “rather than emphasizing that the seventh day is legally prescribed in the sense that God ordered its observance, the point rather seems to be that it is a law of nature that was established at the outset of creation; hence, a ‘custom’ inherent in the natural order”; Holladay, *Aristobulus*, 230, n. 141. See also Vos, “Aristobulus and the Universal Sabbath,” 150–151.

³⁶ There are three suggestions as to what is intended by *logos* here: either it is a human faculty of the soul to reason, or a cosmic ordering principle, or both. See Vos, “Aristobulus and the Universal Sabbath,” 144. On the basis of Nikolaus Walter’s argument that Aristobulus consistently uses *logos* in the Stoic sense of “rule” or “natural law,” we might render this phrase as “the sevenfold law of nature.” See Walter, *Der Thorausleger Aristobulos*, 74–75, and 74, n. 3; Holladay, *Aristobulus*, 230–231, n. 142. As Vos argues, while Walter’s arguments for such a reading are persuasive, interpreting *logos* as “reason” is also consistent with the way the phrase is used in early Jewish literature, and “it is very likely that Aristobulus points to the *logos* with the seven-structure as the cosmic order and [his emphasis] as the leading principle of the soul.” See Vos, “Aristobulus and the Universal Sabbath,” 148. For our purpose, we may leave the term untranslated, noting only its clear connection with Stoic ideas of natural law.

As Aristobulus later explains, the “sevenfold *logos*” refers to the recurrence of the number seven in nature, such as the seven heavenly bodies above the Earth (fragment 5:16). Clearly, then, he uses the term *logos* in a way familiar to Stoic proponents of natural law (see chapter 3), and he thus justifies one of the most distinctively Jewish commandments in the Decalogue in terms of Stoic natural law: it is grounded in the cosmic significance of the number seven, an argument later also made by Philo (*Decalogue* 21).

Aristobulus hints at why it should be that just because the number seven, and therefore the Sabbath, is significant in nature, we should *rest* on the Sabbath. He recognises that the rest is “because of the toilsome life everyone has” (fragment 5:9). But beyond this, he argues that it was on this day that wisdom was completed. This is because the completion of creation was “the beginning of light through which all things are seen together. And the same thing could be applied metaphorically to wisdom (*sophia*) as well, for all light issues from it” (fragment 5:9–10). In other words, wisdom becomes possible with the Sabbath, as it is only then that creation is fully contemplable, and the Sabbath rest is thus intended to be a day of contemplation.³⁷ This foreshadows Philo’s near identical view of the Sabbath.³⁸ We thus see here Aristobulus conjoining between wisdom, Decalogue (more precisely, the Sabbath), and natural law. Further, it is clearly biblical wisdom that Aristobulus has in mind, as he clarifies regarding this wisdom that “Solomon, one of our

³⁷ Vos, “Aristobulus and the Universal Sabbath,” 139.

³⁸ Amir, “The Decalogue According to Philo,” 154.

ancestors, said more clearly and more eloquently that it was there before heaven and earth” (fragment 5:11), a clear reference to Proverbs 8:22–31.³⁹

It should be noted that even though we have a discussion of the Sabbath here, which constitutes a rare reference to a ritualistic commandment of the Decalogue in early Jewish literature, it too is universalised. The Sabbath is stripped of its Sinaitic context and its association with Israelite slavery in Egypt (Deut 5:15). (Indeed, Aristobulus notes in fragment 5:9 that “everyone,” and thus not just Israelites in bondage, has a toilsome life from which they need rest.) Instead, the Sabbath is justified on universalist principles of wisdom and natural law.

We come finally to Philo. He is the earliest Jewish writer with an extant work dedicated to the Decalogue.⁴⁰ He tries to show, in the series of four books *On the Special Laws*, how the rest of the law can be subsumed under the headings of the Ten Commandments. He thus regards the Ten Commandments as the basis of Jewish Law. He recognises the two-part division of the Decalogue into the first five, which relate to “the monarchical principle on which the world is governed,” and thus are “superior” and merit “first place,” and then the remaining five (*Decalogue* 12:50–51).⁴¹

Philo’s presentation of Mosaic law as both natural and wise has been well documented by Christine Hayes in *What’s Divine about Divine Law*.⁴² We may clearly discern these claims in Philo’s treatment of the Decalogue. The book begins by

³⁹ See Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors, Volume 3: Aristobulus*, 178–181; see also *ibid.*, 152–155, for broader claims by Aristobulus of connections between the laws of the Hebrews and the ways of the Greeks.

⁴⁰ Amir, “The Decalogue According to Philo,” 121.

⁴¹ Both translations and transliterations of Philo are from Colson’s edition.

⁴² Hayes, *What’s Divine about Divine Law*, 111–124.

praising Moses and the other wise ancestors (*sophōn andrōn*) for giving the law (*Decalogue* 1.1), and is interspersed with references to how the various laws accord with nature; e.g. “Let him, then, who slays another know full well that he is subverting the laws and statutes of nature (*nomous physeōs*)” (*Decalogue* 25:132).

Philo provides us with a systematic treatment of the Ten Commandments and discusses them at length. As he brings together several Second Temple trends in how the Decalogue was interpreted, it will be instructive at this stage to compare Philo’s reading of the Decalogue to the qur’anic iteration. Like Pseudo-Phocylides before or contemporary with him and Syriac Menander after him, Philo makes a connection between the duties owed to God and the duties owed to one’s parents, taking his cue from the placement of the fifth commandment in the first half of the Decalogue (*Decalogue* 22:106). This connection is also made in Q 17:23 by conjoining the two commandments in a single verse, “Your Lord has decreed that you not worship other than Him and show kindness to your parents.”

Philo goes on to detail how and why this duty of care to one’s parents is to be accomplished. He makes an analogy with the way younger birds care for their parents, then reminds children of their erstwhile dependence on their parents:

Among the storks the old birds stay in the nests when they are unable to fly, while their children fly, I might almost say, over sea and land, gathering from every quarter provision for the needs of their parents; and so while they in the inactivity justified by their age continue to enjoy all abundance of luxury, the younger birds making light of the hardships sustained in their quest for food, moved by piety and the expectation that the same treatment will be meted to them by their offspring, repay the debt which they may not refuse—a debt both incurred and discharged at the proper time—namely that in which one or other of the parties is unable to maintain itself, the children in the first stage of their existence, the parents at the end of their lives. And thus without any teacher but their natural instinct they gladly give to age the nurture which fostered their youth. (*Decalogue* 23:116–117)

The Qur'an in Sūrat al-Isrā' also uses the image of birds caring for each other to illustrate the care due to parents when they reach old age, and conjoins this with a reminder to children of the care they received from their parents in their youth:

^{23b} If one or both of them reach old age with you, do not say "fie" to them, and do not chide them, but speak to them with kindness;

²⁴ And lower over them the wing of humility, out of mercy, and say, "My Lord (*rabbi*), have mercy on them in the same way that they brought me up (*rabbayānī*) when I was young."

The play on words in v. 24, *rabbi* ("My Lord") and *rabbayānī* ("they brought me up"), is a rare instance of the Qur'an creating a parallel between God and His creatures, essentially likening God's Lordship with the care provided by one's parents. This too has a clear equivalent in Philo: "how can reverence be rendered to the invisible God by those who show irreverence to the gods who are near at hand and seen by the eye?" (*Decalogue* 23:120). Admittedly, this is in the context of Philo disapproving of those who all but equate the status of the parents to that of God, but in this conclusion he suggests a degree of affinity with this sentiment.

The parallels continue with several of the other commandments. The commandments not to steal and not to bear false witness are both missing from the Qur'an's Decalogue. Each has been replaced by what seems at best an approximate equivalent. For both commandments, Philo expounds the Pentateuchal commandment by detailing what he regards as either the ultimate purpose of the legal precept, or a consequence of leaving the sin unchecked. In each case he comes very close to the Qur'an's substitutions. So, while the Qur'an's Decalogue does not include a prohibition against stealing, it does say, "And do not walk in the land in

exultation (*lā tamshi fī l-arḍi maraḥan*). You will not split open the earth nor reach the mountains in height” (v. 37). The prohibition here is against arrogantly going about the land. Compare this with how Philo explains the prohibition against theft:

The third commandment in the second five forbids stealing, for he who gapes after what belongs to others is the common enemy of the State, willing to rob all, but able only to filch from some, because, while his covetousness extends indefinitely, his feeble capacity cannot keep pace with it but restricted to a small compass reaches only to a few. So all thieves who have acquired the strength rob whole cities, careless of punishment because their high distinction seems to set them above the laws. These are oligarchically-minded persons, ambitious for despotism or domination, who perpetrate thefts on a great scale, disguising the real fact of robbery under the grand-sounding names of government and leadership. (*Decalogue* 26:135–136)

Philo makes a direct connection between robbery and tyrannical haughtiness, which latter is the focus of the Qur’anic prohibition. Clearly, for Philo, it is the danger of this oppression that is the main point of the prohibition. He goes on to say, “Let a man, then, learn from his earliest years to filch nothing by stealth that belongs to another, however small it may be, because custom in the course of time is stronger than nature, and little things if not checked grow and thrive till they attain to great dimensions” (*Decalogue* 26:137).

Note also that the phrase “do not walk in the land in exultation (*lā tamshi fī l-arḍi maraḥan*)” occurs in another *ḥikmah* passage in the Qur’an, namely Luqmān’s advice to his son. There, as in Philo, it is explicitly conjoined with having a feeling of self-superiority: “Do not disdainfully turn away your cheek from the people, and do not walk boastfully on the earth. Indeed, God does not like any swaggering braggart” (Q 31:18).

In place of bearing false witness, the Qur'an gives, "Do not follow that of which you have no knowledge; the hearing, the sight, and the heart – all of these will be questioned about it" (v. 36). Compare once again to Philo:

Secondly, apart from the falsehood, they veil the facts as it were in night and profound darkness, take part with the offenders and against those who are wronged, *by affirming that they have sure knowledge and thorough apprehension of things which they have neither seen nor heard.* [My emphasis] (*Decalogue 27:139*)

We should note in conclusion to this comparison between the qur'anic Decalogue and Philo that although there are six centuries that separate the Arabian Prophet from the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher, Philo's works were read and quoted throughout late antiquity and throughout the Near East region, well beyond his most admiring patristic readers, Origen (d. 253), who is responsible for bringing Philo's works from Alexandria to Caesarea,⁴³ and Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339), who essentially inherited Origen's library in Caesarea and was instrumental in disseminating Philo's ideas to the Eastern church, including eventually into Syriac.⁴⁴ Indeed, the longest surviving quotation of Philo in patristic writings is in the Syriac translation of Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428).⁴⁵ Philo's influence on Christian thought is noted in a Syriac work dating to c. 600.⁴⁶ Around a quarter of his entire corpus, including the *Decalogue* and parts of the *Special Laws*, were translated into Armenian from manuscripts kept in Constantinople at the end of the sixth century.

⁴³ Hadas-Lebel, *Philo of Alexandria*, 208–209.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 210–213.

⁴⁵ Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 265. Theodore's works began to be translated from Greek into Syriac already during his lifetime; see *GEDSH*, s.v. "Theodore of Mopsuestia."

⁴⁶ Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 269.

Parallels to Philo's writings among the church fathers continue to be explored, and "we should not exclude the possibility ... that further Philonic material is present in these corpora, not advertised, and so awaiting identification by observant scholars."⁴⁷ It seems to me that the Qur'an is at the very least a contender for Philonic intertextuality. Regardless, what is more important to note here is the broader discourse around the Decalogue and its connection to wisdom and natural law already in early Jewish literature.

7.2.3. The Decalogue in the New Testament

The New Testament continues the Second Temple Jewish trend of citing only the inter-personal commandments when referring to the Decalogue, whether directly or by way of allusion.⁴⁸ Indeed, this moralising trend is taken further by summarising the Ten Commandments, and even the whole Torah, as constituting the command to love one's neighbour (Rom 13:8–10; Gal 5:14; Jas 2:8; cf. Lev 19:18) or, less commonly, the two commandments to love God and one's neighbour (Matt 22:36–40, Luke 10:27).

Before considering the relevance of New Testament material for the qur'anic Decalogue, it will prove helpful to briefly revisit some of the pertinent contents of the latter. Apart from not taking gods beside God and honouring one's parents, which, as we have seen, Pseudo-Phocylides, Syriac Menander, and Philo also set aside for special mention, the only other commandments in the qur'anic Sūrat al-

⁴⁷ Ibid., 270–271. For a recent attempt at demonstrating Philo's influence on Aphrahat, see Fiano, "Adam and the Logos."

⁴⁸ A good summary of where each one of the Ten Commandments is quoted or alluded to in the New Testament is provided by Evans, "The Decalogue in the New Testament."

Isrā' Decalogue that have relatively straightforward equivalents in the Pentateuchal Decalogues are not committing adultery and not committing murder. Prohibitions against stealing and bearing false witness occur elsewhere in the Qur'an (e.g., Q 5:38, 60:12 and Q 2:283, 70:33, respectively), and would not have been out of place with the other inter-personal and moralising commandments of the qur'anic Decalogue. Nonetheless, the Qur'an omits both commandments from its Decalogue, though as we have seen above their replacements are closely aligned with Philo's exposition of them.

This leads to the question why the commandments relating to adultery and murder specifically might have been retained in a manner that so readily enables a connection with the biblical Decalogues? It is noteworthy, in this regard, that there are two passages in the New Testament in both of which these two commandments of the Decalogue are particularly prominent, and, like the Qur'an, both omit the commandment relating to stealing, the third member of the frequently co-occurring triumvirate: the Sermon on the Mount and the Letter of James. Indeed, these seem to be part of a Second Temple Jewish tradition that regarded the commandments relating to adultery and murder as summarising the entire Decalogue.⁴⁹

The Sermon on the Mount is recorded in Matthew 5–7. Of particular relevance for us is Matthew 5:17–48. After vigorously affirming the Law (vv. 18–19, e.g., “For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished”), Jesus goes on to tell the audience, “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you

⁴⁹ This itself is part of a broader phenomenon of providing pithy summaries of the Decalogue, or indeed of the whole Torah, popular in Second Temple Judaism. See Flusser, “The Ten Commandments and the New Testament,” 239.

will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (v. 20). What is involved in exceeding the righteousness of the law-obsessed Pharisees is clarified in the subsequent so-called antitheses, in which Jesus introduces familiar Mosaic laws using the formula “you have heard,” or “it has been said,” and then provides his own interpretation.

You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, “You shall not murder”; and “whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.” But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, “You fool,” you will be liable to the hell of fire. (Matt 5:21–22)

You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matt 5:27–28)

These two passages have the same structure. A Mosaic law is recounted, and then seemingly intensified, to bring out the underlying morality that the law seeks to preserve in Jesus’s interpretation. Jesus is insisting here that mere conformity to the law does not guarantee the upholding of this higher morality.⁵⁰

Jesus goes on in the antitheses to discuss divorce, breaking one’s oath (which is probably a reference to the Decalogue prohibition of taking the Lord’s name in vain⁵¹), retaliation, and loving one’s enemies as one loves one’s neighbour. Prime position in this list is given to the prohibitions against murder/anger and adultery/lust – as mentioned above, stealing is omitted. This is particularly significant as the Sermon on the Mount is widely recognised as being Matthew’s reformulation

⁵⁰ For a sensitive reading of the passage, and the history of its interpretation in late antiquity, see Zellentin, “One letter *yud* shall not pass away from the Law.”

⁵¹ See Kugel, *The Bible as It Was*, 391–393, who shows that avoiding false oaths was a very typical interpretation of this commandment. The recognition of this allusion in the Sermon on the Mount was also made by Eusebius – see below.

of the Decalogue.⁵² Indeed, the connection between the Mosaic Decalogue on Sinai and the Sermon on the Mount was noted as early as the fourth century by Eusebius of Caesarea:

Moses again legislates saying: “Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not forswear thyself.” But our Saviour, extending the law, not only forbids to kill, but also to be angry: instead of “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” He forbids to look on a woman with unbridled lust. Instead of “Thou shalt not steal,” He enjoins that we should give what is our own to the needy. And transcending the law against false swearing, He lays down the rule of not swearing at all. (*Demonstration of the Gospel* 3:2)

Eusebius tries here to align the Sermon on the Mount closer to the Sinaitic Decalogue than even Matthew does, in that he (somewhat implausibly) connects Jesus’s command to practice charity in secret (Matt 6:1–4) with the commandment not to steal. He thus clearly recognises the broader typological connection between the Sinaitic revelation of the Decalogue and Jesus’s Sermon pericope.

The final antithesis, in Matthew 5:43–48, builds on the commandment to love one’s neighbour: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you’” (Matt 5:43–44). As mentioned above, the commandment to love one’s neighbour was frequently cited in Second Temple Judaism as a summary of the Torah, or else of the second inter-personal half of the Decalogue (which, as we have seen, was given far more prominence in early Jewish literature than the first half).⁵³ The fact that it is the basis of the closing antithesis reinforces the sense that Jesus was here re-enacting the proclamation of the Mosaic Decalogue.

⁵² Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology*, 172–180.

⁵³ Flusser, “The Ten Commandments and the New Testament,” 241.

The presence of this love commandment provides a clue as to why the commandments relating to murder and adultery were given such prominence in the Sermon: they too, taken together, functioned as summaries of the entire Decalogue, for reasons that I will come to shortly. The Sermon, then, rather than reworking every one of the Ten Commandments, reformulates the well-known summaries at the start and at the end.

The function of the sixth and seventh commandments as together summarising the Decalogue also explains why only these two are cited in the Letter of James.

Here again we find the love commandment along with these two commandments:

¹ My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favouritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? ² For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, ³ and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," ⁴ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵ Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? ⁶ But you have dishonoured the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? ⁷ Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you? ⁸ You do well if you really fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." ⁹ But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. ¹¹ For the one who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. (Jas 2:1–11)

Both Jesus in his Sermon and James in this passage argue that any slight against or falling out with one's brother is equivalent to murdering him.⁵⁴ This is

⁵⁴ Wick, "You shall not murder... you shall not commit adultery," 89–92.

clear from the first antithesis (Matt 5:21–22), and is the hidden assumption in James 2:1–11, where in the argument against belittling the poor, we unexpectedly find the prohibition against murder: “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For the one who said, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘You shall not murder’” (vv. 10–11). Here, the final clause regarding murder occurs where, following the logic of the passage, we would have expected something like “You shall not mistreat the poor.” One can only make sense of this if mistreating the poor is already understood to be a type of murder. This line of argumentation was continued by the rabbis, e.g., b B. Mes. 58b, “He who publicly shames his neighbour is as though he shed blood.” As Peter Wick has argued, the sixth commandment came to stand generally for the duties one owes to one’s brother, i.e., the second half of the Decalogue.⁵⁵

Perhaps more surprisingly, the seventh commandment, to not commit adultery, came correspondingly to stand for the duties owed to God, i.e., the first half of the Decalogue. This is because adultery was interpreted symbolically to mean cheating on God by having friendship with the world,⁵⁶ a theme developed by the prophets in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Isa 50:1, Jer 3:8, Ezek 16:15, Hos 2:1–7). This is explicit in James 4:4, “Adulterers! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” The theme is also adopted by Jesus when he calls the Pharisees a

⁵⁵ Ibid., 96.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 90–91.

“wicked and adulterous generation” (Matt 12:39).⁵⁷ This connection between adultery and idolatry was also noted by several church fathers.⁵⁸

The prominence of the sixth and seventh commandment in the Sermon on the Mount and the Letter of James is thus unlikely to be coincidental. It was a rhetorically effective way of referring to the two parts of the Decalogue. The retention of precisely these two commandments in the Qur’an is again testimony to the degree to which the Qur’an stands in continuity with the evolving Decalogue traditions.

7.2.4. Rabbinic and Patristic Decalogues

Although there are a few indications in pre-Islamic rabbinic literature of the special place of the Decalogue, there is in general an effort by the rabbis to downplay its importance. The rabbis’ attitude may be gauged from the Palestinian Talmud’s discussion of Sinaitic Revelation:

Hananiah, nephew of R. Joshua says, “Between each one of the commandments were its details and refinements.... Just as in the great sea, between one great wave and another are small swells, so between each commandment [recorded on the two tablets] were the details and refinements of the Torah [written out].” (y Šeqal. 6:1)

On the one hand, this is clearly reminiscent of Philo’s attempt to classify the laws of the Torah as subsumed under the individual commandments of the Decalogue, the former being mere “details and refinements” of the latter. On the other, however, the purpose of the story in the broader context of the passage itself

⁵⁷ See Carson, “Matthew,” 295.

⁵⁸ Salvesen, “Early Syriac, Greek, and Latin Views of the Decalogue,” 54.

and rabbinic engagement with the Decalogue more generally seems to be that in fact it was not just the Ten Commandments revealed at Sinai, but the whole of the *halakhah*. The section of the Jerusalem Talmud cited here occurs in the context of a discussion as to the number of commandments written on each of the two tablets: was it five on each, or ten, or twenty, or forty? The issue seems to be resolved in favour of the traditional reckoning of five (though this is never made explicit), with the total ten being headers, as it were, for the rest of the Law. This view is made explicit elsewhere in rabbinic literature. In b Ber. 5a, for instance, the entire Torah as well as the Mishnah are attributed to Moses's revelation at Sinai, and in y Pe'ah 2:4 the oral law is similarly ascribed to the Sinaitic revelation.⁵⁹

It seems the rabbis were arguing against the notion that the rest of the law is of lesser importance than the Decalogue. Indeed, in addition to demoting the Ten Commandments to just a part of what was revealed at Sinai, the rabbis justified the removal of the recitation of the Decalogue from the liturgy, despite it once having preceded even the Shema in order of recitation.⁶⁰ We are told why: the apparent uniqueness of Decalogue had been abused by a group of heretics, or *minim*, who believed that the Decalogue is the *only* requirement that God imposed on mankind.⁶¹ Although it is not entirely clear who these heretics were, there is a good case to be made that the rabbis are referring to the Christians.⁶² Interestingly, later

⁵⁹ For the development of the notion of the Oral Torah as a parallel revelation to the Written Torah, see Jaffee, "Rabbinic Authorship as a Collective Enterprise," 26.

⁶⁰ Urbach, *The Sages*, 1:19; Oppenheimer, "Removing the Decalogue from the Shema and Phylacteries"; Stemberger, "Der Dekalog im frühen Judentum," 148–155.

⁶¹ Urbach, *The Sages*, 1:361–361, 401; Vermes, "The Decalogue and the Minim," 173–174, Kugel, *The Bible as It Was*, 378–379.

⁶² For Christian privileging of the Decalogue as (almost) the sum total of what needs to be retained of the Hebrew Bible legal code, see below, as well as Zellentin, "One letter *yud* shall not pass away from the Law." The bibliography on the identity of the *minim* is extensive. For arguments in favour of the Christian identification, see, e.g., Simon, *Versus Israel*, 189–190. For alternative views, see, for

rabbinic texts, including *Pesiqta Rabbati* 21–24, perhaps on account of the threat to Jewish identity posed by the *minim* having been neutralised, evidence a partial return to the Second Temple emphasis on the centrality of the Decalogue.⁶³

From the earliest Christian texts after the New Testament, the Decalogue became a focal point in the ongoing controversy about which laws of the Hebrew Bible remained in effect.⁶⁴ Among the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, the *Didache* and *Epistle of Barnabas* either allude to or explicitly cite the Decalogue, which seems to be assumed as necessary for Christians to follow.⁶⁵ Both texts follow in the tradition of the biblical prophetic writings, early Jewish writings, and the New Testament, all reviewed above, in drawing on and expanding upon the ethical commandments of the Decalogue at the expense of the ritual commandments.⁶⁶ The *Didache*'s list of virtues in chapter 2 features clear allusions to the Decalogue. The *Epistle of Barnabas*, in chapter 19, urges the reader to not “abandon the commandments of the Lord” (*Barn.* 19:2).⁶⁷ There follows a list of what these commandments include, in which the Decalogue looms large. For instance: “Do not engage in sexual immorality, do not commit adultery” (*Barn.* 19:4), “Do not take the Lord’s name for a futile purpose” (*Barn.* 19:5), “Do not desire your neighbour’s belongings” (*Barn.* 19:6). These are peppered with expansions, a technique similar to the one we saw above for Syriac Menander, where we noted how this anticipates

example, Vermes, “The Decalogue and the Minim,” 176–177; Stemberger, “Der Dekalog im frühen Judentum,” 156.

⁶³ Stemberger, “Der Dekalog im frühen Judentum,” 158.

⁶⁴ Salvesen, “Early Syriac, Greek, and Latin Views of the Decalogue,” 47–49; Blackburn, “Law,” 567.

⁶⁵ For the attitude in the *Epistle of Barnabas* towards the Decalogue and the events at Sinai, see Pregill, *The Golden Calf*, 166–169, and Bori, *The Golden Calf*, 43. For the *Didache*, see Van de Sandt and Flusser, *The Didache*, 163–166.

⁶⁶ Salvesen, “Early Syriac, Greek, and Latin Views of the Decalogue,” 49–50.

⁶⁷ Translations of the Letter of Barnabas are from Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 2.

the Qur'an. Indeed, the expanded list is occasionally reminiscent of the Sūrat al-Isrā' Decalogue passage, in particular the repeated calls for humility, e.g., "Do not exalt yourself but be humble in every way. Do not heap glory on yourself" (Barn. 19:3).

The Epistle of Barnabas is, in fact, explicit in differentiating between the ethical and ritual parts of the Hebrew Bible, and rejecting the latter as being obsolete now that Jesus has brought in his new law.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, in chapters 14–15 it is clear that the Sinaitic revelation remains binding. In chapter 14, Barnabas describes how the promise of a future covenant made to the patriarchs was fulfilled when Moses was given the law at Sinai. However, when the Israelites fell into the sin of worshipping the golden calf, the covenant God had intended to make with them was broken, as symbolised by Moses breaking the tablets. This broken covenant was finally re-established through Jesus (Barn. 14:3–4). That this new covenant through Jesus implies the Decalogue is clear from the proceeding chapter, which commences: "Something is also written about the Sabbath in the ten commandments, which God spoke to Moses face to face on Mount Sinai." The author feels the need to justify why it is that the Sabbath is not kept by Christians, *despite* it being part of the Decalogue. Interestingly, Barnabas does not reject the Sabbath on the grounds of its being ritualistic – the dispensable ritualistic laws, on his view, post-date the essential laws of the Decalogue – but rather because it may only be observed by the truly pure, who will arise with the second coming of Jesus.

A close reading of the Epistle of Barnabas thus reveals a strategy for navigating what is to be adopted and what is to be rejected from the Hebrew Bible. Primarily, it

⁶⁸ Salvesen, "Early Syriac, Greek, and Latin Views of the Decalogue," 49–50.

is the Decalogue, alongside its moralistic expansions, that are to be accepted, because this represents the covenant between God and the patriarchs. Therefore, it precedes Jewish law proper. Over the next few centuries, this solution to the problem of which parts of the Hebrew Bible's legal content to accept or reject was readily taken up, but with different justifications for why the Decalogue had its exceptional status, and different reasons given for why the Sabbath was to be excluded. Overwhelmingly, the views that are repeated most frequently are that the Decalogue represents natural law, or that the Decalogue was kept by Adam and Eve in the Garden before the fall. These two positions are closely related – if the Decalogue is natural law, then it follows that it would be kept by man in his most natural state.

The earliest proponent of natural law as the differentiator between what is still in force from Mosaic Law and what has been dispensed with is Justin Martyr (d. 165). He recognises that part of Mosaic Law is simply natural in his *Dialogue with Trypho* 45:3–4, 47:2 (= ANF 1:217–218). Although he does not equate this natural element in Mosaic Law with the Decalogue, he does connect it to the two great commandments of loving God and loving one's neighbour (*Dialogue with Trypho* 93 = ANF 1:246), which, as we have seen, constituted one of the popular ways of providing a summary of the whole of the Torah, and may have been shorthand for the Decalogue.

Following Justin, an explicit equation of the Decalogue with natural law was made by Irenaeus (fl. late second c.), Tertullian (fl. late first/early second c.), the Didascalia Apostolorum (which calls it the “simple law” rather than the “natural law”), and Ephrem (d. 373). We may include in this list Clement of Alexandria (d. early second c.), who connects the Decalogue to the *logos*, as had Aristobulus before

him. Arguments for the primordially of the Decalogue (in particular, its status as being legally binding preceding even the life of the patriarchs) are made by Tertullian and the Book of Steps.⁶⁹ The most relevant quotes and brief discussion are provided below.

Irenaeus

Preparing man for this life, the Lord Himself did speak in His own person to all alike the words of the Decalogue; and therefore, in like manner, do they remain permanently with us, receiving by means of His advent in the flesh, extension and increase, but not abrogation. The laws of bondage ... He cancelled by the new covenant of liberty. But He has increased and widened those laws which are natural, and noble, and common to all, granting to men largely and without grudging, by means of adoption, to know God the Father, and to love Him with the whole heart, and to follow His word unswervingly, while they abstain not only from evil deeds, but even from the desire after them. (*Against Heresies* IV.16.4–5 = ANF 1:482)

We see here both the idea that the Decalogue is binding and natural, and that, being natural, it is subject to being “increased and widened” through other natural laws. Further, Irenaeus provides one of the earliest arguments that the Hebrew Bible laws beyond the Decalogue were a punishment for the Jews, a frequent theme in patristics, and also taken up by the Qur’an: “Because of wrongdoing on the part of the Jews, We forbade them good things that had been lawful to them; and because of their turning many from God’s way” (Q 4:160 – see chapter 6).⁷⁰

Tertullian

For in this law given to Adam we recognise in embryo all the precepts which afterwards sprouted forth when given through Moses; that is, You shall love the Lord your God from your whole heart and out of your whole soul; You shall love your neighbour as yourself; You shall not kill; You shall not commit

⁶⁹ Many of these sources are cited by Salvesen, “Early Syriac, Greek, and Latin Views of the Decalogue.” For the Book of Steps, not quoted from here, see *ibid.*, 65. See also Pregill, *The Golden Calf*, 170–186.

⁷⁰ On the question of the laws being punitive, see Zellentin, *The Qur’an’s Legal Culture*, 143, n. 19; *idem*, “One letter *yud* shall not pass away from the Law.”

adultery; You shall not steal; False witness you shall not utter; Honour your father and mother; and, That which is another's, shall you not covet. For the primordial law was given to Adam and Eve in paradise, as the womb of all the precepts of God.... Therefore, in this general and primordial law of God, the observance of which, in the case of the tree's fruit, He had sanctioned, we recognise enclosed all the precepts specially of the posterior Law, which germinated when disclosed at their proper times.... In short, before the Law of Moses, written in stone-tables, I contend that there was a law unwritten, which was habitually understood naturally, and by the fathers was habitually kept. For whence was Noah found righteous, if in his case the righteousness of a natural law had not preceded? Whence was Abraham accounted a friend of God, if not on the ground of equity and righteousness, (in the observance) of a natural law? (*Against the Jews 2 = ANF 3:152*)

Tertullian does not unambiguously equate natural law with the Decalogue, but he does regard the latter as sprouting from the former.

Didascalia Apostolorum

For you know that He gave a simple and pure and holy law, (a law) of life, ... that He might show that He does not undo the Law, but teaches what is the Law and what the Second Legislation.... The Law therefore is indissoluble; but the Second Legislation is temporary, and is dissoluble. Now the Law consists of the Ten Words and the Judgements ... This is the simple and light Law, wherein is no burden, nor distinction of meats, nor incenses, nor offerings of sacrifices and burnt offerings. (*Didascalia 26, 223–225*)⁷¹

As with Irenaeus and the *Epistle of Barnabas*, and later the Qur'an, the Didascalia distinguishes between what was essential and what was temporary in Israelite Law.⁷² Although the text does not use the terminology of natural law, it nonetheless, like the other texts cited here, insists on the necessity of the Decalogue.

Ephrem

⁷¹ Translations of the Didascalia are those of Vööbus, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac*. A more recent translation is given by Stewart-Sykes (see pp. 238–240 for the extract here cited).

⁷² See Zellentin, *The Qur'an's Legal Culture*, 144–146; Pregill, *The Golden Calf*, 175–186; Fonrobert, "The Didascalia Apostolorum," 502–506.

All the commandments he gave them depend on this maxim: “Do not do to your neighbours what is hateful to you”: “Do not kill,” that another person may not kill you; “do not commit adultery” with your neighbour’s wife, so that you do not receive through your own wife your just deserts for seducing your friend’s wife. “Do not steal” what is not yours, so that others do not steal what is yours. “Do not give false testimony against your neighbour” so that another may not give lying testimony against you. “Do not covet anything that belongs to your neighbour” so that another may not covet anything that is in your house. Consider how right our Lord was when he said “On these two commandments the law hangs” (Matt 22:40), the Law being the natural laws (*nāmūsay kyānā*) contained in the “Law” and the Prophets, and not including new laws that were introduced for circumstances as they arose. (*Commentary on Exodus 20:2–3*)⁷³

Ephrem here not only explicitly connects the Decalogue to natural law, but also to the Golden Rule, which itself was frequently equated with natural law (see chapter 9).

A particularly interesting case is presented by Ephrem’s younger contemporary, Aphrahat. It is clear from his discussion of the law in general and the Decalogue in particular that he stands in line with his contemporaneous current of Christian thought as presented above. For instance, he insists that the Decalogue is necessary for Christians to follow. In his first Demonstration, he writes:

Now this is faith: ... a person separate himself from ... blasphemy, and from adultery. And he must not bear false witness. (*Demonstration 1, “On Faith” 19*)⁷⁴

Aphrahat further, like the church fathers whose writings we have considered above, sees the Decalogue *alone* as necessary to follow, and dismisses later legal precepts in the Hebrew Bible as caused by Israel’s sins. Thus, he writes:

⁷³ Translation from Salvesen, *The Exodus Commentary of St. Ephrem*.

⁷⁴ Translations for Aphrahat are from Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat*.

Be persuaded, O stubborn scribe of the Law, teacher of the people! For the mouth of the Holy One testifies that the commandments and judgements which were given to you are of no benefit and are not good.... It was because of your sins that he instructed you to give offerings and distinguished foods for you.... The life-giving commandments and judgments, on the other hand, are those which were written from above.... The ten holy commandments which he inscribed with his hand and gave to Moses. (*Demonstration 15, "On Distinctions Among Foods" 13*)

Like other church fathers who want to insist on the Ten Commandments, Aphrahat had to grapple with the issue of how to circumvent the Jewish Sabbath. Interestingly, he argues on natural law grounds: as it is clear that the beasts do not rest on the Sabbath, it cannot possibly be the case that God intended it to be a day of rest in the sense understood by the Jews (*Demonstration 13, "On the Sabbath" 2*) (see chapter 3 for a brief discussion of this aspect of late antique natural law).

In his concluding *Demonstration*, Aphrahat provides a list of commandments that he deems it necessary to keep. As with the lists in the *Didache*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, and indeed his own *Demonstration 1, "On Faith,"* the final demonstration draws deeply from and expands upon the Decalogue. He concludes:

There is nothing greater than the fear of God, and the person who keeps His commands is glorified. For many are called wise, but there is no wisdom like the fear of God. (*Demonstration 23, "On the Grapecluster" 47*)

Two points should be noted here: first, whereas his Greek contemporaries call the commandments of the Decalogue natural, Aphrahat connects them instead to wisdom and being wise; second, the concluding phrase in the above citation clearly recalls Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction." In other words, for Aphrahat, the Decalogue is strongly identified with biblical wisdom.

7.3. SINAI AND MERKABAH MYSTICISM

Although the relationship between apocalyptic literature and the Qur'an has recently attracted several in-depth studies,⁷⁵ there has been almost no investigation into the relationship between *merkabah* mysticism and the Qur'an.⁷⁶ This is despite the very real possibility that the seminal texts of *merkabah* mysticism, or the *hekhlot* literature, are contemporaneous with the Qur'an, and traces of the practice are firmly established in pre-Islamic rabbinic sources.⁷⁷ Importantly for the purpose of this study, the mystical practice may also be able to shed light on the relationship between *hikmah* and the Decalogue.

7.3.1. The *merkabah* and Sinai in Late Antique Judaism

The tradition of *merkabah* visions has its origins in Ezekiel 1. Although the word itself is not used in Ezekiel, the prophet describes four strange living beings and four wheels which correspond to them (vv. 4–21). Later, in Ezekiel 8, the prophet describes a mystical journey, in which “the spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem” (Ezek 8:3). There, he is shown the evil deeds of Israel, and hears the Lord’s decree against the nation (Ezek 9).

⁷⁵ For recently published examples, see Lawson, *The Quran: Epic and Apocalypse*; Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*; Ghaffar, *Der Koran in seinem religions- und weltgeschichtlichen Kontext*. See also the detailed coverage of apocalypticism in Dye and Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran des historiens*, vol. 1, with separate chapters devoted to Jewish apocalyptic texts, Syriac apocalypses, and Iranian apocalypses. For past studies on the question of apocalypticism in the Qur'an, see Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 116–117.

⁷⁶ See n. 7 above.

⁷⁷ For a short introduction to *merkabah* literature, see Swartz, “Jewish Visionary Tradition in Rabbinic Literature.” The established classics in the field are Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God*; idem, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*; Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*. A translation of the texts (relied upon here), with an introduction, is provided by Davila, *Hekhalot Literature in Translation*.

In Ezekiel 10, the prophet once again has a vision of the four wheels (Ezek 10: 10–15), which he explicitly connects to his earlier vision in Ezekiel 1 (Ezek 10:20). The beings and the chariot then take the Glory of the Lord away from the Temple, symbolising God’s abandoning the sinful nation (Ezek 11:22–25). Before doing so, however, God makes a promise of a future renewal in Ezekiel 11 (see below). Now, as it stands, there is no connection between these visions and Sinai. However, exactly such a connection was made first by the rabbis, and also, as I shall argue, by the Qur’an.

The rabbinic connection between the *merkabah* vision and Sinai is both literary and liturgical. Regarding the latter, the Talmud provides details for the haftarah, the parts of the Nevi’im that are to be read alongside the Sabbath or festal Torah readings. For the first of Shavu’ot, the appropriate readings are given in b. Meg. 31a: “According to others, we read ‘In the third month’ (i.e., starting from Exodus 19:1, which describes the Israelites’ arrival at Sinai and the receiving of the Ten Commandments), and for haftarah the account of the Divine Chariot (*merkabah* i.e., Ezekiel 1).” David Halperin’s analysis of the textual sources that document the practice led him to conclude that this liturgical combination was “very early and very widespread.”⁷⁸

As for the literary connections between the *merkabah* vision and Sinai, although they are lacking in Ezekiel’s vision, they were certainly incorporated into the visions that form part of the *ma’aseh merkabah*, literally “the work of the chariot,” a term found in both of the Talmuds and used to describe the epiphanies

⁷⁸ Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, 18.

and beatific visions experienced by the rabbinic mystics. These include burning trees/bushes and angels speaking from the fire, already providing a clear link to Moses at Sinai.⁷⁹ Most clearly, Sinai itself features in such visions (b. Ḥag 14b):

Forthwith, R. Eleazar b. Arak began his exposition of the work of the Chariot (*ma'aseh merkabah*), and fire came down from heaven and encompassed all the trees in the field; [thereupon] they all began to utter [divine] song.... R. Jose the priest went and related what happened before R. Johanan b. Zakkai; and [the latter] said: Happy are you, and happy is she that bore you; happy are my eyes that have seen thus. Moreover, in my dream, I and you were reclining on Mount Sinai, when a Divine Voice (*bat qol*) was sent to us, [saying]: Ascend hither, ascend hither! [Here are] great banqueting chambers, and fine dining couches prepared for you; you and your disciples and your disciples' disciples are designated for the third class."

7.3.2. The *merkabah*, Sinai, and the Qur'an

The Qur'an presents a parallel to the rabbinic connection between the *merkabah* and Sinai: the Prophet's *isrā'*, or night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, and the qur'anic Decalogue both feature in Sūrat al-Isrā'.⁸⁰ Nöldeke was the first to identify the possible resonances between Muhammad's and Ezekiel's mystical transportations to Jerusalem in Ezekiel 8.⁸¹ He did not go on to develop that idea, however. We may do so by noting that just as Ezekiel, after being transported to Jerusalem, is shown the destruction of the city in Ezekiel 9–11, so too the beginning of Sūrat al-Isrā', after the opening verse describes the Prophet's night journey, goes on to mention the two destructions of the Temple (vv. 4–8), with God delegating the

⁷⁹ Ibid., 13–18. Schäfer disagrees that pre-Bavli versions of the *merkabah* stories connected the events to Sinai, but agrees that this development is evident in the Babylonian Talmud. *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 194.

⁸⁰ The identity of *al-masjid al-aqsā* in Q 17:1 as the Jerusalem Temple, rather than a heavenly temple or some other earthly location, was almost universally held by the earliest *mufassirūn* and in works of *sīrah*. See also Neuwirth "The *Qibla* of Muhammad's Community Reconsidered"; Rubin, "Muhammad's Night Journey (*isrā'*) to al-Masjid al-Aqṣā"; Reynolds *The Qur'an and the Bible*, 432.

⁸¹ Nöldeke et al., *The History of the Qur'anic Text*, 110, n. 103, and 282–283.

city's punishments to His executioners/servants in both destruction scenes (Ezek 9:5–7 and Q 17:5–7). Similarly, both destruction scenes hold out a hope for a future renewal (Ezek 19:17–21 and Q 17:7–8).

Clearly, there are some differences here. While the Qur'an, like Ezekiel 11, announces the possibility of God's renewing His relationship with the Israelites, in Ezekiel this has the force of a prophecy, whereas the Qur'an makes it conditional upon obedience to God, and warns against a further lapse. Nonetheless, the total list of overlaps with Ezekiel is compelling: the visionary journey of a prophet to Jerusalem, the scenes of the city's destruction (with both the residents and the temple separately mentioned), and the hope of a future renewal.

Thus, both the rabbis and the Qur'an make a connection between a prophetic vision of a journey to Jerusalem and the Sinaitic revelation (directly in the case of the rabbis, and indirectly in the case of the Qur'an, which does not mention Sinai in *Sūrat al-Isrā'*, but does give a reworking of the Sinaitic Decalogue revelation). This connection is certainly not independently derivable from the relevant biblical passages.⁸² As we will see below, the connection between the *Sūrat al-Isrā'* and the *merkabah* texts that were inspired by Ezekiel's vision runs even deeper.

7.3.3. Ascension Narratives in the *merkabah* Texts and *Sūrat al-Isrā'*

Both the *merkabah* visions, as developed in the Babylonian Talmud and subsequent *hekhalot* literature,⁸³ and the early exegesis of *Sūrat al-Isrā'*, came to incorporate an

⁸² The origin of the connection among the rabbis seems to be the mention of the presence of chariots at Sinai in Psalm 68:17. See Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, 18.

⁸³ Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 194, 196–203, 339–345.

ascension narrative.⁸⁴ This is not to argue for the historicity of the Prophet's claim to have experienced a heavenly ascent, or *mi'rāj* – it may well instead reflect an early understanding of the link between *Sūrat al-Isrā'* and the *merkabah* visions, such that the Prophet's *isrā'* was expanded to include a *mi'rāj*, as is befitting a true *merkabah* experience. There are in fact indications in *Sūrat al-Isrā'* itself that already allude to a recognition that a heavenly ascension is the usual corollary of the *merkabah* visions, albeit that the *sūrah*, in contrast with the later Islamic tradition, explicitly rules out such a possibility.

The Prophet is instructed to pray in Q 17:80, "Say, 'My Lord, make me enter an honourable entrance, and make me to exit an honourable exit, and grant me supporting authority from You.'" The supplication is unique in the Qur'an, without any clear qur'anic parallels. There does, however, seem to be a parallel in a well-known rabbinic passage found in the Mishnah, the Tosefta, and both of the Talmuds, and which is again connected to the *merkabah*. The Tosefta version is given below. It is part of a cycle of stories that expound various aspects of the *merkabah*.⁸⁵

Four men entered a garden: Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, another (i.e., the heretic Elisha ben Avuya), and R. Akiba. One of them looked and died; one looked and went mad; one looked and cut the young plants; one ascended safely and

⁸⁴ Pace Rubin, "Muhammad's Night Journey (*isrā'*) to al-Masjid al-Aqṣā," 159–160, 162–163, who argues that the story of the Prophet's ascension was initially part of a cycle of stories relating to the first revelatory experience, rather than the Jerusalem night journey, and the two were merged only later – "this development is not yet known to Ibn Ishāq, nor to Muqātil or 'Abd al-Razzāq." This seems to be incorrect in the case of Ibn Ishāq and 'Abd al-Razzāq, however. Ibn Ishāq, for instance, reports on the authority of Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī that Prophet said, "When I was done with what had happened in Jerusalem, the ascension (*mi'rāj*) was brought (to me)." *Al-Sīrah*, 2:36. Similarly, 'Abd al-Razzāq reports that when the Prophet was "taken by night" (*usriya bihi*), the angels greeted him at every heaven. *Al-Muṣannaf*, 2:261.

⁸⁵ For more on the rabbinic history of these stories, see Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 185–213. The translation here is from Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, 31. Angelika Neuwirth also detects a connection between this story and Q 17:80, but sees it as reflecting a late antique understanding that "attempts at spiritual rapprochements to the divine were known to have resulted in catastrophic failure." See Neuwirth, "The *Qibla* of Muhammad's Community Reconsidered," 273.

descended safely.... R. Akiba ascended safely and descended safely. (t. Ḥag. 2:3–4)

The corresponding pericope in the Palestinian Talmud, again connected to the *merkabah*, replaces the final sentence with “Rabbi Akiva entered safely, and departed safely” (y. Ḥag. 3:5). The final sentence is truncated in the Bavli, which as it stands is close to the Palestinian Talmud: “Rabbi Akiva departed unhurt” (b. Ḥag. 14b).

As mentioned above, we see at least in the Tosefta version of the story a connection between the *merkabah* and an ascension narrative. But, intriguingly, the discrepancy in the sources about whether Rabbi Akiva went up to the garden or entered it indicates some uncertainty regarding whether this mystical journey was in fact an *ascent*. Indeed, manuscripts of the Tosefta also vary on this point.⁸⁶ As I will try to show, several factors indicate that the Qur’anic prayer in Q 17:80 cited above is a deliberate rejection of the prayer for safe ascent and descent.

Probably the oldest of the *hekhalot* texts is Hekhalot Rabbati. Peter Schäfer’s study concludes that it was composed some time after the sixth century, with some material maybe dating as far back as the third century.⁸⁷ The parts under consideration here are highly unlikely to derive from the Qur’an or early Muslim literature, as they do not seem to be responding to them – the relation, in fact, is quite clearly the reverse. Hekhalot Rabbati begins⁸⁸ (§ 81): “R. Ishmael said: What are these songs that he who seeks to gaze on the vision of the *merkabah* recites, so

⁸⁶ Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 197.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 241, 245.

⁸⁸ Note that it is conventional to refer to the Synopse numbers from Schäfer, Schlüter, and von Mutius, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, when citing *hekhalot* literature, indicated by a § siglum. § 81 is the opening of the text.

as to descend safely and ascend safely?” Here, Rabbi Ishmael, the conventional hero of the *hekhalot* literature, wants to know what prayers one should say if he wishes to undertake the ascent. Later, in §§ 92–93, it becomes evident that these songs are performed during a standard Shema prayer, as the rules for when a mystic who is beholding the *merkabah* might legitimately be interrupted are identical to the rules for when someone praying the Shema prayer might be interrupted. Compare this now with the Sūrat al-Isrā’ prayer for an honourable entrance and exit in a fuller context:

⁷⁸ Perform [singular] prayer at the setting of the sun up to the darkening of the night and [recite] the recitation (*qur’ān*) at dawn. The recitation at dawn is witnessed.

⁷⁹ And some part of the night – keep vigil with it as an additional act for yourself. Perhaps your Lord will grant you a laudable station.

⁸⁰ And say, “My Lord, make me enter an honourable entrance, and make me to exit an honourable exit, and grant me supporting authority from You (*sulṭānan naṣīran*).”

The connections are suggestive: the ritual prayer context, the Prophet being taught the final supplication (just as Rabbi Ishmael had asked to be taught what to pray), and the supplication itself. There’s more: when Rabbi Ishmael makes it to the company of the angels, he hears God describing His love for hearing Israel’s prayers, “Every single day when the rising of the dawn approaches, the attending angels seek to recite a song of praise.... The adorned King sits and blesses the living creatures.... ‘For you are the lovely furnishings that I prepared and I completed you with it, for all formed beings whom I created are silent before me that I may hear and give ear to the prayer of my sons’” (§ 173). We find the same divine attention given to dawn recitation in Q 17:78.

The Qur'an's choice of the "entering and exiting" locution over "ascending and descending" seems to be part of what one might call an anti-ascensionist theology.⁸⁹ This is clearly spelled out later in the same *sūrah*, where the Prophet's opponents demand that he ascend to the sky and bring down a scripture therefrom, a demand promptly rejected: "Say, 'Glory be to my Lord. Am I anything but a mortal messenger?'" (v. 93).

The immediate context of the supplication in Q 17:78 is provided by the preceding v. 76, which acknowledges that the Meccan pagans are now actively trying to expel the Prophet.⁹⁰ Perhaps this provides some insight into the deeper purpose of the anti-ascensionist theology being developed in *Sūrat al-Isrā'*: the response to the political threat will not be a miraculous spiritual ascent, but a forthcoming physical migration.

7.3.4. Wisdom in the *merkabah* Ascent and *Sūrat al-Isrā'*

One of the most developed of the *merkabah* texts, 3 Enoch, describes the ascent and *merkabah* visions of Rabbi Ishmael, and the latter's meeting with the angel Metatron during his ascension. It picks up on the *merkabah*-Sinai motif as follows: "All the storehouses of wisdom (*ḥkmh*) were committed into his hand. All of them were opened for Moses on Sinai, until he had learned, in the forty days that he stood on the mount" (48d:2–3).⁹¹ This is part of a repeated theme in 3 Enoch that associates Metatron with wisdom (see also 10:5–6, 9:1, 48c:7).

⁸⁹ See also Hussain, "The Prophet's Visions in *Sūrat al-Najm*."

⁹⁰ Ghāmidī, *Bayān*, 3:102, *ad* Q 17:78.

⁹¹ All citations and translations of 3 Enoch are from Alexander's edition. Transliterations are from Odeberg's critical edition.

The combination of *merkabah*, Sinai, and wisdom in the text seems to be highly relevant, but unfortunately the dating of 3 Enoch is so uncertain as to render recourse to it highly fraught – it may not have reached its final form until the tenth century.⁹² Nonetheless, some of the key ideas expressed are found in much earlier texts too. We have already seen the association of the *merkabah* vision with Sinai above. The *merkabah* ascent being associated with wisdom, or the knowledge of who will and will not acquire wisdom being the ultimate point of the ascent,⁹³ is found in much earlier texts, including Hekhalot Rabbati § 82:

Greatest of all [the *merkabah* beholder's achievements] it is that [the angels] have a care for him, to gather him in and bring him unto the chambers of the palace of the seventh heaven, to cause him to stand on the right hand of the throne of the glory of God, ... to know all that which is destined to come to pass in the world, ... who shall be granted the Torah for his portion, and who be given wisdom.

As Schäfer points out, the one who will be given Torah and wisdom may simply refer to the mystic himself – i.e., he sees what glory awaits him.⁹⁴ This mention of who will be given wisdom is immediately followed by the mystic being given the ability to discern who in the world has stolen, committed adultery, and murdered – in other words, has contravened the Ten Commandments. As with 3 Enoch, we see a connection between the Decalogue, wisdom, and *merkabah*. I will return to the implications this has for understanding the qur'anic Decalogue below.

⁹² Alexander, "3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch," 226–229.

⁹³ Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 249. See also Swartz, "Jewish Visionary Tradition in Rabbinic Literature," 205; Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God*, 70–72.

⁹⁴ Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 250, n. 35.

7.4. THE QUR'ANIC DECALOGUE AS *ḤIKMAH*

We may turn finally to the qur'anic Decalogue, and consider how its various characteristics demonstrate the degree to which it aligns with its antecedent Decalogues and Decalogue-related traditions. Once this alignment and continuity has been established, it becomes plausible to interpret the characterisation of the qur'anic Decalogue as *ḥikmah* in light of the way the pre-qur'anic versions of Decalogues were similarly described.

We must begin by asking whether the observation that Q 17:22–39 is indeed a recapitulation of the Decalogue is actually correct. As we have seen, several *mufassirūn* have made the connection, and several modern studies are devoted to this putative qur'anic Decalogue. I am not aware that this view has ever been challenged. It is certainly not immediately self-evident, however. Richard Bell, for instance notes the significance of “practical maxims” in early qur'anic proclamations when discussing Q 17:39, but makes no connection between it and the Decalogue.⁹⁵ There are nonetheless good grounds to accept the view shared by the *mufassirūn* and modern scholarship.

Let's begin with the number of the commandments. Clearly, if one adds all of the imperatives and prohibitions in the passage, it is considerably greater than ten. Al-Rāzī counts twenty-five commandments from the passage, for example.⁹⁶ Günther tries to show that the various commands are subsumed under ten principal commandments, as does Ghāmidī.⁹⁷ This is plausible, but it has to be admitted that separating the main commandments from the auxiliary ones in such a way that the

⁹⁵ Bell, “Muhammad's Vision,” 147.

⁹⁶ Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, 20:343, *ad* Q 17:39.

⁹⁷ Günther, “The Ten Commandments and the Qur'an,” 34–35; Ghāmidī, *al-Bayān*, 3:74–86, *ad* Q 17:22–39.

total number of principal commandments is ten can appear to be arbitrary.⁹⁸ We would do well to accept Neuwirth's and Brinner's observation that the number ten does not really matter here.⁹⁹ We may note that the various ways in which the Decalogue is recalled in early Jewish and patristic literature are also not concerned to give exactly ten commandments (see, e.g., the citations from the Dramatists' Gnomologium, the opening section of Pseudo-Phocylides, the Didache, and the Epistle of Barnabas above).

I have already indicated in the preceding discussion several ways in which the Qur'anic adaptation of the Decalogue was foreshadowed in the pre-Qur'anic traditions. The summary below recaps these various points of correspondence. Taken together, these overlaps make it highly probable that the Qur'an is indeed giving a version of the Decalogue here:

- The connection between the commandments to worship God and honour one's parents (Pseudo-Phocylides, The Sentences of Syriac Menander, Philo);¹⁰⁰
- Specific overlaps with Philo in his expansions on the commandments to respect one's parents, not to kill, not to steal, and not to bear false witness;

⁹⁸ For example, unlike Günther, Ghāmidī splits v. 34 ("Do not approach the property of the orphan, save in the most virtuous manner, until he is of age. And fulfil the covenant. The covenant will be called to account") into two commandments, and considers v. 31 ("Do not slay your children through fear of poverty. We shall make provision for you and for them. Killing them is a great sin") to be subsumed under the general commandment in v. 26 ("Give the kinsman his due, and the destitute, and the traveller. And do not squander"). *Al-Bayān*, 3:74–86, *ad* Q 17:22–39.

⁹⁹ Neuwirth, "The Discovery of Evil," 261; Brinner, "An Islamic Decalogue," 76.

¹⁰⁰ See also Kugel, *The Bible as It Was*, 393–395, for additional evidence of the prominence of these two commandments in Jewish literature, even outside the Decalogue.

- Retention of commandments prohibiting adultery and murder, but the omission of the commandment prohibiting theft (Sermon on the Mount, Letter of James);
- Expansion of the principal commandments to include several thematically related ones, e.g., after the commandment to treat parents well (vv. 23–24), and before the commandment to avoid fornication (v. 31), we have commandments to include ones relatives in acts of charity (v. 26), to avoid the opposite of charity, namely squandering one’s wealth (vv. 26–27), to thus seek a just mean in spending (v. 29), and to avoid infanticide out of fear of poverty (v. 31) (Philo, Sentences of Syriac Menander, Yerushalmi);
- The fact that the putative Decalogue passage follows on from a *merkabah*-like vision (Hekhalot Rabbati, 3 Enoch).

The continuity with earlier Decalogues also explains the absence of the Sinaitic context, and the deritualisation of the qur’anic Decalogue, including the omission of the Sabbath commandment, and an expansion of the interpersonal ethical commandments (cf., the Dramatists’ Gnomologium, Pseudo-Phocylides, Syriac Menander, the Didache, the Epistle of Barnabas, Aphrahat, and Irenaeus).

We may now attempt use these myriad connections between the qur’anic Decalogue and its precursors on the one hand, and an examination of the contents of the Q 17 Decalogue pericope on the other, to explain what the Qur’an means when it calls its own iteration of the Decalogue *ḥikmah*. As shown above, texts in the wisdom genre frequently incorporate the Decalogue as part of their wisdom

teaching (Wisdom of Solomon, Pseudo-Phocylides, Syriac Menander). Further, we have seen the wisdom / natural law / Decalogue nexus in Aristobulus and Philo. All of this seems to have culminated in the Decalogue being explicitly or implicitly described as natural law in the writings of the church fathers (e.g., Irenaeus, Tertullian, Ephrem, Clement of Alexandria). Finally, Aphrahat, who also argues from for the continuing validity of the Decalogue (and indeed uniquely offers a natural law argument for why the Sabbath commandment could not possibly have meant that one was not to work on that day), nevertheless does not use the term “natural law” in reference to the Decalogue, but instead equates following the Ten Commandments with biblical wisdom, thus continuing the Second Temple Jewish connection between the two (see chapter 3).¹⁰¹

We have seen that the Qur’an’s reworkings of the Decalogue are familiar from, and often identical to, its antecedent Jewish and Christian versions, which, as we have also seen, have a long history of connecting the Decalogue to either wisdom or natural law, two concepts that were themselves frequently equated. It is at least plausible therefore that when the Qur’an calls its Decalogue *ḥikmah*, it is in fact equating it with natural morality, and thus endorsing the latter.

The possibility that this indeed so is increased when we examine the verse that comes between the final qur’anic Decalogue command and the *ḥikmah* verse that closes the passage. Referring most probably to the whole list of commands just proclaimed, we read, “The evil of all that is hateful to your Lord” (v. 38).¹⁰² The verse

¹⁰¹ This is perhaps not surprising, in light of the greater degree of continuity between early Syriac Christianity (in particular Aphrahat and Ephrem) and Jewish literary traditions than is generally found in the Greek-speaking church. See Siegal, “Judaism and Syriac Christianity.”

¹⁰² There is a notable variant reading here: *kullu dhālika kāna sayyi’atan* (in place of *sayyi’uhu*) ‘*inda rabbika makrūhā* (“All that is a sin, hateful to your Lord”). Of Ibn Mujāhid’s seven canonical reciters,

is remarkable for, in effect, taking a position on the Euthyphro dilemma (see chapter 3): the acts prohibited in the Decalogue passage have an inherent evil that is detestable before God, and thus revealed qur'anic *ḥikmah* merely confirms that inherent state.

Let us return to the several points of intersection between *hekhlot* texts and the Sūrat al-Isrā'. We noted above the association between the *merkabah* vision, Sinai / the Decalogue, and the acquisition of wisdom. Further, the anti-ascensionist theology in Sūrat al-Isrā' is couched in a language that seems purposefully to recall the *merkabah* mystical experience and reject it. Interestingly, Jacob of Serugh (d. ca. 521) also polemicises against the ascensionist motif in *merkabah* literature in a *memrā* titled *On the Chariot that Prophet Ezekiel Saw*. He offers to his audience in its place the Eucharist as the locus of God's vision.¹⁰³ It may be that Sūrat al-Isrā' is similarly repudiating the possibility of an ascent precisely because it insists that *ḥikmah* is not proprietary to the elect few, but has been demystified, and aligned

the *sayyi'atan* reading is preferred by Abū 'Amr, Ibn Kathīr, and Nāfi' (the other four reciters all preferring *sayyi'uhu*, yielding the reading translated in the main text here as "The evil of all that is hateful to your Lord"). Arguments for both variants are given by al-Rāzī, *Mafātīh al-ghayb*, 20:343–343. The Kufic and Hijazi style manuscripts (i.e., the earliest Qur'an manuscripts produced) overwhelmingly prefer *sayyi'uhu*. Of those consulted on the Corpus Coranicum website, the following have *sayyi'uhu*: Berlin, Staatsbibliothek: Wetzstein II 1913 (Ahlwardt 305); Jerusalem, National Library of Israel: Yah. Ms. Ar. 968; Paris, BnF: Arabe 325 (k); Paris, BnF: Arabe 337 (d); Paris, BnF: Arabe 363 (a); Paris, BnF: Arabe 399; Rampur Raza Library: No. 1, Korankodex; Tübingen, Universitätsbibliothek: Ma VI 165. Several of these use different coloured dotting to indicate *sayyi'atan* as a variant, namely Paris, BnF: Arabe 325 (k); Paris, BnF: Arabe 337 (d); Paris, BnF: Arabe 363 (a); and Rampur Raza Library: No. 1, Korankodex. Only one manuscript gives *sayyi'atan* as the primary, indeed the only reading: Gotthelf-Bergsträßer-Archiv: "Saray Medina 1a" (= Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi: M 1). It is difficult on literary grounds alone to select either one over the other as the critically more acceptable reading. There thus seems to be no reason not to take the manuscript evidence seriously, and to (tentatively) accept the majority manuscript reading of *sayyi'uhu*.

¹⁰³ Bumazhnov, "Jewish-Christian Anti-Paulinism and Merkabah Mysticism," 55–57. I am grateful to Ilger Zellentin for drawing my attention to this study.

once more with its biblical roots in being accessible to everyone, now through the revelation of the Qur'an.¹⁰⁴

Finally, much of the preceding discussion has centred on the links between the Q 17 passage and its intertexts. If we were to consider instead what *ḥikmah* means purely on the basis of the contents of the pericope, we see it refers to divine unicity (v. 23) and then various inter-personal commandments, including kindness to parents; providing for and speaking words of kindness to one's needy kin, the poor, and travellers; avoiding squandering wealth, infanticide, homicide, and fornication; not misappropriating the wealth of orphans; keeping one's covenants; weighing fairly in the marketplace; avoiding suspicion and false accusations; and avoiding arrogance.

Several of these stipulations are qualified so as to encourage a just mean. Thus, vv. 28–30 discourage giving away all of one's wealth, just as they discourage hoarding it, and counsel instead that one speak kindly to those in need if unable to financially help them. While v. 33 prohibits homicide, it at the same time promises those whose nearest kin have been murdered that they will be assisted, and thus they should "not go to excess in killing," suggesting already in the Meccan phase an approval of the *lex talionis* that will be spelled out in Medinan *sūrahs* (Q 2:178,

¹⁰⁴ Further evidence of this subversion is provided in the following *sūrah*, Sūrat al-Kahf, which seems to be paired with Sūrat al-Isrā'. Sūrat al-Kahf includes the story of Moses's enigmatic journey with a figure who is probably an angel, thus paralleling several apocalyptic journeys in Jewish and Christian literature in which an angel decodes for the biblical figure the meaning of a series of visions. Notably, however, Moses does not ascend through the heavens for his journey, and the end result is decidedly ambiguous; far from leading to wisdom (as heavenly tours are generally supposed to), Moses is dismissed as unable to bear such teaching. On *sūrah* pairings, see Sinai, *Historical-Critical Introduction*, 29. On the Moses story in Sūrat al-Kahf, see in especially Griffith, "Late Antique Lore within the Purview of the Qur'an."

5:45).¹⁰⁵ And v. 34 countenances a partial exception to the prohibition against utilising the wealth of the orphan – one may do so “in the most virtuous manner,” referring probably to the permissibility of using their wealth before they attain maturity if it is in their own interest, including possibly as equitable remuneration for their care (see Q 2:220, 4:6).

Finally, near the end of the pericope is an indication that there will be a final accountability before God, when the faculties of hearing and sight, and the heart itself, are questioned (*mas’ūl*). Thus, if we were to offer a pithy summary of this, *ḥikmah* in Q 17 refers to knowledge of divine unicity, practical moral teaching, and final accountability.

¹⁰⁵ For the unusual form of the *lex talionis* in Q 2:178, which on the surface suggests that only a free-man can be killed in retaliation for the homicide of a free-man, only a slave for a slave, and only a woman for a woman, see Saeed, “Fights and Flights.” He argues in favour of Ibn Taymiyyah’s position that this refers to how to pair off and thus cancel the blood-wit of those slain on the opposite sides of a conflict, rather than who should be punished for killing a free-man etc. (note, for example, the use of the plural in the phrase *al-qisās fi l-qatlā*, “blood-wit among *those slain*”). The verse thus primarily refers to *retrospectively* cancelling blood-wit, rather than *prospectively* punishing a free-man or a slave or a woman. See also Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū‘ al-fatāwā*, 30:326, 35:81.

CHAPTER 8

Luqmān the Sage (Q 31:12–19)

8.1. INTRODUCTION

Luqmān was well-known in pre-Islamic Arabia. Renowned for wisdom, his name occurs in multiple pre- and early-Islamic lines of poetry, often connected with the ancient Arabian tribes of ‘Ād, Iram, and Tubba’.¹ The Qur’an confirms that he was indeed endowed with *ḥikmah*, and recounts his advice to his son in Q 31:12–19.

¹² We certainly gave Luqmān wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*), saying, “Give thanks to God; and whoever gives thanks, gives thanks only for his own sake. And whoever is ungrateful, [let him know that] God is indeed all-sufficient, all-laudable.”

¹³ When Luqmān said to his son, admonishing him (*ya’izuhu*), “O my son! Do not ascribe any partners to God. Associating (others with God) is indeed a great injustice.”

¹⁴ We have enjoined (*waṣṣaynā*) man concerning his parents – His mother carried him through weakness upon weakness, and his weaning took two years – saying, “Give thanks to Me and to your parents. To Me is the return.

¹⁵ But if they urge you to ascribe to Me as partner that of which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them. Keep their company honourably in this world and follow the way of those who turn to Me penitently. Then to Me will be your return, and I will inform you concerning what you used to do.”

¹⁶ “O my son! Even if it should be the weight of a mustard seed, and [even though] it should be in a rock, or in the heavens, or in the earth, God will produce it. God is indeed all-attentive, all-aware.

¹⁷ O my son! Maintain the prayer and bid what is right and forbid what is wrong, and be patient with whatever may befall you. That is indeed the steadiest of courses.

¹⁸ Do not disdainfully turn away your cheek from the people, and do not walk boastfully on the earth. Indeed, God does not like any swaggering braggart.

¹⁹ Be modest in your bearing, and lower your voice. Indeed, the ungainliest of voices is the donkey’s voice.”

Like the Sūrat al-Isrā’ *ḥikmah* passage (the Qur’anic Decalogue), Sūrat Luqmān provides an extensive list of virtues that it explicitly labels to be *ḥikmah*. Sūrat al-Isrā’

¹ Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, 134; E12, s.v. “Luqmān.”

does this at the conclusion of its *ḥikmah* passage (“That is from what your Lord has revealed to you of *ḥikmah*,” v. 39), and Sūrat Luqmān at the start (“We certainly gave Luqmān *ḥikmah*,” v. 12). In fact, as we shall see, there is good reason to believe that the opening verse of the Luqmān pericope is purposely recalling the Sūrat al-Isrā’ Decalogue pericope, with which it has much in common.

The overlaps between the qur’anic Luqmān and the broader Near Eastern wisdom tradition have been recognised at least as far back as Hirschfeld, who noted the similarity between Luqmān’s speech and the opening chapters of Proverbs,² and several candidates have been suggested for Luqmān’s identity in the context of popular late antique wisdom literature.³ The proverbial traits in Luqmān’s speech, especially in vv. 16–19, certainly suggest a connection to the wisdom genre. Indeed, Gutas uses this passage as a prime example for his general thesis that *ḥikmah* in the Qur’an always means “maxim,” i.e., an aphoristic or proverbial saying.⁴ If Gutas is correct, and *ḥikmah* in Q 31 means “maxim,” it could be something of a departure from the meaning of the term as we have encountered it thus far, namely, natural knowledge of basic moral truths and of eschatological accountability. However, a close analysis of the Luqmān passage will reveal several overlaps between it and the earlier, second Meccan *ḥikmah* pericopes, particularly the Sūrat al-Isrā’ Decalogue pericope, making a substantially different sense of *ḥikmah* in this verse unlikely.

Nonetheless, as we will see from an examination of the pre-qur’anic Luqmān, wise

² Hirschfeld, *New Researches*, 80. See also Horovitz, “Jewish Proper Names and Derivatives in the Koran,” 173–175.

³ Horovitz discusses, and dismisses, the identification of Luqmān with the biblical Balaam, or Elchasai, or the pre-Socratic Alcmaeon of Croton, or Aḥīqar. *Koranische Untersuchungen*, 132–136. Hirschfeld’s and Bell’s view that the name is a corruption of *Sulaymān* has also not found favour in scholarship. See Hirschfeld, *New Researches*, 80; Bell, *The Qur’ān*, 2:401; Van Reeth, “Sourate 31: *Luqmān*,” 2b:1101. See below for a more recent revival of the Alcmaeon identification.

⁴ Gutas, “Classical Arabic Wisdom Literature,” 54. For a brief appraisal of Gutas’s view, see chapter 1.

teaching was part of his legacy, and the meaning of *ḥikmah* in this passage, although in line with chronologically earlier occurrences of the term in the Qur'an, is nuanced to include the imparting of wisdom, specifically, through admonishment. This is thus fairly close to Gutas's definition of *ḥikmah* as "maxim," and that latter sense is certainly more plausible here than in any of the other qur'anic *ḥikmah* passages.

In this chapter, it will be useful to examine first of all the pre-qur'anic Luqmān as he appears in the *Jāhili* poetry tradition, and then the general connection of the Luqmān pericope to other pre-Islamic wisdom discourses. Following that, I will examine the Luqmān pericope itself, including its structure, its link to other qur'anic *ḥikmah* passages, any significant links to antecedent intertexts not discussed thus far, and the significance of the pericope within its *sūrah* context. Finally, on the basis of this analysis, I will try to determine what *ḥikmah* in Sūrat Luqmān means, and in particular whether it is distinct from chronologically earlier uses of the term.

8.2. LUQMĀN IN PRE-ISLAMIC POETRY

The pre-Islamic poetry tradition presents Luqmān variously as a wise sage or a great king. In fact, it is not certain whether Luqmān the sage and Luqmān the king refer to the same person in the *Jāhili* poetry corpus, as the verses that mention him variously allude either to his wisdom or his kingship, but never to both in the same poem.⁵ We do not need to resolve the issue here, although, as we will see, reading the pre-Islamic Luqmān poetry in light of the Qur'an's allusions to the same material suggests that the various pre-qur'anic references to Luqmān were indeed to the same legendary figure. Nonetheless, we will not detain ourselves with lines of poetry

⁵ Horowitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, 135; *EQ*, s.v. "Luqmān"; *EI2*, s.v. "Luqmān."

that depict Luqmān as a king. We can also overlook those verses that cite his longevity of life and generosity, traits at least as important as his wisdom in the surviving pre-Islamic poetry corpus.⁶ Instead, in the following discussion, I focus only on those verses that relate to his wisdom.

Our first verses, which we briefly considered in chapter 5, are variously ascribed to Bint Wathīmah or Nājiyah bt. ḌamḌam.⁷ The poetess mourns the death of either her father or brother as follows:

I found him the refuge of widows,
and the guardian of orphans.

And the repeller of obstinate foes (*khaṣm*),
when mutual faults were revealed in quarrel.

With the tongue of Luqmān the son of ‘Ād,
and the decisiveness of his wise speech (*faṣli khuṭbatihī l-ḥakīmah*).

It would restrain them, after mutual pushing
and pulling, in sound judgement (*ḥukūmah*).

As we saw, there is a clear connection between the phrase “the decisiveness of his wise speech” (*faṣli khuṭbatihī l-ḥakīmah*) and the Sūrat Ṣād David *ḥikmah* pericope examined earlier. In Q 38:20, the Qur’an recalls how God blessed David: “We strengthened his kingdom and gave him wisdom and decisive speech (*al-ḥikmata wa-faṣla l-khiṭāb*).” Furthermore, Bint Wathīmah’s / Nājiyah’s verses mention Luqmān’s ability to judge (i.e., his *ḥukūmah*) between disputants (*khaṣm*), which has a parallel in Q 38:21–22, “Has there come to you the account of the

⁶ See the references in n. 5.

⁷ Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, 1:183; Fawwāz, *al-Durr al-manthūr fī rubāt al-khudūr*, 518–519. Note that I could not trace the attribution of these lines to Nājiyah bt. ḌamḌam, also referred to as Nā’iḥat Haram b. ḌamḌam (“The one who mourned for Haram b. ḌamḌam”) to any pre-modern source.

disputants (*khaṣm*) when they scaled [the wall into] the sanctuary? ... ‘Do not be afraid. [We are only] two disputants (*khaṣmāni*), one of us has abused the other. So judge (*fa-ḥkum*) justly between us and do not exceed [the bounds of justice], and show us the right path.’” The overlap in diction between the lines of poetry and the qur’anic verses is patent, but in fact the parallels may run even deeper. Recall that the pre-Islamic Luqmān was variously described as either a king or a wise man. In Q 38:20, we see both traits conjoined in David, viz., kingdom and wisdom, in the very verse that recalls the pre-Islamic Luqmān as depicted in Bint Wathīmah’s or Nājiyah bt. Ḍamḍam’s poem. This suggests that there were not two separate Luqmāns in the pre-Islamic tradition, but a single one, depicted sometimes as a king, and sometimes as a wise man.

The significance of this intertextual discovery should not be underestimated. Although diction in the Qur’an is occasionally traced back to the pre-Islamic poetry corpus, the overlap is usually of isolated words or phrases.⁸ Here, however, we have significant lexical overlap over the length of almost an entire qur’anic pericope. This connection of the Sūrat Ṣād David pericope with this pre-Islamic Luqmān poem is, to my knowledge, the first time such an intertextual connection between the Qur’an and the *Jāhili* poetry tradition has been uncovered. It seems the Qur’an went to some considerable length in portraying David as Luqmān. I will return to what the purpose of this might be.

There is a possibility of course that these lines of verse are not authentically pre-Islamic.⁹ There is no easy way to rule that out, but on balance it seems highly

⁸ See Mir, *Verbal Idioms of the Qur’ān*, for numerous examples throughout.

⁹ On the issue of forgery in the pre-Islamic corpus, and controls to detect it, see chapter 3, n. 141.

unlikely. The verses have not been fabricated to prove anything about the Qur'an. The version recorded by al-Jāḥiẓ is part of a much longer poem, and neither he nor anyone of the *mufassirūn* connected the description of Luqmān in the verses with the David pericope. Indeed, for al-Jāḥiẓ, the purpose of citing the poem was as evidence for the Arabs' love of gaining the upper hand when arguing (*al-'uluww fī l-khaṣm*).¹⁰ No obvious motivation for the forgery can thus be identified. Furthermore, there is a compelling reason to believe that these lines of poetry provide the Qur'an's subtext, rather than the reverse. Overwhelmingly, as far back as we can trace the Islamic exegetical tradition, the David pericope in Sūrat Ṣād was not read as a text in the wisdom genre, in which David's great wisdom was demonstrated by his solving a dispute brought before him. Instead, the focus of the exegetes was squarely on explaining (and later, explaining away) what sin David had committed that was demonstrated to him through the possibly angelic disputants, and there was no attempt to show that David's *ḥikmah* in v. 20 had enabled him to deal with the *khaṣm*, or disputants, in vv. 21–24.¹¹ If the poem is inspired by the Qur'an, our putative forger would thus have been unique (at least among early Islamic authors whose works have reached us) in appreciating this connection.

This link between David and Luqmān strongly suggests that the Meccan *ḥikmah* pericopes are bound together by more than simply the occurrence of the term *ḥikmah* within them. As we proceed through this chapter, we will explore yet

¹⁰ Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, 1:176.

¹¹ For a study of the reception history of the qur'anic pericope, see Mohammed, *David in the Muslim Tradition*. It was not until al-Rāzī, it seems, that a connection was made between God's having given David *ḥikmah* in v. 20 and the subsequent dispute scene in vv. 21–24, and even then al-Rāzī does not explicitly connect David's resolution of the dispute with his wisdom. Rather, he merely argues that the dispute passage cannot be a reference to the supposed affair between David and Bathsheba, as God has just prior to it praised David as full of wisdom. *Ibid.*, 76, 91.

more intra-qur'anic linguistic overlaps between the Luqmān passage and other *ḥikmah* pericopes, reinforcing my thesis that the Qur'an is using the term *ḥikmah* with a highly uniform meaning across the corpus.

The next verses we will consider are from Zabbān b. Sayyār, again recorded in al-Jāḥiẓ's *al-Bayān wa-l-tabẓīn*,¹² and also in his *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*.¹³ The context, as provided by al-Jāḥiẓ in the latter work, is that Nābighah al-Dhubaynī (whose actual name, as he is referred to in the poetry, was Ziyād b. Mu'āwiyah) and Zabbān had intended to engage in a joint raid. Nābighah, however, spotted a certain type of locust on his clothes. Taking it to be a bad omen, he panicked and withdrew from the intended raid. Undeterred, Zabbān continued as planned, and returned without harm, having also acquired much booty. He then composed the following lines:

Ziyād [i.e., al-Nābighah al-Dhubaynī] asked his omen regarding it that it might inform it, while he was not knowledgeable (*ḵhabīr*) of it.

He remained in his place as if Luqmān the son of 'Ād –
[as if] a beckoner (*mushīr*) had beckoned to him [Ziyād] using his [Luqmān's] wisdom (*ḥikmatihī*).¹⁴

He learned that there is no bad omen except
for the seeker of bad omens, and it is ruin.

Rather, a thing coincides with some other thing
occasionally, and its falsehood is plentiful.

And whoever goes far from his dwelling place, certainly one day
news of death or glad tidings will bring him (back).

¹² Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabẓīn*, 3:304–305.

¹³ Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān*, 3:447–448.

¹⁴ Gutas translates *ḥikmah* here as “maxims” (as he does wherever it occurs in the pre-Islamic poetry tradition), on the basis that that makes for a better contrast with the preceding “omens.” “Classical Arabic Wisdom Literature,” 51, incl. n. 24. This remains unconvincing. While Gutas is correct in identifying that the poet is setting up a contrast in these two verses, the contrast need not necessarily be realised through *ḥikmah* being a discreet, well-known oral teaching, thus corresponding to the omen's being a readily identifiable observation. Rather, the point of the contrast could be that although both omens and wisdom are ways of determining how one should behave, one works, and the other does not.

There has been some confusion in scholarship regarding the correct translation of the second stich (beginning, “He remained in his place”), which in turn has far-reaching consequences for what we can elicit from the poem. The Arabic is as follows:

*aqāma ka’anna Luqmāna bna ‘Ādin
ashāra lahu bi-ḥikmatihī mushīru*

Both Horovitz¹⁵ and Gutas¹⁶ interpret the *mushīr* (“beckoner”) in the second hemistich of this couplet to be the predicate of “Luqmān the son of ‘Ād” (*Luqmāna bna ‘Ādin*) in the first hemistich. Their respective translations are as follows:

Horovitz

Er verweilte, als wäre Luqmān b. ‘Ād
ein Berater gewesen, der ihn kraft seiner Weisheit beraten hätte.

Gutas

He stayed [behind], as if Luqmān b. ‘Ād,
had been someone beckoning to him with his maxims.

This is clearly a stretched reading of the verse. The fronting of a reduced relative clause¹⁷ – here, supposedly, “indicated to him” (*ashāra lahū*) – such that it precedes what would usually have been the noun that it qualifies – i.e., “a becker” (*mushīr*) –, would be highly irregular. Rather, the word *mushīr* that concludes the second

¹⁵ Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, 133.

¹⁶ Gutas, “Classical Arabic Wisdom Literature,” 51.

¹⁷ Although in English translation this is a reduced relative clause, i.e., one not marked by an explicit relative pronoun, we should note that the classical Arab grammarians disallowed relative clause dependents of indefinite noun antecedents (which is what *mushīr* would be on Gutas’s and Horovitz’s readings, albeit one that is no longer technically an antecedent, on account of its relative clause being fronted), and classed them instead as *ṣifāt*. See Ibn Hishām, *Mughnī al-labīb*, 5:246–267.

hemistich is the subject of *ashāra* in the same hemistich, and the entire second hemistich is the complex predicate (*khabar murakkab*) of “Luqmān the son of ‘Ād” in the first hemistich. In other words, the couplet has “Luqmān” as its major subject, and *mushīr* (“beckoner”) as its minor subject.

The implication of the correct reading is significant. It is no longer Luqmān who is portrayed as someone who might take the role of a beckoner to wise conduct, but an undefined third party who uses the wisdom of Luqmān. This supports the evidence presented in chapter 1 that Luqmān’s sayings had acquired something of a normative status prior to the proclamation of the Qur’an, such that they could be adduced as maxims to provide advice to others, and thus that there existed a popular wisdom genre in the literature of the Arabs before Islam.

As a final point, Zabbān’s verses implicitly contrast Luqmān’s wisdom with al-Nābighah’s superstitious reliance on omens. Ziyād indefensibly acted as if what was in reality mere superstition reached the same standard of normative validity as the wisdom of Luqmān. The contrast is particularly effective if Luqmān’s wisdom is, like the omens, derived from observations of nature and reflection on man’s experience, as indeed was characteristic of much of the ancient Near Eastern wisdom genre, including in the Bible (see chapter 3). Indeed, the final stich in the poem (“And whoever goes far from his dwelling place, certainly one day / news of death or glad tidings will bring him [back]”) seems precisely to be an aphorism derived from reflection on man’s experience, and may be citing or at least imitating Luqmān’s maxims. The difference between superstition and true wisdom, as represented by Luqmān, would then be that whereas Luqmān was able to draw the correct lessons from experience and observation of nature, Ziyād was not. This also explains the

poet's remark that Ziyād was not "knowledgeable (*khābir*)" of how to draw the right lessons from omens/nature, implying that Luqmān therefore *was* knowledgeable.¹⁸

The last verse we will consider is variously attributed to al-Musayyab b. 'Alas and al-A'shā:¹⁹

And you are more eloquent when you speak than
Luqmān when (even) he is incapable of the task.

There are several variants for the comparative in the first hemistich: *aḥkamu* ("wiser"), *abyanu* ("clearer"), and *anṭaqu* ("more eloquent").²⁰ In all cases, the implication is that Luqmān's wisdom was not only a faculty of understanding, but of persuasive speech. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, part of Luqmān's legacy was not just *being* wise, but *guiding* through wisdom. This aligns with the links we have already seen chapters 5 and 6 between *ḥikmah* and *wa'z* ("admonition"). We will see further instances of a connection between the two in the Luqmān pericope. In this line attributed to al-Musayyab and al-A'shā, we have a pre-Islamic forerunner to this pairing.²¹

¹⁸ See Gutas, "Classical Arabic Wisdom Literature," 51, where he argues for an empirical component to *ḥikmah*. See also n. 21 below.

¹⁹ Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, 1:188–189, incl. 188, n. 3.

²⁰ Ibid. All variants are cited in Gutas, "Classical Arabic Wisdom Literature," 77, n. 29. See Geyer, *Gedichte*, 333.

²¹ The significance of *ḥikmah* and *wa'z* is also demonstrated by the fact that, along with poetry, two of the oldest genres of Arabic literature are proverbial sayings (including testaments) and sermons. See Serjeant, "Early Arabic Prose," 115–119.

8.3. LUQMĀN AND PRE-ISLAMIC TRADITIONS

8.3.1. Wisdom and Apocalypse

Overlaps between Luqmān's advice to his son and maxims found in wider Near Eastern wisdom literature are evident. Luqmān's form of address, "O my son," is typical of this genre (see, e.g., Prov 1:8, 10, 15; Sir 2:1). Unsurprisingly, this address also features heavily in the testament genre of early Jewish literature, where a biblical figure gives his parting advice to his family, such as the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, (e.g., 1:5, 15:5).²² We also find the formula in apocalyptic works, including 1 Enoch (e.g., 79:1, 82:1), 2 Enoch (e.g., 36:4), and The Apocalypse of Adam (1:1, 3:1, 4:2), perhaps a further illustration of the influence of wisdom literature on apocalyptic literature discussed in chapter 3. We saw in chapter 4 how apocalyptic literature that incorporated elements from the wisdom genre provided the context for understanding the meaning of *ḥikmah* as eschatological judgement in Sūrat al-Qamar, and that furthermore this *ḥikmah* was accessible to all willing to pay attention to the signs of nature. This understanding of *ḥikmah* seems to be part of the present *sūrah* too, where Luqmān's wisdom is partially demonstrated by his awareness of eschatological truths (v. 16).

The maxims themselves clearly have a proverbial feel, especially vv. 18 and 19. Some of the advice is found almost verbatim in the Story of Aḥīqar, another ancient Near Eastern sage who taught through proverbs: "O my son, bend your head low and soften your voice and be courteous and walk in the straight path and be not foolish. And raise not your voice when you laugh, for were it by a loud voice that a house

²² See also Spittler's introduction to his translation, "Testament of Job," 831.

was built, the ass would build many houses every day.”²³ Further intriguing parallels have recently been posited by Nora Schmid between the qur’anic Luqmān and Tobit (Tob 4:3–19), and David’s exhortation to his son Solomon (1 Kgs 2:1–12).²⁴ The latter intertext consolidates yet further the connection between David and Luqmān established above.

These overlaps have prompted scholars to propose that elements drawn from Near Eastern wisdom literature were a part of popular Arabian culture prior to Islam, and that these maxims were already being attributed to Luqmān before the Qur’an.²⁵ Given the Aḥīqar intertext in particular, a connection between Luqmān’s wisdom as presented in Sūrat Luqmān and the broader Near Eastern wisdom tradition seems well established. The story of Aḥīqar was one of the most popular pieces of literature in late antiquity.²⁶ Indeed, Aḥīqar himself seems to be mentioned in a pre-Islamic verse attributed to ‘Adī b. Zayd, confirming his cultural presence in the Arabian peninsula prior to Islam.²⁷

Before we consider the overlaps between the Sūrat Luqmān *ḥikmah* passage and chronologically earlier *ḥikmah* pericopes, there is one further possible antecedent to Luqmān and his wisdom that has recently found support, and which, if established, would mean that *ḥikmah* as used in Sūrat Luqmān means something substantially different from any of the uses of the term we have encountered thus

²³ Conybeare, Harris, and Lewis, *The Story of Aḥīqar*, lxxvi. As Stummer points out, the proverb as it exists in the Syriac, which works by suggesting that a loud voice does not have the power to build a house, is somewhat odd. Stummer lists various alternatives to understanding the original; *Der kritische Wert*, 12–13. We can see that the Qur’an has adopted (or created) a simplified version of the proverb.

²⁴ Schmid, “From Ethico-Religious Exhortation to Legal Paraenesis,” 329–331.

²⁵ Horovitz; *Koranische Untersuchungen*, 136.

²⁶ Lindenberger, “Aḥīqar,” 479.

²⁷ *EI2*, s.v. “Luqmān”; Nöldeke, *Untersuchungen zum Aḥīqar-Roman*, 25; Goitein, “The Present-Day Arabic Proverb,” 371, 377; Van Reeth, “Sourate 31: Luqmān,” 2b:1101

far. It is the proposition that Luqmān is the Arabicised name for Alcmaeon of Croton, and *ḥikmah* in the pericope signifies philosophy.

8.3.2. Philosophy

The suggestion that Luqmān refers to the pre-Socratic natural philosopher Alcmaeon of Croton was originally made by Hartmann,²⁸ and has found support by Mahmud Muftic²⁹ and more recently by Van Reeth in *Le Coran des historiens*.³⁰ The apparent overlaps in the surviving teachings of Alcmaeon and Luqmān are far too generic to be convincing – e.g., Alcmaeon’s statement that there are things which only the gods know, and concerning which human knowledge is limited,³¹ is considered by Muftic to be reflected in the final verse of Sūrat Luqmān (v. 34), “The knowledge of the Hour is indeed with God. He sends down the rain, and He knows what is in the wombs. No soul knows what it will earn tomorrow, and no soul knows in what land it will die. God is indeed all-knowing, all-aware.”³² We may safely dismiss such speculative intertexts. There are three remaining pieces of evidence cited by Muftic and Van Reeth in support of this hypothesis that I will consider.

First, there is the obvious similarity in their names. Second, an earlier part of Sūrat Luqmān condemns the one(s) “who buys diverting talk (*lahwa l-ḥadīth*) that he may lead [people] astray from God’s way without any knowledge” (v. 6). Muqātil

²⁸ Hartmann, “Kleinere Mittheilungen: *luqmān* = Ἀλκμαίων,” 106–107.

²⁹ Muftic, “Which oath?,” 6–8.

³⁰ Van Reeth, “Sourate 31: *Luqmān*,” 2b:1101.

³¹ Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 107.

³² Muftic, “Which oath?,” 7. Muftic somewhat misleadingly gives the impression that Alcmaeon said that only God knows the sex of the foetus. If this were indeed so, the overlap with Q 31:34, the final verse of Sūrat Luqmān, would be more impressive. In fact, Alcmaeon simply says that the child will take the gender of whichever parent contributes more seed. See Diels and Kranz, eds., *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 1:213 (Testimony A14).

identifies this individual as al-Naḍr b. al-Ḥārith, who supposedly learned the stories of Rustam and Isfandiyār from the Persians, and would narrate them to divert people from listening to the Qur’an.³³ Furthermore, according to Ibn Abī Uṣayba‘ah (d. 668/1270) in his *‘Uyūn al-anbā’*, al-Naḍr b. al-Ḥārith studied philosophy and wisdom (*ḥikmah*), which is clearly intended as a hendiadys, and also studied with his father, the legendary medical practitioner al-Ḥārith b. Kaladah, who in turn had studied at the Persian medical school of Jundīshāpūr.³⁴ Given the pre-eminence of Alcmaeon as a medical thinker as well as a philosopher (in any case, disciplines that were not entirely distinct), al-Ḥārith would have learned something of Alcmaeon’s teaching, and presumably would have passed these on to his son. Van Reeth speculates that perhaps the Qur’an is here claiming to improve upon al-Naḍr’s philosophical teachings through its own tales of Luqmān/Alcmaeon.

As a final consideration in support of this thesis, Van Reeth points out that Abū I-Ḥasan al-‘Āmirī (d. 381/992) identified Luqmān as the founder of philosophy, who taught the discipline to Empedocles. Combining this with the fact that Clement of Alexander in the *Miscellanies* says that Alcmaeon was the one who “first composed a treatise on nature” (1:16), and that the historical Alcmaeon’s teachings are connected to those of Empedocles, Van Reeth draws the conclusion that the Luqmān/Alcmaeon identification must have been made at least as early as al-‘Āmirī.³⁵

³³ Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, 3:432. Al-Naḍr’s story also appears in the *sīrah* literature, but without a connection to this verse. See, for example, Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah*, 1:300.

³⁴ Ibn Abī Uṣayba‘ah, *‘Uyūn al-anbā’*, 167. See also Shahid, *Byzantium and Arabs in the Sixth Century*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 179.

³⁵ Van Reeth, “Sourate 31: *Luqmān*,” 2b:1102.

If this line of reasoning is sound, it would indeed have far-reaching implications for how we are to understand *ḥikmah* in the Sūrat Luqmān pericope, and perhaps in the Qur'an more broadly. However, very little of this stands up to scrutiny. The similarity between Luqmān's and Alcmaeon's names is speculative at best, and does nothing to explain how the pre-qur'anic Luqmān came to be associated with 'Ād and the other ancient Arabian tribes.³⁶ Further, although Alcmaeon's works may well have been taught at the school of Jundīshāpūr, even if we allow that an historical al-Ḥārith b. Kaladah from the Hijaz travelled there and studied medicine, the identification of Naḍr b. al-Ḥārith (who, recall, is the one castigated at the start of Sūrat Luqmān according to Muqātil for spreading "diverting tales") as al-Ḥārith b. Kaladah's son is highly questionable. The identification is perhaps no earlier than the seventh century AH / thirteenth century CE.³⁷ Indeed, many of the earliest bibliographical sources on Naḍr b. al-Ḥārith insist that his lineage was in fact Naḍr b. al-Ḥārith b. 'Alqamah, rather than Naḍr b. al-Ḥārith b. Kaladah.³⁸ While these sources attribute to al-Naḍr that he learned Persian stories, there is nothing to suggest he acquired philosophical knowledge or "wisdom," such as we find in Ibn Abī Uṣayba'ah. As for Abū I-Ḥasan al-'Āmirī's view (expressed in his *Kitāb al-Amad 'alā l-abad*) that Empedocles learned philosophy/wisdom from Luqmān, that is far more simply explained by al-'Āmirī's project to reconcile Islam with philosophy (interestingly, he

³⁶ Hartmann, who first made the proposal that Luqmān is Alcmaeon, acknowledged that this was a grave difficulty in the theory; "Kleinere Mittheilungen: *luqmān* = Ἀλκμαίων," 107.

³⁷ I believe it was not made earlier than Ibn Abī Uṣayba'ah, *Uyūn al-anbā'*, 167.

³⁸ E.g., Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah*, 1:265.

makes Luqmān a contemporary of David),³⁹ rather than by Van Reeth’s tortuous connections from Luqmān to Alcmaeon via Clementine and Empedocles.

I think we can safely dismiss the notion, then, that *ḥikmah* in Sūrat Luqmān is connected to Alcmaeon’s philosophy. Nonetheless, Van Seeth’s insight that the Luqmān pericope is responding to the rejection of the “diverting tales (*lahwa l-ḥadīth*)” mentioned in v. 6 does seem promising, and I shall return to it below.

8.4. PERICOPE STRUCTURE AND LINKS TO OTHER *ḤIKMAH* PERICOPEs

Luqmān’s speech is divided into three parts, each introduced by his address “O my son,” after an introductory verse affirming that Luqmān was indeed given wisdom (v. 12). This gives us section openers for the speech at vv. 13, 16, and 17.⁴⁰ The first section, therefore, comprises vv. 13–15. Within this section, the final two verses are an interjection, where the divine voice interrupts Luqmān’s admonition to his son. It is tempting to see this as a later interpolation, as for example Nöldeke and Bell do.⁴¹ However, the placement of the interjection immediately after Luqmān’s exhorting his son to adhere to strict monotheism aligns the pericope with the opening of the Sūrat al-Isrā’ *ḥikmah* passage, or the qur’anic Decalogue, with its opening two-fold command to serve God alone and to honour one’s parents: “Your Lord has decreed that you not worship other than Him and show kindness to your parents” (v. 23).

³⁹ Walbridge, *The Leaven of the Ancients*, 33–34. This use of Luqmān by the *falāsifah*, perhaps starting with al-‘Amirī, is also noted by De Smet in Amir-Moezzi, *Dictionnaire du Coran*, s.v. “Luqmān.”

⁴⁰ The use of vocatives to mark the beginning of new sections has been noted by several scholars. See Zahniser, “Major Transitions,” 30; Klar, “Text-Critical Approaches to Sura Structure: Part One,” 8–15 and 26; Sinai, “Towards a Compositional Grammar.”

⁴¹ Nöldeke et al., *The History of the Qur’ān*, 128; Bell, *The Qur’ān*, 2:400–402. Nöldeke further suggests that in fact it is possible that the entire Luqmān pericope may be a later insertion into the *sūrah*. I will argue, as we proceed, that the pericope is too well-integrated into the rest of the *sūrah* for that to be likely.

Furthermore, Q 31:14 (the verse commending that parents be honoured from the Luqmān *ḥikmah* passage) and Q 17:23–24 (the opening of the qur’anic Decalogue) are unique in the Qur’an in suggesting a striking overlap between the role of parents and the role of God Himself in a person’s life. This is accomplished in Sūrat Luqmān by the conjunction of parents and God as two objects of the single imperative *ushkur* (“give thanks”). As for Sūrat al-Isrā’, I discussed in chapter 7 the wordplay in v. 24 between *rabbi* (“my Lord”) and *rabbayānī* (“they [i.e., my parents] brought me up”). Although the conjunction between the duties owed to God and those owed to parents occurs in a few other verses (Q 2:83; 4:36; 6:151), nowhere else is there a suggestion of such parity between the role of the parents and the role of God, and the duties of piety one owns to each.⁴²

To argue that the Sūrat Luqmān interjectory verses (i.e., vv. 14–15) deliberately parallel the opening of the qur’anic Decalogue in Sūrat al-Isrā’, we would have to show that Sūrat al-Isrā’ was chronologically prior to Sūrat Luqmān.⁴³ Note first of all

⁴² Although the combination of prohibiting *shirk* and demanding that parents be honoured occurs in several *sūrahs*, apart from the Sūrat al-Isrā’ and Sūrat Luqmān *ḥikmah* pericopes only one other verse in the Meccan Qur’an has the combination, namely Q 6:151 (which, incidentally, like the Sūrat al-Isrā’ *ḥikmah* pericope, is a summary of the Decalogue; see Lowry, “When Less is More,” 22–42). Furthermore, it seems that Sūrat al-An’ām (Q 6) was considerably later than both Sūrat al-Isrā’ and Sūrat Luqmān, so a filial honour and *shirk* combination had not yet been established as part of the Qur’an’s recurring formulae at the time that Sūrat Luqmān was proclaimed. Nöldeke assigns Sūrat al-Isrā’ to the second Meccan period, and both Sūrat al-An’ām and Sūrat Luqmān to the third Meccan period. Sinai’s mean verse length analysis also places Sūrat al-Isrā’ first, and places Sūrat Luqmān considerably before Sūrat al-An’ām (they are the eighty-second and hundredth *sūrahs* respectively, when ordered by increasing mean verse length). Finally, in Sadeghi’s Modified Bazargan phases, the relevant Q 17, Q 31, and Q 6 verses occur in the fifth, sixth, and seventh phases respectively. This strongly suggests that the Luqmān pericope, with its conjunction of Luqmān’s advice to his son to avoid *shirk* and the divine voice’s sudden interjection to be good to one’s parents, does not arise out of a previously established formulaic language that combined the two ideas, but was instead echoing Sūrat al-Isrā’ specifically. For *sūrah* chronology, see chapter 2, n. 7.

⁴³ Note that the formula “We have enjoined man concerning his parents” (*waṣṣaynā l-insāna bi-wālidayhi*), which opens the interjection in Q 31:14–15, occurs in two other Meccan passages (it does not occur in Medinan *sūrahs*): Q 29:8 and Q 46:15. It is possible that Q 31:14 is modelled on one of the other *waṣṣaynā* verses. Even if this were the case, however, we would still need to explain its seemingly abrupt interruption to Luqmān’s speech. There are in fact reasonably compelling reasons to believe that the Sūrat Luqmān verse is the earliest of the three *waṣṣaynā* verses. Q 29:8 reads, “We

that Sūrat al-Isrā' precedes Sūrat Luqmān in all three chronological schemes whose general reliability I have argued for in the chapter 2, namely, Nöldeke's chronology, Sinai's mean-verse-length chronology, and Sadeghi's Modified Bazargan.⁴⁴

Additionally, positing that Sūrat al-Isrā' predates to Sūrat Luqmān may explain the qualification to parental respect in Q 31:15, "But if they urge you to ascribe to Me as partner that of which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them." Q 17:23–24 has no such proviso, and the chronologically later Q 31:15 may have been an attempt to deal with uncertainties regarding the limits of showing good behaviour to one's parents occasioned by the imperative in Sūrat al-Isrā'.⁴⁵

We can thus envisage a scenario whereby Sūrat al-Isrā' is proclaimed first, which calls its list of virtues *ḥikmah* (v. 39). Then, when Sūrat Luqmān is proclaimed, its opening statement that Luqmān was given *ḥikmah* would have immediately

have enjoined man to be good to his parents (*wa-waṣṣaynā l-insāna bi-wālidayhi*). But if they urge you to ascribe to Me as partner that of which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them (*wa-in jāhadāka li-tushrika bī mā laysa laka bihi 'ilmun fa-lā tuṭi'humā*). To Me will be your return, and I will inform you concerning what you used to do (*ilayya marji'ukum fa-unabbi'ukum bi-mā kuntum ta'malūn*)." Note that the transliterated phrases in this Sūrat al-'Ankabūt verse are spread over two verses in Sūrat Luqmān; it seems on balance more likely that Q 29:8 drew on and summarised Q 31:14–15, rather than the latter expanding the Sūrat al-'Ankabūt verse by inserting additional phrases. As for Q 46:15, formulaically its opening clause is more similar to Q 29:8 than to Q 31:14, as the former two end with a cognate from the root *ḥ-s-n* after *wālidayhi* (i.e., *wa-waṣṣaynā l-insāna bi-wālidayhi ḥusnan/iḥsānan*), whereas the opening clause in Q 31:14 ends simply with *wālidayhi*. As Q 31:14 seems to be chronologically prior to Q 29:8 (as argued above), positing that Q 46:15 is also chronologically posterior to Q 31:14 allows for a smoother evolution of this opening formula. In addition, whereas the Sūrat Luqmān *waṣṣaynā* verse commands gratitude (*ushukr*) to God and one's parents, Q 46:15 has man praying, "My Lord! Inspire me to give thanks (*ashkura*) for Your blessing with which You have blessed me and my parents," which again suggests that Q 46:15 is responding to, and thus later than, Q 31:14. Thus, Q 31:14 seems to be the earliest *waṣṣaynā* verse.

⁴⁴ See chapter 2, n. 7.

⁴⁵ I owe this insight to Nora Schmid, although she applies it to the Qur'an's reworking of the Tobit passage mentioned earlier (Tob 4:3), in which Tobit too advises his son to obey his mother without qualification. I find the connection between this passage and the Sūrat al-Isrā' *ḥikmah* pericope more compelling than its connection with the Tobit intertext, although they are not mutually exclusive relevant antecedents. Schmid herself takes pains to note that she is "not arguing that there is a direct link between the qur'anic Luqmān and Tobit; both sapiential figurations might stem from a common pool of ideas." We should think, therefore, of a broad oral discourse to which texts both outside and within the Qur'an contribute, and which then serve as a backdrop for subsequent proclamations. See Schmid, "From Ethico-Religious Exhortation to Legal Paraenesis," 331.

brought to the audience's mind the Sūrat al-Isrā' *ḥikmah* passage, with its opening commandment regarding worshipping only God and honouring one's parents. The Sūrat Luqmān passage then utilised that connection by having the divine voice intrude and enjoin filial respect immediately after Luqmān's admonition to his son not to associate anything with God, an interruption to Luqmān's speech that would not have seemed abrupt to an audience already familiar with the connection between the two commandments established in Sūrat al-Isrā'.

To conclude, there appears to be a reasonably strong case to be made that the opening of the Sūrat Luqmān *ḥikmah* pericope is modelled on the opening of the Sūrat al-Isrā' *ḥikmah* pericope. Recall that Sūrat al-Isrā' is the most significant *ḥikmah* pericope we have encountered thus far, by virtue of the fact that it offers a reworked Decalogue that it calls *ḥikmah*. It is no surprise, then, that following the affirmation that Luqmān was given *ḥikmah*, the Qur'an immediately associates that wisdom with the Decalogue passage.

The second subsection in Luqmān's speech comprises a single verse, v. 16, and takes up the subject of accountability in the hereafter. (There is in fact a transitional introduction to this theme at the close of v. 15.) This theme is again familiar from previous *ḥikmah* pericopes. Luqmān's wisdom thus includes him being aware that there will be an eschatological accountability, which we have encountered in the Qur'an's use of *ḥikmah* in Sūrat al-Qamar and Sūrat al-Isrā'. Luqmān's phrase "weight of a mustard seed" (*mithqāla ḥabbatin min khardal*) is uncommon in the Qur'an. It is tempting to connect it to the phrase in the Gospels, "The kingdom of

heaven is like a mustard seed” (Matt 13:31, Mark 4:31, Luke 13:19).⁴⁶ However, neither in Sūrat Luqmān nor in the one other qur’anic passage where the phrase occurs, Q 21:47, does it have any connection to Jesus. The latter verse reads: “We shall set up just scales on the Day of Resurrection, and no soul will be wronged in the least. Even if it be the weight of a mustard seed (*mithqāla ḥabbatin min khardalin*) We will produce it, and We suffice as reckoners.” The absence of a connection to Jesus may be due to the Qur’an significantly reworking the New Testament image, such that “the mustard seed is dogmatically re-articulated to signify the absolute, microscopic reach of God’s justice.”⁴⁷ However, we must contend with the possibility that the Arabic borrowing of the phrase pre-dates the Qur’an, so that its association with the Gospels was lost by the time of the Qur’an’s proclamation. Although the phrase “weight of a mustard seed” does not occur in any pre-Islamic poetry that I am aware of, it is nonetheless used by two of the *mukhaḍram* poets (that is, poets whose lives spanned both the pre- and early-Islamic eras), Abū l-‘Ayyāl al-Hudhalī (d. 41/661)⁴⁸ and ‘Amr b. Sha’s al-Asadī (d. 20/640),⁴⁹ both in the slightly truncated form *mithqālu ḥabbati khardalin*. It is possible, of course, that they took the phrase from the Qur’an, but equally possible that both they and the Qur’an were drawing on a pre-Islamic Arabic idiom. The likelihood of the latter scenario is raised when we consider that evoking the size of a mustard seed to represent the smallest conceivable thing is not unique to the Gospels: we also find it in Talmudic

⁴⁶ Reynolds, for example, asserts that it is “derived ultimately from the synoptic Gospels.” *The Qur’an and the Bible*, 632.

⁴⁷ El-Badawi, *The Qur’an and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, 151–152.

⁴⁸ Al-Zayn, ed., *Dīwān al-Hudhaliyyīn*, 2:267.

⁴⁹ ‘Amr b. Sha’s, *Shi’r ‘Amr b. Sha’s al-Asadī*, 47.

literature,⁵⁰ though admittedly it seems limited there to questions of purity, i.e., as an illustration of the smallest drop of menstrual blood, or the smallest drop of semen. Thus, for example, b. Ber 31a: “The daughters of Israel have undertaken to be so strict with themselves that if they see a drop of blood no bigger than a mustard seed they wait seven [clean] days after it.” (See also b. Nid. 13b, 16b, 58b, 66a.)

Despite these concerns, there is some reason to believe that the phrase as it occurs in Q 31:16 does indeed recall the intertexts from the Gospels. Consider the verse in its entirety: “O my son! Even if it should be the weight of a mustard seed, and [even though] it should be in a rock, or in the heavens, or in the earth, God will produce it. God is indeed all-attentive, all-aware.” The combination of heavens and earth is very common in the Qur’an, but the addition of rock (*ṣakhrāh*) is unusual here, the word occurring just twice elsewhere in the qur’anic corpus (Q 18:63; 89:9). The idea of a seed being on rock, the ground, or in the heavens, is however familiar from Mark and Matthew, as part of the same series of parables in which Jesus also mentions the mustard seed. Consider the passage from Mark 4 (see also Matt 13):

³ “Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. ⁶ And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. ⁸ Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.”

...

³⁰ He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and

⁵⁰ I am grateful to Marianna Klar for alerting me to this.

puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

In vv. 3–8, Jesus gives the parable of scattered seeds that might be devoured by the birds, or fall on rocky ground, or fall among thorns, or fall on good ground. The parallel between this and the Qur’an’s “in a rock, or in the heavens, or in the earth” is clear. The correlation is even stronger between the Qur’an and the Peshitta version of the passage, which translates the Greek *petrōdēs* (“rocky ground”), has *šū’ā* (“rock”). Although it is true that the *mustard* seed is not mentioned until later in Mark 4 (and Matt 13), the chapter has several parables involving seeds, and that the Qur’an may have combined the imagery between the various seed-related parables in the same chapter of both Mark and Matthew to create its own parable seems entirely plausible. The question that arises is why a connection is made to Jesus here at all? It may be because an allusion to Jesus in the middle of the Luqmān *ḥikmah* pericope provides an additional intra-qur’anic connection to an earlier occurrence of *ḥikmah* (namely, the Jesus pericope in Sūrat al-Zukhruf – see chapter 6), just as the start of the Luqmān pericope, as we saw above, similarly echoes the Sūrat al-Isrā’ Decalogue pericope. We thus see here a tightly woven discourse around *ḥikmah*.

The third subsection of the Luqmān pericope comprises vv. 17–19. Whereas the first two subsections dealt with doctrinal matters (monotheism and eschatology), this final section deals with praxis. As with the opening part of the pericope, we once again see a clear overlap with the Sūrat al-Isrā’ Decalogue passage. Thus, the phrase “do not walk boastfully on the earth” (*lā tamshi fī l-arḍi maraḥan*) is common to both *ḥikmah* pericopes (Q 17:37 and 31:18), and occurs only

in these two verses. More broadly, vv. 18–19 correspond to Q 17:37, in that they are all concerned with human arrogance.

8.5. THE LUQMĀN PERICOPE WITHIN ITS *SŪRAH* CONTEXT

There are several features of the opening section of *Sūrat Luqmān* that foreshadow the Luqmān *ḥikmah* pericope. Verse 2 is only one of two places in the Qur'an where the phrase "the wise scripture (*al-kitāb al-ḥakīm*)" is used, the other being Q 10:1 (though note also "the wise recitation" [*al-qur'ān al-ḥakīm*] in Q 36:2). Verse 6 condemns "he who buys diverting talk (*lahwa l-ḥadīth*) that he may lead [people] astray from God's way without any knowledge." What this "diverting talk" consists of is not specified, but it is clearly contrasted with the wise scripture mentioned in v. 2, and God's recited signs in v. 7:

² These are the signs (*āyāt*) of the wise scripture.

...

⁶ Among the people is he who buys diverting talk (*lahwa l-ḥadīth*) that he may lead [people] astray from God's way without any knowledge, and he takes it in derision. For such there is a humiliating punishment.

⁷ When Our signs (*āyātunā*) are recited to him he turns away arrogantly, as if he had not heard them [at all], as if there were a deafness in his ears. So inform him of a painful punishment.

One possibility suggested by the *mufasssīrūn* is that "diverting talk" refers to the preference of popular stories over the Qur'an.⁵¹ In a *sūrah* that relates an episode from the best-known pre-Islamic sages, and clearly connects him to the secular wisdom literature tradition through Aḥīqar, this interpretation of the phrase is certainly possible. The Luqmān pericope would then serve as a type of corrective

⁵¹ Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt ahl al-sunnah*, 8:298.

for what genuine wisdom should look like. The connection between those given to “diverting talk” and the Luqmān pericope may also be seen in the thematic overlap between v. 7, which complains that the one who buys such diverting tales “turns away (*wallā*) arrogantly” from the recited signs of God, and v. 18, part of Luqmān’s advice to his son, “Do not disdainfully turn away (*tuṣa‘ir*) your cheek from the people,” albeit that the verbs for “turning away” are different in the two verses.

The verses immediately prior to and following on from the Luqmān pericope speak of God’s creation of the heavens and the earth, and His favours to mankind evident in these creations:

¹⁰ He created the heavens without any pillars that you may see, and cast firm mountains in the earth lest it should shake with you, and He has scattered in it every kind of animal. And We sent down water from the sky and caused every splendid kind [of plant] to grow in it.

¹¹ This is the creation of God. Now show Me what others besides Him have created. Rather the wrongdoers are in manifest error.

[Luqmān pericope, vv. 12–19]

²⁰ Do you not see that God has disposed for you whatever there is in the heavens and whatever there is in the earth, and He has showered upon you His blessings (*ni‘amahu*), the outward and the inward? Yet among the people are those who dispute concerning God without any knowledge or guidance or an illuminating scripture.

This context, with its focus on God’s favours, explains why in v. 12 the most immediate response that Luqmān is expected to show as a result of his *ḥikmah* is to be grateful to God. When communicating this to his son, however, Luqmān gives it an eschatological twist, as if to say that people will be held accountable for acts of ingratitude to God, as epitomized in *shirk* (vv. 13, 16 – note the possible wordplay between *sh-r-k*, “association” in v. 13 and *sh-k-r*, “gratitude,” in v. 12).

Finally, just as the *sūrah* approvingly recounts the advice of Luqmān to his son, it almost immediately follows this by castigating the associators for clinging to the religion of *their* fathers (v. 21), and concludes with the warning, “O mankind! Be wary of your Lord and fear the day when a father will not atone for his child, nor the child will atone for its father in any way” (v. 33). The audience are thus expected to distinguish between the true wisdom of Luqmān’s advice to his son, and the falsity of their ancestral ways.

8.6. *ḤIKMAH* IN *SŪRAT LUQMĀN*

Can we conclude from the above analysis that the meaning of the term *ḥikmah* in *Sūrat Luqmān* is the same as in the earlier second Meccan passages? I believe there are good reasons for doing so. We have already seen several connections between the *Sūrat Luqmān ḥikmah* passage and its chronological predecessors in Q 17 (the Decalogue), Q 38 (David’s wisdom), and Q 43 (Jesus’s wisdom) in particular, either direct (such as overlap in diction and structure) or indirect (via pre-Islamic poetry or biblical intertexts).

In fact, *Sūrat Luqmān* presents us with a strong confirmation of the hypothesis that *ḥikmah* refers to the Qur’an’s core theological claims of divine unicity and final accountability alongside natural moral beliefs deducible prior to revelation.⁵² As we saw in the verses attributed to Zabbān b. Sayyār, there is evidence in the pre-Islamic poetry tradition that Luqmān’s wisdom, like that of the broader Near Eastern wisdom tradition, was grounded in observations of nature and experience rather

⁵² De Smet recognises that “Luqmān donne de pieux conseils à son fils, qui touchent à l’essence même de la religion musulmane, tant sur le plan théologique ... que sur le plan éthique.” In Amir-Moezzi, *Dictionnaire du Coran*, s.v. “Luqmān.”

than divine revelation. Furthermore, nothing in the Qur'an indicates that Luqmān was a prophet, and this is also the opinion of the majority of the *mufasssirūn*.⁵³ Indeed, the Qur'an in several places insists that before Muhammad no warner had come to the associators (Q 28:46; 32:3; 34:44; 36:6), and, as Walid Saleh as shown, the Prophet's Meccan opponents were aware of biblical stories and modes of prophecy only as elements of a foreign culture.⁵⁴ It thus seems unlikely that the indigenous Arabian sage Luqmān was considered a prophet after the biblical mode either by the Arabians themselves or within the logic of the Qur'an's prophetology. Nonetheless, his *ḥikmah* instilled in him a sense of the need to show gratitude to God (v. 12), pray and remain patient (v. 17), and avoid arrogance (v. 18).

Luqmān's wisdom allowed him to infer from his impulse to show gratitude to God that there must be consequences for associating others with God. Thus, his *ḥikmah* seems to include natural theological beliefs, namely that there is only one God (v. 13), and there will be an afterlife accountability (v. 16), a development of the sense in which *ḥikmah* was used in Sūrat al-Qamar to refer to apocalyptic news, and in line with the meaning of *ḥikmah* in Sūrat al-Isrā'. The fact that Luqmān is contrasted with the associators' own forefathers, whom "Satan was calling ... to the punishment of the blaze" (v. 21),⁵⁵ indicates that even prior to revelation guidance was available to those wise enough to seek it, and thus those who remained misguided may be held to account for their impiety.

⁵³ See, e.g., al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 14:59.

⁵⁴ Saleh, "The Preacher of the Meccan Qur'an," 81–82. Hawting, in his survey of prophetic claimants in the era of the *Jāhiliyyah*, ultimately concludes that "the traditional material on these prophets of the Jahiliyya often seems insubstantial and unconvincing as accounts of historical reality, and it is doubtful that they can help us to understand the appearance of Muhammad as a prophet." "Were there Prophets in the Jahiliyya?," 209.

⁵⁵ On the basis of parallel verses (Q 2;170; 5:104; 43:22–24), the pronoun "them" here clearly refers to the forefathers, not the audience themselves. See al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma'ānī*, 11:93.

Finally, in the earlier chapters we twice encountered a connection between *ḥikmah* and *waʿẓ* (“admonition”): Q 16:125 and 2:231. We see this in the Luqmān passage too; upon receiving wisdom, the first thing Luqmān does is admonish his son. We saw the pre-qur’anic traces of what would become the *ḥikmah/waʿẓ* combination in the Qur’an in al-Musayyab’s/al-Aʿshā’s verse about someone being more eloquent or clearer than Luqmān, which implied that wisdom included articulation, and in Bint Wathīmah’s / Nājiyah bt. ḌamḌam’s verse about wisdom that can quell argumentation. This, along with the fact that the Qur’an draws on the literary form of the proverb in Luqmān’s speech, indicates that the meaning of *ḥikmah* in the *sūrah* has been nuanced to include the ability to communicate wisdom.

CHAPTER 9

Wisdom and the Golden Rule (Q 2:269)

9.1. INTRODUCTION

Other than the verses that describe the Prophet's four-part mission – to recite God's signs, to purify the believers, to teach scripture, and to teach wisdom – chronologically Q 2:269 seems to be the final *ḥikmah* verse proclaimed in the Qur'an. Its praise of wisdom is highly reminiscent of the manner in which wisdom is extolled in biblical and apocryphal wisdom texts (see chapter 3). The verse is given below:

He grants wisdom (*ḥikmah*) to whomever He wishes, and whoever has been given wisdom (*ḥikmah*), has been given an abundant good (*khayran kathīran*). And none takes admonition except those endowed with insight (*ulū l-albāb*).

To understand what might be intended by “wisdom” in the verse, as with previous *ḥikmah* pericopes, we must read it within the context of the passage in which it is embedded. Sūrat al-Baqarah, as we have seen in chapter 5, has attracted numerous structural studies, several of which have been synoptically assessed by Marianna Klar in a two-part study, “Text-Critical Approaches to Sura Structure: Combining Synchronicity with Diachronicity in Sūrat al-Baqara.” Of the five analyses Klar considers, three (Robinson, Zahniser, and Reda) place v. 269 in a section that spans from v. 243 to the end, or near the end of the *sūrah* at v. 286. The other two analyses – Farrin and Bazargan – propose sections spanning vv. 254–284 and 261–283 respectively. The subject matters covered by even the narrowest range of verses here (Bazargan) is too great to allow for a straightforward contextual analysis of what *ḥikmah* might mean in v. 269.

We can narrow down the scope of the verses we need to consider by utilising an observation most recently expounded by Nicolai Sinai, namely, that vocatives are frequently deployed as section markers in Medinan *sūrah*s (see the structural analysis of the Luqmān pericope in chapter 8).¹ In this case, the *ḥikmah* verse here under consideration would be situated in a section that commences just two verses earlier, in v. 267. We do not need to adjudicate here between the various proposals for how to divide up the *sūrah*. Ultimately, if we can show how the verses proximate to our *ḥikmah* verse help to determine the meaning of the term, that will suffice. In this case, as we will see, positing a section opener at v. 267 produces sufficient context to makes sense of the *ḥikmah* verse.

²⁶⁷ O you who believe! Spend of the good things (*ṭayyibāt*) you have earned and of what We bring forth for you from the earth, and do not be of the mind to give the bad part (*al-khabīth*) of it, for you yourselves would not take it without shutting your eyes over it. And know that God is all-sufficient, praiseworthy.

²⁶⁸ Satan threatens you with poverty and prompts you to indecent acts. But God promises you forgiveness from Himself and bounty (*faḍl*), and God is all-bounteous, all-knowing.

²⁶⁹ He grants wisdom (*ḥikmah*) to whomever He wishes, and he who is given wisdom is certainly given an abundant good (*khayran kathīran*), and none will heed God's admonishment (*yadhdhakkaru*) except those of understanding (*ulū l-albāb*).

Verse 267 exhorts the believers to spend from the best part of their wealth for the needy, rather than the inferior part. Significantly, the verse draws on the Golden Rule in ethics, to do unto others what you would have them do unto you (or, phrased negatively, *not* to do to others what you would *not* want them to do to you).

¹ Sinai, "Towards a Compositional Grammar." See also Klar, "Text-Critical Approaches to Sura Structure: Part One," 15, and El-Awa, *Textual Relations in the Qur'an*, 51–55. See also chapter 8, n. 40.

Verse 268 then recognises the motivation behind not spending from the superior part of one's wealth: fear of poverty. It ascribes the origin of this fear to Satan, and associates it with another Satanic impulse, namely, sexual immorality, possibly to indicate the base nature of the fear of poverty. God allays this worry for one's material well-being by promising forgiveness (presumably here for those who *are* willing to spend) and an increase in wealth, or *faḍl*.

We then come to the *ḥikmah* verse. It clearly continues the discourse from the previous verse; God not only promises forgiveness and bounty (v. 268), but also gives wisdom. Indeed, there is a subtle connection between the promise of "bounty," or *faḍl*, which connotes increase and excess beyond one's needs,² and the subsequent description of wisdom as a "great good," or *khayran kathīran*. We see therefore that this short series of verses, from the vocative in v. 267 to the *ḥikmah* verse, v. 269, are a cogently structured unit. Contextually, then, given the unity of the passage, it is at least plausible that the *ḥikmah* in v. 269 refers to the Golden Rule in v. 267, though admittedly this is not immediately evident from the text itself. On the basis of the intertexts that we shall shortly examine below, I will nonetheless attempt to demonstrate that this is indeed the case.

Let us first consider Q 2:267–269 itself in a little more detail. In the remainder of this section, I will first examine other instances of the Golden Rule in the Qur'an and then the phrase "none will remember (*yadh dhakkaru*) except those of understanding (*ulū l-albāb*)" at the close of the passage, which tells us who the recipients of wisdom are.

² Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 6:2411, s.v. "*faḍala*."

9.1.1. The Golden Rule in the Qur'an

The few studies there have been on this subject have only ever identified one instance of the Golden Rule in the Qur'an, namely Q 83:1–3, separately cited by both Gensler and Rost:³

- ¹ Woe to the defrauders who use short measures,
- ² who, when they measure [a commodity bought] from the people, take the full measure,
- ³ but diminish when they measure or weigh for them.

Homerin lists several verses that encourage moral behaviour in a section titled “The Golden Rule and the Qur'ān,” but these are really only exhortations to ethically commendable actions rather than instances of the Golden Rule per se.⁴ As well as overlooking Q 2:267, also missing from these studies are Q 3:92 and Q 4:8–9.

Q 3 (Sūrat Āl 'Imrān)

⁹² You will never attain piety until you spend (*tunfiqū*) out of what you hold dear (*tuḥibbūna*), and whatever you may spend of anything, God indeed knows it.

Q 4 (Sūrat al-Nisā')

⁸ And when the division is attended by relatives, the orphans, and the needy, provide for them out of it, and speak (*qūlū*) to them honourable words (*qawlan ma'rūfan*).

⁹ Let those have fear who, were they to leave behind weak offspring, would be concerned on their account. So let them be wary of God, and let them speak (*wa-l-yaqūlū*) upright words (*qawlan sadīdan*).

³ Rost, *The Golden Rule*, 100–101 (cited in Homerin, “The Golden Rule in Islam,” 101); Gensler, *Ethics and the Golden Rule*, 43.

⁴ Homerin, “The Golden Rule in Islam,” 100–102.

Q 3:92, which exhorts the believers to spend from what they love, is admittedly the most indirect appeal to the Golden Rule of the verses cited here. As an encouragement to spend of one's wealth, it is no more an instance of the Golden Rule than any of the other verses in the Qur'an that commend charitable giving. However, the explicit command here to "spend out of what you hold dear" at least suggests that one should spend what one would like to receive.⁵ Note also that the verse seems to echo Q 2:267 cited earlier, where the implication of spending from the good part (or the part that you love) of you wealth, viz., that you do not give in charity what you would not like to receive, is made explicit: "Spend (*anfiqū*) of the good things (*ṭayyibāt*) you have earned ... and do not be of the mind to give the bad part (*al-khabīth*) of it, for you yourselves would not take it without shutting your eyes over it."

There are several traditional interpretations of Q 4:9.⁶ The most plausible seems to be that the verse is exhorting believers, either those making their bequests or those charged with disbursing requests, to treat orphans and the destitute as they would want their own children to be treated in the eventuality of their own unexpected demise. Note, in support of this, that v. 9 seems to continue the theme introduced in v. 8 of how to engage with the poor at the time of inheritance division, with several phraseological overlaps between the two verses: *qūlū* ("speak," v. 8) and *wa-l-yaqūlū* ("let them speak," v. 9); *qawlan ma'rūfan* ("honourable words," v. 8) and *qawlan sadīdan* ("upright words," v. 9).

⁵ Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*, 132.

⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 6:446–453.

In addition to the several passages that invoke the Golden Rule, there are a few other verses that encourage the related ethical principle of *imitatio dei*, e.g., Q 24:22, “Let them excuse and forbear. Do you not love that God should forgive you?,” and Q 28:77, “Be good [to others] just as God has been good to you.” Note that the *imitatio dei* principle is connected to the Golden Rule in Luke’s Sermon on the Plain: “Do to others as you would have them do to you ... Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:31, 36).⁷

In conclusion, there are at least four passages in the Qur’an where the Golden Rule is invoked (Q 2:267; 3:92; 4:8–9; 83:1–3) and another two in which the related principle of *imitatio dei* is invoked (Q 24:22; 28:77). This range covers both Meccan and Medinan *sūrahs*, including the two Medinan *sūrahs* with the highest volume of legal material: Q 2 and 4. Clearly, the Golden Rule is not an insignificant principle in the Qur’an. It remains to be seen, however, whether it is this principle that Q 2:269 calls *ḥikmah*.

9.1.2. The *ulū l-albāb*

The close of v. 269 tells us that only those who have a *lubb* (the singular of *albāb*) will be able to remember. *Lubb* is variously translated as “intellect,” “understanding,” “insight,” “core,” and “heart.” It occurs in the Qur’an only within the phrase *ulū l-albāb*, a total of sixteen times. Of these, it is paired with remembrance (*tadhakkur* or *dhikrā*) ten times (Q 2:269; 3:7; 13:19; 14:52; 38:29, 43; 39:9, 21; 40:54; 65.10), which is over half of all its occurrences. A further two times

⁷ See Ricoeur, “The Golden Rule: Exegetical and Theological Perplexities,” 396.

we find the similar phrases “signs (*āyāt*) for the *ulū l-albāb*” (Q 3:190) and “a lesson (*‘ibrah*) for the *ulū l-albāb*” (Q 12:111). There is clearly a well-established connection in the Qur’an between possessing a *lubb* and being able to recall or arrive at the truths of revelation.

One verse is particularly illuminating when it comes to understanding the *ulū l-albāb* locution. Consider Q 3:7 below:⁸

It is He who has sent down to you the scripture. Parts of it are definitive verses, which are the mother of the scripture, while others are ambiguous. As for those in whose hearts (*qulūb*) is deviance, they pursue what is ambiguous in it, pursuing misguidance and aiming at its [mis]interpretation. But no one knows its interpretation except God. And those firmly grounded (*al-rāsikhūn*) in knowledge (*‘ilm*) say, “We believe in it; all of it is from our Lord.” And none will remember (*yadhdhakkaru*) except those of understanding (*ulū l-albāb*).

The verse contrasts “those in whose hearts (*qulūb*) is deviance” with “those who are firmly grounded (*rāsikhūn*) in knowledge (*‘ilm*).”⁹ This provides us with a rich context within which to interpret the final clause (which is identical to the concluding phrase in the *ḥikmah* verse under consideration, Q 2:269): the *ulū l-albāb* are those in whose hearts (*qulūb*) there is not deviation, and are well-grounded (*rāsikhūn*) in knowledge (*‘ilm*).

⁸ The significance of this verse in understanding the phrase *ulū l-albāb* was noted by several of the *mufasssīrūn*. See *EQ*, s.v. “heart.”

⁹ There is a well-known difference among the exegetes regarding the syntax of the verse: is the phrase “those who are well-grounded (*al-rāsikhūn*) in knowledge (*‘ilm*)” co-ordinated with “God,” such that the correct translation should be, “No one knows its interpretation except God and those firmly grounded in knowledge,” or does *al-rāsikhūn* commence a new clause, as translated here. The correct understanding is certainly the latter, I believe, as argued for by Sinai, who notes that the verse is best read as presenting a contrast between “those in whose hearts (*qulūb*) is deviance” and “those who are well-grounded (*rāsikhūn*) in knowledge.” See Sinai, “Qur’ānic Self-Referentiality,” 128–129. See also Neuwirth, “The House of Abraham and the House of Amram,” 515 (with further studies on the verse cited in nn. 33, 34). Many of the arguments in favour of the preferred reading here are already found in the *tafsīr* works. See, for example, Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr*, 3:165.

The phrase *dhū (l-)lubb*, and more generally references to *lubb* as the locus of understanding, are well attested in pre-Islamic poetry.¹⁰ Although the qur’anic *ulū l-albāb* may therefore be traceable back to the tradition of pre-Islamic poetry, it nonetheless behoves us to also consider possible parallels with the biblical tradition that may shed light on the passages under consideration. Versions of the Hebrew phrase *’anšê lebāb* and its Syriac equivalent *nāšay lebā*, literally “people of heart,” both very close cognates to the Arabic *ulū l-albāb*, appear in Job, one of the primary texts of biblical wisdom (see chapter 3). The Hebrew phrase also appears in a wisdom text discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls – 4Q298, or The Maskîl’s Address to all the Sons of Dawn. The latter work sits squarely in the wisdom genre, with the fragment in question opening by invoking the Sons of Dawn (mimicking the standard opening address to one’s son in wisdom literature – see chapter 8), followed by an admonition to pay attention to the discourse at hand.¹¹

Therefore, hear me, you who have sense (Heb: *’anšê lebāb*; Syr: *nāšay lebā*). (Job 34:10)

Those who have sense (Heb: *’anšê lebāb*; Syr: *nāšā d-lebā*), will say to me, and the wise (Heb: *ḥākām*; Syr: *ḥakīmā*) who hear me will say. (Job 34:34)

[Word] of a Maskîl [= one who understands] which he spoke to all Sons of Dawn. Lend your ea[r to me, a]ll people of heart [*nšy lbb*]. (4Q298)¹²

Evidently, this formulaically fixed phrase has clear sapiential connotations in the biblical and para-biblical literature. Note, for instance, that the parallel lines of

¹⁰ Seidensticker, *Altarabisch „Herz“ und sein Wortfeld*, 133–139.

¹¹ For more on 4Q298 as a wisdom text, see McLaughlin, *Israel’s Wisdom Traditions*, 187–188.

¹² Pfann, “The Maskîl’s Address to All Sons of Dawn,” 227. I have adapted the translation slightly to make it more literal.

verse in Job 34:34 effectively equate “those who have sense” (*’anšê lebāb*) with the wise (*ḥākām*), a pairing that we also see in Q 2:269.¹³ We shall return to the significance of the *ulū l-albāb* later in this chapter.

9.2. THE GOLDEN RULE FROM THE HEBREW BIBLE TO THE RABBIS AND CHURCH FATHERS

The term “Golden Rule” was coined in the seventeenth century to describe Jesus’s teaching in Matthew 7:12 (as part of the Sermon on the Mount) and Luke 6:31 (part of the Sermon on the Plain).¹⁴ In Matthew’s wording, “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.” In *Second Temple Judaism and the New Testament*, the Golden Rule was frequently connected with commandment to love God as a summary of the law. We see this in Matthew 22:37–40:

³⁷ He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

The commandment to love God is a direct quotation of Leviticus 19:18, and occurs several other times in the New Testament (e.g., Gal 5:14, Jas 2:8). In both rabbinic

¹³ On the idea that parallelism is the defining feature of biblical Hebrew poetry, including the history of scholarship as well as the shortcomings of this model, see Holmstedt, “Hebrew Poetry and the Appositive Style.”

¹⁴ For a history of the Golden Rule in the context of Judaism and Christianity, including how it acquired this appellation, see Fitzmeyer, *Tobit*, 175; Skemp, “Avenues of Intertextuality between Tobit and the New Testament,” 64–65, incl n. 68, and 268; Salvesen, “Early Syriac, Greek, and Latin views of the Decalogue,” 48, n. 2; Alexander, “Jesus and the Golden Rule,” 363–364, n. 1; Stanglin, “The Historical Connection,” 358. For a history of the Golden Rule more broadly, see Gensler, *Ethics and the Golden Rule*.

and patristic writings, as early as Justin Martyr (d. 165), this love commandment is, as in the New Testament passage, conjoined with the Golden Rule.¹⁵

Sifra has Rabbi Akiva state that the love commandment in Leviticus 19:18 is a “great principle (*kll gdwl*) of the Torah” (Sifra Qədōšīm 4:12), and the Babylonian Talmud reports Hillel as affirming, like Jesus, that “what is hateful to you, do not to your neighbour: that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof; go and learn it” (b. Šabb 31a) – see also ‘Abot R. Nat. (B) 26. The rhetoric of its importance as a “great principle” is arguably out of step with the infrequency with which it is appealed to in *halakhic* writings, however, even though Jacob Neusner’s contention that the rule is “inert” and never informs the positive law of the rabbis does not seem to be wholly accurate; there are at least a few occasions where the rabbis do draw on the rule in formulating law, though they do not cite it as such when appealing to its logic.¹⁶ Nonetheless, Neusner may well be correct to note the marginality of this so-called great principle in rabbinic law-making. Even Hillel’s famous maxim is, in context, not so much about the importance of the Golden Rule, but rather about Hillel’s remaining serene in the face of irritating questioning (in this case, “Make me a proselyte, on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot” [b. Šabb 31a]).¹⁷

In Q 2:269, if *ḥikmah* does refer to the Golden Rule, we have a disjuncture between the Qur’an and rabbinic writings, in that the verse would be making an explicit appeal to the Golden Rule to justify the legal prescription two verses earlier. As we will see, this is more akin to the Christian use of the rule. The church fathers

¹⁵ Alexander, “Jesus and the Golden Rule,” 371, 374–375

¹⁶ Ibid., 376–377.

¹⁷ Ibid., 367; Neusner, “The Golden Rule in Classical Judaism,” 182.

identified the Golden Rule with natural law even more so than they did the Decalogue. Olivier du Roy goes so far as to say that from Origen (d. 254) onwards, “all the Greek, Syriac, and Latin Fathers accept and teach this doctrine of the Golden Rule as being the content of natural law, the two most important and influential of whom are Augustine in the West and John Chrysostom in the East.... It became a common, shared belief.”¹⁸ Indeed, the second half of the Decalogue was frequently shown to be a part of natural law by justifying it on the basis of the Golden Rule,¹⁹ as we saw in Ephrem’s *Commentary on Exodus 20:2–3* in chapter 7.

One could multiply citations from patristic sources. In addition to Ephrem, one more will suffice to illustrate the connection between the Golden Rule and natural law in patristic writings. John Chrysostom, perhaps the most eloquent proponent of both natural law and the Golden Rule, writes:

Sufficiently indeed, then, our discourse of late evinced to you, that a natural law of good and evil is seated within us. But that our proof of it may be more abundantly evident, we will again today apply ourselves strenuously to the same subject of discourse. For that God from the beginning, when He formed man, made him capable of discriminating both these, all men make evident. Hence when we sin, we are all ashamed at the presence of our inferiors; and oftentimes a master, on his way to the house of a harlot, if he then perceives any one of his more respectable servants, turns back, reddening with shame, from this untoward path. Again, when others reproach us, fixing on us the names of particular vices, we call it an insult; and if we are aggrieved, we drag those who have done the wrong to the public tribunal. Thus we can understand what vice is and what virtue is. Wherefore Christ, for the purpose of declaring this, and showing that He was not introducing a strange law, or one which surpassed our nature, but that which He had of old deposited beforehand in our conscience, after pronouncing those numerous Beatitudes, thus speaks; *All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them. (Homily on the Statues 13:7)*

¹⁸ Roy, “The Golden Rule as the Law of Nature,” 97. See also *ibid.*, 94–97, for an outline of how the Golden Rule came to occupy such a central role in patristics. Steenbuch collects every citation of the Golden Rule in patristic writings. “How ‘Trivial’ is the Golden Rule in Patristic Ethics?” 6–7, n. 13.

¹⁹ Steenbuch, “How ‘Trivial’ is the Golden Rule in Patristic Ethics?” 11; Roy, “The Golden Rule as the Law of Nature,” 98.

9.3. BIBLICAL AND PATRISTIC INTERTEXTS TO THE QUR'ANIC GOLDEN RULE AND THE *ULŪ L-ALBĀB*

In this section, I will detail several commonalities between the way the Qur'an utilises the Golden Rule and biblical and patristic uses. These intersections strongly suggest that the instances of the Qur'an's recourse to the Golden Rule are grounded in the Golden Rule discourse of the biblical tradition. This alignment between the qur'anic and biblical/para-biblical uses of the Golden Rule greatly increases the likelihood that *ḥikmah* in Q 2:269 does indeed refer to the Golden Rule exemplified two verses earlier; just as the Decalogue and the Golden Rule are the prime examples of natural law for the church fathers, so also the Qur'an, on this interpretation, would be connecting the two by calling them both *ḥikmah*, a term whose pre-qur'anic connection to natural law we have encountered at several junctures in this study. Indeed, Augustine describes the teaching of the Golden Rule as "walking along the path of wisdom" (*Sermon on the Mount* 2:22:74). As in the introduction, I will focus first on the Golden Rule itself, and then on the phrase *ulū l-albāb*.

9.3.1. The Golden Rule in the Qur'an and Its Intertexts

The particular context of the Golden Rule in Q 2:267 is charitable giving. Indeed, the three other instances of the rule's being invoked in the Qur'an – Q 3:92, 4:8–9, and 83:1–3 – all relate to financial fair dealing, and of these Q 3:92 and 4:8–9 specifically relate to charity. This is precisely the context in which the Golden Rule is articulated in Luke 6:

³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.

The context of charity is also invoked by several of the church fathers (e.g., John Chrysostom, *Homily 17:4* on 2 Corinthians), though given the rule's widespread attestation in patristic literature, it is hardly surprising that at least occasionally the context is one of charitable giving. More significantly, the association of the Golden Rule with charity and financial probity on the one hand, and (indirectly) wisdom on the other, are both found in Tobit 4:15–17.²⁰

¹⁴ “Do not keep over until the next day the wages of those who work for you, but pay them at once. If you serve God you will receive payment. Watch yourself, my son, in everything you do, and discipline yourself in all your conduct. ¹⁵ And what you hate, do not do to anyone. Do not drink wine to excess or let drunkenness go with you on your way. ¹⁶ Give some of your food to the hungry, and some of your clothing to the naked. Give all your surplus as alms, and do not let your eye begrudge your giving of alms.

It is noteworthy that the Golden Rule as expressed in Tobit is part of the counsel that he imparts to his son, beginning in v. 3 with his address, “My son,” a common motif in wisdom literature, including the Qur’an (see chapter 8). Indeed, much of Tobit’s advice overlaps with what is found in Proverbs, Sirach, and the Wisdom of Aḥīqar,²¹ and there are also several clear overlaps with qur’anic diction, some of which, in the context of the Luqmān wisdom pericope, have recently been

²⁰ The connection of the Golden Rule in both Luke and Tobit to charity is noted by Fitzmeyer, *Tobit*, 175–176. Our earliest Syriac manuscript of Tobit dates to the seventh century. See Weeks, Gathercole, and Stuckenbruck, *The Book of Tobit*, 47.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 34, 165–166; Macatangay, *The Wisdom Instructions in the Book of Tobit*, 62–66. See also Skemp, “Avenues of Intertextuality between Tobit and the New Testament,” 60–66

explored by Nora Schmid.²² The Tobit passage therefore clearly sits squarely within the wisdom genre.

Indeed, just as we saw with the Decalogue, wisdom texts often incorporate the Golden Rule. Thus, in Syriac Menander 246–251 we see once again the conflation between the Decalogue and the Golden Rule: “Just as you do not wish your wife to commit adultery with another, likewise also do not wish to commit adultery with your neighbour’s wife. And if you are very keen on not losing anything, you should (also) not be keen on stealing. Everything that is hateful to you, you should not wish to do that to your neighbour.”²³ Similarly, the Sentences of Sextus repeatedly enjoin the Golden Rule (vv. 89–90, 179, 210b–212, 327),²⁴ as does the Syriac Aḥīqar.²⁵

Most notably, the confluence of the Golden Rule and wisdom is readily seen in the Letter of Aristeas, a pseudepigraphic Jewish text that probably dates to the second century BCE. The central core of the book purports to be a conversation between the king of Egypt and his Jewish guests (sent to him by the High Priest for the purpose of translating the Hebrew Bible). Upon being asked about wisdom, the Jews reply with a version of the Golden Rule.²⁶

He [viz., the king] said, “What is the teaching of wisdom (*sophias*)?” And he [viz., one of the translators] answered, “Just as you do not wish evil things to come upon yourself but you wish to have a share of all good things, so you should behave this way toward your subjects and those who do wrong. So you should admonish virtuous and good people most equitably. For God also leads all people with equity.” (Let. Aris. § 207)

²² See chapter 8, n. 24.

²³ For an introduction to Syriac Menander, see chapter 7.

²⁴ Wilson, *The Sentences of Sextus*, 38. For more on the Sentences of Sextus, see chapter 3.

²⁵ Conybeare, Harris, and Lewis, *The Story of Aḥīqar*, 103. For more on Aḥīqar, see chapter 7.

²⁶ For an introduction to the Letter of Aristeas, including on the question of its dating, see Wright III, *The Letter of Aristeas*, chap. 1: Introduction.

To summarise, the Golden Rule in the Qur'an has two striking overlaps with its antecedents. First, as in Luke and Tobit, the Rule is used primarily in the context of charitable giving. Second, if Q 2:267–269 does indeed equate the Golden Rule with *ḥikmah*, this stands in a long tradition of reading the Golden Rule as a wisdom precept, such as is found in Augustine, and several wisdom texts, including Tobit, Syriac Menander, the Sentences of Sextus, and Syriac Aḥīqar, and most clearly the Letter of Aristeas.

9.3.2. The Phrase *ulū l-albāb* in the Qur'an and Its Intertexts

Let us return to the conclusion of the *ḥikmah* verse: “none will remember (*yadhakkaru*) except those of understanding (*ulū l-albāb*),” which suggests that the *ḥikmah* referred to in the verse may be recalled only by those with a *lubb*, or deep insight. We saw also that this deep insight is connected to a heart that is not astray. This is remarkably close to the way the Golden Rule is conceptualised as natural law in patristic writings. See, for instance, the above citation from John Chrysostom, who speaks of the Golden Rule being “deposited beforehand in our conscience.” Particularly interesting here is Philoxenus of Mabbug’s discussion of Joseph in his *Discourse on Fornication*:²⁷

Now the wise (*ḥakīmā*) and chaste Joseph considered sin against his master – even though it were committed with his wife – to be sin against God, because the commandment of God would be undone by the transgression of the law of nature (*nāmūsā d-kyānā*); for although the words, “You shall not lust,” and, “You shall not commit adultery with your neighbour’s wife,” had not yet been heard, yet the essence of the words was mingled in nature (*kyānā*), because the words, “That which is hateful unto yourself, do not unto your neighbour,” were written in nature (*kyānā*), and were inscribed by signs (*’ātwātā*) and by

²⁷ *The Discourses of Philoxenus* 1:607–608 [Syr.], 2:579–580 [Eng.].

the act of creation (*bārūyūtā*) of God upon the conscience (*tīrtā*) of every man, that the law (*nāmūsā*) of every man might be within himself, and that he might not be able to say, “I have not as yet learned (*yelfet*) writing (*sefrā*), and I have not read (*qrīt*) and understood (*’eshtawd’et*) the signs (*’ātwātā*) of the letters which were cut on the tablets (*lūhē*) of the heart (*lebā*) by the act of the creation (*bārūyūtā*) of God,” and that as a man grew (*rbā*) in his bodily stature (*qūmtā d-pagrēh*) he might meditate (*methgā*) upon this writing (*sefrā*). And Joseph also, being only twenty years of age – now he was in this period of life when this war was stirred up against him – meditated upon these letters inwardly and the instruction (*yūlpānā*) which he had received from them he proclaimed to his master’s wife, saying, “How can I do this great wickedness (*bīštā*) and sin (*’ahtē*) against God? How can I condemn myself to do that thing from which I have separated myself aforetime? How can I condemn myself with that which had appeared to me beforehand to be condemnation (*hūyābā*)?”

The passage refers to the signs (*’ātwātā*, plural of *’ātā*) and the creation (*bārūyūtā*) of God inscribing the Golden Rule onto the conscience, which is identified as the heart (*lebā*) that a man should meditate (*methgā*) upon. Also noteworthy in Philoxenus is the conflation of the Golden Rule with the Decalogue (the commandment not to covet your neighbour’s wife is justified by appeal to the Golden Rule) – a feature of patristic writings I have already noted above. The passage concludes with a recognition from Joseph that were he not to listen to the voice of his conscience, he would assuredly face condemnation (*hūyābā*).

The significance of this passage for the qur’anic milieu may be gauged by considering its overlaps with the Joseph story in Sūrat Yūsuf. Joseph Witztum has extensively analysed parallels between the qur’anic story of Joseph and the latter’s portrayal in Syriac Christian writings.²⁸ He did not, however, consider this passage from Philoxenus. There are two details in particular that overlap with the qur’anic account that are not mentioned in any of the Syriac sources that Witztum uncovers.

²⁸ Witztum, “The Syriac Milieu of the Quran,” 188–256.

First, Philoxenus says that the Golden Rule, being a part of natural law, becomes more accessible to a man as he reaches adulthood – “as a man grew (*rbā*) in his bodily stature (*qūmtā d-pagrēh*).” Thus, as Joseph was twenty when tempted by Potiphar’s wife, he had sufficiently matured to know that it would be wrong to betray his master Potiphar by allowing himself to be seduced. The Qur’an, too, immediately prior to the seduction account, mentions Joseph’s reaching maturity and its significance: “When he came of age (*ashuddahu*), We gave him judgement (*ḥukm*) and knowledge (*‘ilm*), and thus do We reward the virtuous” (Q 12:22). Note also the reference to Joseph’s judgement (*ḥukm*), corresponding with Philoxenus’s description of him as *ḥakīmā*, and to his knowledge (*‘ilm*), which corresponds to a cluster of words in Philoxenus’s discourse: learning (*yelfet*), writing (*sefrā*), reading (*qrīt*), understanding (*‘eshtawd’eth*), and instruction (*yūlpānā*).

Second, the Qur’an gives a cryptic reason as to why Joseph, despite his temptation, was able to resist the seduction attempt: “She certainly made for him; and he would have made for her [too] had he not seen the proof (*burhān*) of his Lord. So it was, that We might turn away from him all evil (*sū’*) and indecency (*fahshā*). He was indeed one of Our dedicated servants” (Q 12:24). This has frequently been connected, both in Western studies of the Qur’anic Joseph and among traditional Muslim exegetes, with the Talmudic story of Joseph miraculously seeing an image of his father Jacob that prevented him from adultery.²⁹ However, it seems to me that in this case Philoxenus’s discourse may be the appropriate intertext, particularly in light of the overlap between the Qur’an and Philoxenus with

²⁹ Reynolds, *The Qur’an and the Bible*, 368–369; Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 111; Speyer, *Die biblische Erzählungen*, 200–203.

regards to Joseph’s aforementioned description as attaining maturity and being granted judgement and knowledge. On this reading, *burhān* refers to Joseph’s own reasoning, the “the instruction (*yūlpānā*) which he had received” from the natural law that God had written on his heart: “How can I condemn myself to do that thing from which I have separated myself aforetime? How can I condemn myself with that which had appeared to me beforehand to be condemnation (*hūyābā*)?” Unlike the view that the *burhān* refers to Joseph’s seeing his father, the suggestion offered here, that it refers to an internal dialogue by means of which he reasoned against his own temptation, fits with the meaning of *burhān* as “proof.”³⁰ Elsewhere in the Qur’an, *burhān* refers to both scriptural proof for doctrine (e.g., Q 2:111), but also proof derived from nature (e.g., Q 21:24; 27:64 – both of these are used in a context of natural proofs for God’s unicity).

A further nuance of *burhān* is worth considering. As noted by Nöldeke, *burhān* is almost certainly an Ethiopic loan word, its meaning in Ethiopic being “light, brightness,” from which the meaning of “proof” in Arabic emerged later.³¹ Although it is the latter meaning that is more common in the Qur’an, the sense of “light” is evidently still retained in some passages, most notably in Q 4:174, “O mankind! Certainly a proof (*burhān*) has come to you from your Lord, and We have sent down to you a manifest light (*nūran mubīnan*).” Nöldeke suggests that in Q 12:24, also, it is this sense of “light” that is intended. Ambros and Procházka accordingly suggest

³⁰ This is close to one of the possibilities listed by al-Rāzī for the meaning of *burhān*, namely that it is “the attainment for those [pious] characteristics and a reminder of the dispositions that prevent them [= the prophets and all those connected with God] from committing evil deeds.” *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, 18:443. See also Mir, *Dictionary of Qur’ānic Terms and Concepts*, 128–129.

³¹ Nöldeke, *Neue Beiträge*, 58–59; Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, 77–78.

“spiritual illumination” as the appropriate translation in the verse.³² This seems to fit better than “proof.” Significantly, for our purpose, this sense of *burhān* ties the Sūrat Yūsuf passage even closer to Philoxenus’s discourse, as prior to his discussion of Joseph’s self-restraint, Philoxenus writes at length on “the light (*nūhrā*) of the divine knowledge (*īda’tā*) which rises in the soul on the avoidance (*būṭlānā*) of fornication.”³³ Also noteworthy here is that Joseph’s divinely given knowledge is a central theme in Sūrat Yūsuf (in addition to the demonstration of his knowledge when interpreting dreams, see also vv. 6, 21–22, 37, 68, 101).

We saw earlier that the qur’anic phrase *ulū l-albāb* has antecedents both in biblical and para-biblical wisdom literature. We now have a conjunction in both Q 2:267–269 and Philoxenus’s *Discourse on Fornication* between the Golden Rule, wisdom, and the knowledge inscribed on the heart (Syriac: *lēb*; Arabic: *lubb*). Further, Joseph’s wisdom in Philoxenus’s discourse is immediately tied to how natural law (*nāmūsā d-kyānā*) was inscribed on his heart (*lēbā*), which provides us with yet another natural law / wisdom nexus in pre-Islamic Christian discourse. This supports both the thesis that in Q 2:269 *ḥikmah* is indeed referring to the Golden Rule that was exemplified in v. 267, and that this *ḥikmah* is the Qur’an’s term for natural morality.

³² Ambros and Procházka, *A Concise Dictionary*, 37–38.

³³ *The Discourses of Philoxenus* 1:601 [Syr.], 2:573 [Eng.]. Budge translates *būṭlānā* as “abatement,” but “avoidance” seems better here. See Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon*, s.v. “b-ṭ-l.”

9.4. CONCLUSION

I believe we have a compelling case that in Q 2:269 *ḥikmah* refers to the Golden Rule. This does not mean, of course, that *ḥikmah* here means “the Golden Rule.” Rather, it makes more sense to understand the term in line with its usage elsewhere in the Qur’an as natural morality, one manifestation of which is the moral principle of the Golden Rule. The arguments in favour of this reading are summarised below:

1. Most directly, the Golden Rule is associated with wisdom in both patristic writings (Augustine) and by its incorporation into wisdom texts.
2. If *ḥikmah* in v. 269 does refer to the Golden Rule, then both the Golden Rule and the Decalogue are called *ḥikmah* in the Qur’an, just as they are both referred to as “natural law” and prominently connected in patristic writings. This reading thus aligns with and continues the wisdom / natural law nexus we observed in chapter 8.
3. More broadly, the context of all of the qur’anic appeals to the Golden Rule is financial fairness and charity, just as in Tobit and Luke (not to mention several other patristic authors), two of the most important sources of the Golden Rule in patristics. This suggests that the Qur’an’s Golden Rule discourse is significantly aligned with the biblical Golden Rule discourse. In turn, as the Golden Rule is repeatedly equated with natural law in patristic sources, and given the aforementioned wisdom / natural law nexus we have observed, it is not unsurprising for the Qur’an to label its use of the Golden Rule “wisdom.”

4. Finally, the conjunction in vv. 267–269 of the Golden Rule, wisdom, and a reference to the *lubb* as a seat of knowledge is found in Philoxenus’s discourses too, in a passage that seems to be highly significant for understanding the Syriac background to Sūrat Yūsuf (and therefore one that presents ideas relevant to the Qur’an’s background). The fact that Philoxenus equates the Golden rule with wisdom / natural law thus supports the thesis that the Qur’an is indeed doing the same.

CHAPTER 10

Kitāb and ḥikmah

We come finally to the *kitāb wa-ḥikmah* locution,¹ so characteristic of the Medinan corpus of the Qur'an. We have already considered one Medinan verse in chapter 5 that employs the phrase, in relation to the divorce laws of Sūrat al-Baqarah. In the present chapter, we will consider the remaining *kitāb wa-ḥikmah* verses, before looking at the isolated verse that pairs *āyāt allāh* ("the signs of God") – instead of *kitāb* – with *ḥikmah*.

In chapter 2, we saw that the Qur'an occasionally generalises the divine gifts of the *kitāb* and *ḥikmah* to all prophets (Q 3:81), and then picks out in particular the family of Abraham as recipients of these blessings (Q 4:54). Of these verses, Q 3:81 is particularly significant. The verse provides details of God's covenants with the people to whom prophets are sent:

(Remember) when God took the covenant of the prophets, "What I have given you of scripture (*kitāb*) and wisdom (*ḥikmah*) – then a messenger comes to you confirming what is with you – you shall certainly believe in it, and you shall certainly help him."

The verse is remarkable for circumscribing what prophets are given, and what they subsequently convey to their people, into one of two categories alone: *kitāb* and *ḥikmah*. The verse emphasises that what subsequent prophets bring only confirms these two types of revelation (and thus itself falls into one of these categories). As we will see, the tightly woven qur'anic discourse around *kitāb* and

¹ For the purpose of brevity, unless otherwise specified discussion of the phrase *kitāb wa-ḥikmah* includes instances of its definite variant, *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah*.

ḥikmah corroborates the picture that prophetic communication occurs in one of these two modes.

Several verses particularise which prophet was given what: David is given *ḥikmah* only (Q 2:251; 38:20), while Jesus is associated with *kitāb* and *ḥikmah* (Q 3:48; 5:110; 19:30; 43:63). Moses is never said to have been given *ḥikmah*. Rather, he is only given the *kitāb* (e.g., Q 2:53, 2:87, 17:2, 23:49, and 25:35). John is also given the *kitāb* in one verse (Q 19:12). Finally, Muhammad is given both *kitāb* and *ḥikmah* (e.g., Q 2:129; 2:151; 3:164; 62:2).

There seems at first sight to be no clearly discernible pattern here. The picture becomes considerably tidier, however, after we eliminate Jesus and John as recipients of the *kitāb*. The argument in favour of such an elimination has been forcefully and, in my assessment, definitively made by Mohsen Goudarzi (see below). I will repeat here only some of his most compelling points. In the case of John, he is only ever told to “hold on” or “take” (*khudh*) the *kitāb* with firmness (*bi-quwwah*), a locution frequently used for the Israelites in relation to receiving the Torah, for instance, “And We wrote for him [i.e., Moses] in the tablets advice concerning all things and an elaboration of all things, [saying], ‘Hold on to them (*khudhūhā*) with firmness (*bi-quwwah*), and bid your people to hold on (*ya’khudhū*) to the best of [what is in] them. Soon I shall show you the abode of the transgressors” (Q 7:145; cf. Q 2:63, 93; 7:171). It seems that John in Q 19, like the Israelites before him, is being instructed to strictly adhere to the *kitāb* of Moses, rather than being given a separate *kitāb*.

As for Jesus, in two of the four verses where he is associated with the *kitāb*, he is taught it (Q 3:48; 5:110). This is very different from the language employed in

relation to Moses and Muhammad, who are “given” the book, or to whom it is “sent down,” or “revealed” (e.g., for Moses, Q 2:53, 6:91; for Muhammad, Q 3:3, 29:45). In the remaining two verses, Jesus is indeed “given” the *kitāb* (Q 3:79, 19:30), but both of these are part of the *kitāb/ḥukm/nubuwwah* group of verses discussed in chapter 2, which, as I discussed there on the basis of Goudarzi’s research, stand for the Israelite tradition of Torah and prophecy. Far from showing Jesus to have been the recipient of a separate *kitāb*, these verses show that Jesus was an inheritor of the Israelite tradition of prophecy, grounded in the *kitāb* of Moses.

Thus, the pattern that emerges is that Moses is given the *kitāb*, David and Jesus are given *ḥikmah*, and Muhammad is given both *kitāb* and *ḥikmah*. Importantly, these four are both the *only* specific recipients of *kitāb* or *ḥikmah* (i.e., discounting verses that seem to generalise the recipients of *kitāb* and *ḥikmah* to all prophets, or to all of Abraham’s descendants, such as Q 3:81 and 4:54), and the *only* recipients of a specific scripture in the Qur’an.² This suggests that we can divide the Qur’an’s scripturology into a *kitāb* revelation to Moses, two subsequent *ḥikmah* revelations to David and Jesus, and finally a unification of the two types of revelation in the Qur’an, which is both *kitāb* and *ḥikmah*. The remainder of this section will attempt to provide evidence that this is indeed the case.

10.1. THE TWO KITĀBS

The thesis that in the Qur’an’s scripturology there are only two *kitābs* has recently been rigorously argued for by Mohsen Goudarzi in his PhD dissertation, “The Second

² As for the *ṣuḥuf* of Abraham and Moses, mentioned in Q 53:36–37 and 87:91, this seems to be shorthand for the Bible, rather than a separate revelatory scripture. See Sinai, “An Interpretation of *Sūrat Al-Najm*,” 16–18.

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Goudarzi’s presentation and analysis of the data are compelling, and leave little doubt that, far from the traditional picture of multiple *kitābs* to several messengers, the Qur’an’s salvation history presents us with two *kitābs*, the first given to Moses, and the second to Muhammad. This is not the place for an extensive engagement with Goudarzi’s research (with almost all of which I am in agreement);³ I will suffice with quoting his summary of the main prooftexts from the Qur’an:

This chapter has highlighted ten passages that associate the term *kitāb* exclusively with the scriptures of Moses and Muhammad, thereby challenging the generic understanding of *kitāb* as “book” in qur’anic scholarship. The first text, a reflection on prophetic history from Noah to Jesus, highlights Moses alone as the recipient of *al-kitāb* (23:49). The second text is a brief precis of Israelite prophetic history that notes the bestowal of *al-kitāb* to Moses but does not make a similar statement about the unnamed messengers after him or Jesus (2:87). The third passage contains a quotation attributed to a group of jinn, who describe the Qur’an as “a *kitāb* sent down after Moses” (46:30). The fourth and fifth texts describe the messengers before Muhammad as having brought “the clear proofs, the writings, and the illuminating *kitāb*” (3:184, 35:25). Juxtaposing the singular *kitāb* with the plural *zūbur* (“writings”), these two texts seem to posit a deliberate distinction between the Torah and the other pre-qur’anic scriptures. The sixth examined passage urges the Prophet’s followers to believe in “the *kitāb* that [God] sent down to His messenger” as well as “the *kitāb* that He sent down before” (4:136), thereby strongly suggesting that there is only one *kitāb* before the Qur’an.

The last four texts do not establish that *kitāb* is an exclusive appellation for the Torah and the Qur’an, but nevertheless imply that there is special affinity between these two scriptures. The first passage in question describes the Mosaic *kitāb* as divine revelation and then characterizes the Qur’an as “a blessed *kitāb*” that confirms “what (*al-ladhī*) is before it” (6:91-2), a likely reference to the Torah. The second passage highlights the Prophet’s commitment to his own *kitāb* as well as the *kitāb* of Moses, presenting them as God’s foremost scriptures: “Say: bring a *kitāb* from God that gives better guidance than these two (*ahdā minhumā*), so that I may follow it, if you speak truly” (28:49). Finally, the last two texts defend the Qur’an’s divine pedigree,

³ It is a happy coincidence that I completed my Oxford MPhil research (which forms the basis of the present thesis) at almost the same time that Goudarzi completed his Harvard PhD, and I independently argued for the two *kitāb* hypothesis, although – as my research was on *ḥikmah* rather than *kitāb* per se, and as it was only a master’s thesis – with nowhere comparably near the comprehensive and thorough marshalling of evidence and detailed analysis that Goudarzi offers.

noting that “before it is the *kitāb* of Moses” (11:17, 46:12). These passages portray a scriptural landscape that is defined by the preeminence of the Torah and the Qur’an and their special relationship. There are no qur’anic texts that suggest such exclusive correspondence between the Qur’an and the Gospel or Psalms.⁴

There remains only the issue of whether the *kitāb* of Moses is identical to the qur’anic *tawrāh*. Here, I would depart from Goudarzi’s conjecture that whereas the *kitāb* refers to the Pentateuch, the *tawrāh* might refer to the entirety of the Jewish canon. Goudarzi is motivated to make this argument primarily to explain the two verses in which God teaches Jesus *al-kitāba wa-l-ḥikmata wa-l-tawrāta wa-l-injīl*, literally “*al-kitāb* and *al-ḥikmah* and the Torah and the Gospel” (Q 3:48; 5:110), which seems to imply that the *kitāb* and the *tawrāh* are separate scriptures. I will offer an alternative explanation of these verses below that does not require us to posit a difference between the Qur’an’s *kitāb* of Moses on the one hand and the *tawrāh* on the other.

For now, let us briefly consider the evidence in favour of identifying the two. First, the Qur’an describes the *tawrāh* and the *kitāb* of Moses in the same manner: Q 5:44 and 6:91 ascribe respectively to the *tawrāh* and the *kitāb* of Moses *hudan* (“guidance”) and *nūr* (“light”). Second, Q 5:44 shows that the *tawrāh* and the *kitāb* of Moses may be used interchangeably:

We sent down the *tawrāh* containing guidance and light (*hudan wa-nūr*). The prophets, who had submitted, judged by it for the Jews, and so did the rabbis and the scribes, as they were charged to preserve the *kitāb* of God and were witnesses to it.

⁴ Goudarzi, “The Second Coming of the Book,” 151–152.

Goudarzi offers a range of explanations for this verse that do not require the *tawrāh* mentioned at the start of the verse to be identical to the *kitāb* mentioned later.⁵ The reading preferred here, according to which the two are interchangeably used, seems to me the most natural. Note that the phrase I have translated “as (*bi-mā*) they were charged to preserve the *kitāb* of God,” in which I take the *mā* to be *maṣdariyyah*, could be rendered “by what they were charged to preserve from (*min*) the *kitāb* of God,” if one takes the *mā* to be a relative pronoun.⁶ Goudarzi opts for this latter reading, which in fact makes the case for the interchangeability of *tawrāh* and *kitāb* in the verse even stronger, as it renders the verse: “We sent down the *tawrāh*.... The prophets ... judged (*yaḥkumu*) by it (*bihi*)..., by what (*bi-mā*) they were charged to preserve from the *kitāb* of God.” The repetition of *bi* to introduce two complements to the same verb (*yaḥkumu*) and the absence of a co-ordinating conjunction (*wa*) before the second *bi* would, in the relative pronoun interpretation of *mā*, strongly suggests that the two prepositional objects have the same referent, the second complement (“what they were charged to preserve from the *kitāb* of God”) clarifying the first.

10.2. THE PSALMS AND GOSPEL AS ḤIKMAH REVELATIONS

As we saw in chapter 6, in Q 43:63 Jesus “brings” *ḥikmah* to clarify the disputes about the *kitāb* that was already with the Israelites. (The *kitāb* is not explicitly mentioned in the verse, but implied, as argued in chapter 6.) This is consistent with

⁵ Goudarzi, “The Second Coming of the Book,” 212–213.

⁶ The preposition *min* that precedes the phrase “*kitāb* of God” must be *bayāniyyah* in the *mā maṣdariyyah* reading, and is best left untranslated in that case. On the different syntactical possibilities, see al-Samīn al-Ḥalabī, *al-Durr al-maṣūn*, 4:271–272.

what has been argued above, that the only *kitāb* the Israelites had in the Qur'an's scripturology prior to Muhammad was the Torah. The verse thus suggests that Jesus's own contribution to Israelite scripture, in later proclamations named as the *injīl*, is what is meant by *ḥikmah* in the verse, as already proposed by several of the *mufassirūn*.⁷

As mentioned above, God teaches Jesus *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmata wa-l-tawrāta wa-l-injīl*, literally “*al-kitāb* and *al-ḥikmah* and the Torah and the Gospel” (Q 3:48; 5:110). I have briefly argued that the *kitāb* of the Israelite prophets is identical to the *tawrāh* in the Qur'an. But how then are we to make sense of their co-ordination in the these verses?⁸ Given that, as we have seen, the Qur'an categorises all revelation into one of two categories, *kitāb* or *ḥikmah*, and given further that the only pre-qur'anic *kitāb* in the Qur'an's scripturology is the Torah, I would argue that it is correct to infer that the wisdom that Jesus is said to bring in Sūrat al-Zukhruf is an allusion to the Gospel. Accepting these two equivalences of *kitāb* as Torah and *ḥikmah* as Gospel neatly solves the interpretive problem posed by the *al-kitāb/al-ḥikmah/Torah/Gospel* tetralogy – the correct translations for Q 3:48 and Q 5:110 (as already given in chapters 1 and 2) are as follows:

And He will teach him [i.e., Jesus] scripture (*al-kitāb*) and wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*), the Torah and the Gospel. (Q 3:48)

...I taught you [i.e., Jesus] scripture (*al-kitāb*) and wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*), the Torah and the Gospel. (Q 5:110)

⁷ E.g., Muqātil, *Tafsīr Muqātil*, 3:800.

⁸ See chapter 1 for some of the ways the *al-kitāb/al-ḥikmah/Torah/Gospel* tetralogy has been understood in past scholarship.

In other words, in both verses the middle *wa* introduces a clarifying or epexegetic coordination (*‘atf al-tafsīr*),⁹ as proposed by Iṣlāḥī and Ghāmidī.¹⁰ Such a use of the *wa* conjunction, which in English we might express with a punctuation mark such as a comma or a colon, is attested elsewhere in the Qur’an, e.g., Q 5:15, “There has come to you from God a light (*nūr*), (*wa-*) a manifest *kitāb*,”¹¹ and Q 2:48, “Protect yourselves against a day when no soul will give any satisfaction for any other: (*wa-lā*) no intercession will be accepted from it, (*wa-lā*) nor any ransom be taken from it; (*wa*) they will not be helped.” This latter verse is particularly rich in its uses of the *wa* particle. The three instances in which I have transliterated it (which do not include the *wa* with which the verse opens) do not present us with a list of four independent descriptions of the Last Day. Rather, the first *wa* evidently introduces a clarifying coordination, the second *wa* is for regular or sequential coordination (*‘atf al-nasq*), and the third *wa* introduces a final clausula (i.e., it is *waw al-isti’nāf*).¹²

In fact, the Qur’an frequently co-ordinates two pairs of complementary ideas using the *wa* conjunction. Consider the following:

He is the first and (*wa-*) the last,
 (*wa-*) the manifest and (*wa-*) the hidden. (Q 57:3)

⁹ See chapter 5, n. 2.

¹⁰ Ghāmidī, *al-Bayān*, 1:353, and Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur-i Qur’ān*, 3:94 (both *ad* Q 3:48).

¹¹ While the *mufasssīrūn* are split over whether the *nūr* in the verse refers to the Prophet, or Islam, or the Qur’an (see, e.g., al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, 11:327) inner-qur’anic evidence strongly supports the last of these three views. The Qur’an frequently characterises scriptures as being “a light” (e.g., Q 4:174; 5:15, 44, 46; 6:91; 7:157; 42:52; 64:8), and similarly describes itself as “a manifest light” (*nūran mubīnan*) (Q 4:174), echoing the language of Q 5:15.

¹² I am grateful to the participants of a discussion held as part of the QuCIP project in which the uses of the *wa* conjunction within this verse were problematised. In particular, Marianna Klar drew our attention to the four co-ordinated items in the verse not being semantically commensurable, and the final *wa* introducing a summarising clausula. See also Ibn Hishām, *Mughnī al-labīb*, 4:351–420.

It is He who created
the night and (*wa-*) the day,
and (*wa-*) the sun and (*wa-*) the moon. (Q 21:33; see also Q 16:12; 41:37)

The parable of the two parties is that of
the blind and (*wa-*) deaf,
and (*wa-*) the seeing and (*wa-*) hearing. (Q 11:24)

The blind and (*wa-*) the seeing are not equal, /
nor (*wa-lā*) darkness and (*wa-lā*) light, /
nor (*wa-lā*) shade and (*wa-lā*) heat. (Q 35:19–21)

Admittedly, none of these is structurally identical to the reading of Q 3:48 and 5:110 proposed above, in that the complementarity relationship between the co-ordinated pairs is not one of epexegetis. Perhaps the closest is Q 35:19–20, where the blind/seeing pair (v. 19) is co-ordinated with the darkness/light pair (v. 20), and we thus have a clear parallelism between the two initial elements in the co-ordinated pairs, and similarly the two final elements. When evidence of the Qur'an's co-ordination of complementary pairs is considered alongside evidence for the Qur'anic use of the *'atf al-tafsīr*, the reading proposed for Q 3:48 and 5:110 becomes considerably more plausible. Ultimately, it seems to me that interpreting the middle *wa* in the relevant verses as introducing an epexegetic *'atf al-tafsīr* is the most satisfying way to make sense of the co-ordination of *kitāb* and *tawrāh*, particular as there are good reasons to consider them to be equivalent in the Qur'an, as we have seen. This reading, in turn, supports that *ḥikmah* be equated with *injīl*.

As for the *zabūr* of David, its equivalence with *ḥikmah* is admittedly looser. As mentioned earlier, David, Jesus, and Muhammad are the only specific recipients of *ḥikmah* in the Qur'an (Q 2:251 and Q 38:20), and happen also to be the only

recipients of scripture after Moses, the recipient of the *kitāb*. For David (as for Jesus), the scripture he receives is never called *kitāb*. To reiterate, as the revelation promised to the prophets was to be either *kitāb* or *ḥikmah* (Q 4:54), it stands to reason that the *zabūr*, just like the *injīl*, was a *ḥikmah* revelation. Note that this also helps us to understand why it is that although David and Solomon are frequently paired in the Qur'an, with their stories being told in parallel, it is only David who is the recipient of *ḥikmah*, even though in the Judaeo-Christian tradition it is Solomon who is associated with wisdom.

This still leaves us with the question of how to characterise these *ḥikmah* revelations, and what makes them distinct from the *kitāb* revelations. From the preceding chapters, I have argued that *ḥikmah* in the Qur'an refers to a natural theological knowledge of divine unicity and future accountability before God, and natural moral considerations. As the Qur'an insists that the message of monotheism has been the central teaching of all the prophets, insofar as knowledge of divine unicity is a part of *ḥikmah*, then it would be true to say that all the scriptures, including Moses's Torah, have taught *ḥikmah*.¹³ This certainly blurs the neat division of the scriptures mentioned in the Qur'an into *kitāb* and *ḥikmah* revelations. However, as I will argue below, the remaining aspects of *ḥikmah*, namely news of the

¹³ As we saw in chapter 8, *ḥikmah* is closely associated with *wa'z* ("admonishment"), and the Mosaic *kitāb* is explicitly said to include the latter: "And We wrote down for him on the tablets an admonition (*maw'izatan*) drawn from everything, and an exposition for everything: 'So take it with power, and order your people to take the fairest of it. I shall show you the abode of the reprobates (*dāra l-fāsiqīn*)'" (Q 7:145). See Schmid, "From Ethico-Religious Exhortation to Legal Paraenesis," esp. 335–349; Sinai, *Key Terms of the Qur'an*, s.v. "*ḥikmah*." In context, however, the admonishment has to do with conquest of the land. The final clause shows that this is probably an allusion to the Deuteronomistic covenant that only by obedience to God's law will Israel conquer and thrive in the land, whereas disobedience will result in Israel's destruction (Deut 7–8).

eschaton and natural morality, can be strongly associated with the post-Mosaic scriptures more exclusively.

10.3. THE CONTENT OF THE *ḤIKMAH* REVELATIONS

I have thus far argued that in the Qur'an's scriptural landscape, the *tawrāh* is the pre-eminent pre-qur'anic scripture, referred to simply as *al-kitāb*, or "the Scripture." Subsequent pre-qur'anic scriptures are, by contrast, *ḥikmah* revelations, in particular the *injīl* of Jesus. The two types of divine communication, *kitāb* and *ḥikmah*, are first combined with Jesus, who inherits the *kitāb* of Moses and receives the *ḥikmah* of the own revelation, the *injīl*. Finally, in the Qur'an, *kitāb* and *ḥikmah* are for the first time united in a single scripture.

We have also seen in chapter 6 that central to Jesus's mission in proclaiming a new *ḥikmah* revelation was to resolve the disagreements about the *kitāb* that the Israelites had fallen into. This gives us some idea of the relationship between *kitāb* and *ḥikmah*. But what is the difference in *content* between a *kitāb* revelation and a *ḥikmah* revelation? The Qur'an's portrait of the Mosaic *kitāb* seems to be that it is, in Goudarzi's detailed analysis, a "comprehensive record of divine teachings imparting *historical* and *legal* knowledge. In other words, *kitāb* represents consummate divine guidance, a writing that contains extensive accounts of (sacred) history as well as detailed laws for proper conduct."¹⁴ This assessment is supported by specifics that the Qur'an provides regarding the content of Moses's *kitāb*. For instance, Q 5:44–45 ascribes *lex talionis* to the Torah or *kitāb* of God, and we have already seen the

¹⁴ Goudarzi, "The Second Coming of the Book," 94 (emphasis in original); see also *ibid.*, 162, 170, 258, 301.

frequent association between the Mosaic *kitāb* and God's *ḥukm* ("judgement") in chapter 2. We may add to this that the Mosaic *kitāb*, in the Qur'an's presentation of its contents, also included an insistence on monotheism, e.g., Q 17:2 "We gave Moses the *kitāb*, and made it a guide for the Children of Israel, (saying) 'Do not take any trustee besides Me,'" an issue to which we shall return. It is noteworthy that missing from this conspectus of the *kitāb*'s contents are two of the items to which *ḥikmah* refers: news of the eschaton and natural moral considerations.

Let us consider these two aspects of *ḥikmah* as they relate to the *kitāb* of Moses in turn. First, there are a few apparent exceptions to the pattern just described that should be addressed. The most significant is Q 9:111, which reads:

God has bought from the believers their persons and their possessions for the price that the Garden will be theirs. They fight in God's way and will kill and be killed: a promise binding on God in the Torah and the Gospel and the Qur'an. And who fulfils his covenant more fully than God? Rejoice in the bargain you have made with Him. That is the great triumph.

The verse seems to unambiguously claim that promise of a heavenly reward in the afterlife is promised to martyrs in the *tawrāh*. I confess the verse to be problematic to my thesis. Yet, it seems possible to read it to mean that it is only when the *tawrāh* is properly understood through the clarification of the *injīl* that such a reward to the martyrs in the former may be discerned. This would be similar to how in Mark 12:18–27 Jesus needs to explain to the afterlife-denying Sadducees that the reality of the hereafter is derivable from the Hebrew Scriptures. Below, we will consider further evidence that Jewish views that deny that the afterlife may not have died out with the disappearance of the Sadducees following the destruction of the Temple. Thus, just as the Qur'an elsewhere describes Jesus's teaching as bringing clarity to

the *kitāb* of the Israelites, it is possible that some such similar understanding lies behind Q 9:111.

A second set of possibly problematic verses are those that describe the contents of the “Parchments of Abraham and Moses” (*ṣuḥuf ibrāhīm wa-mūsā*), mentioned in Q 87:19 and 53:36–37. Both passages clearly ascribe eschatological content to these Parchments (e.g., Q 87:17, “And the hereafter is better and more enduring”). However, as Nicolai Sinai has convincingly argued, the locution “Parchments of Abraham and Moses” seems to be a paraphrase for the Bible as a whole – i.e., scriptures that have as their foundation the stories of Israel’s greatest patriarch and greatest prophet.¹⁵ As such, we should not infer what the contents of the Qur’an’s Mosaic *kitāb* might be from what the Qur’an says about these Parchments.

10.3.1. The Hereafter

While God does indeed speak to Moses about the hereafter (e.g., Q 20:15), it is noteworthy that such utterances are never said to be part of the *kitāb* (unlike, for example, the contents of the Tablets, which the Qur’an suggests were copied into the *kitāb* passed down from Moses – see Q 7:154). Indeed, Sūrat al-Shūrā (Q 42) clearly distinguishes the *kitāb* prior to Muhammad from *īmān*, suggesting that the tenets of faith were not the primary concerns of Moses’s *kitāb*:

“You did not know what the *kitāb* is, nor what is faith (*īmān*).” (Q 42:52)

¹⁵ See n. 2.

We can also detect in the Qur'an's scripturology that the Mosaic *kitāb* was not concerned about the hereafter by the manner in which the Qur'an rebuts contemporaneous Jewish claims about the afterlife.

⁷⁸ And among them [i.e., the Jews] are those unscriptured (*ummiyyūn*),¹⁶ who do not know the *kitāb*, but just (their own) desires, and they only conjecture.

⁷⁹ So woe to those who write the *kitāb* with their hands and then say, "This is from God," that they may sell it for a paltry gain. So woe to them for what their hands have written, and woe to them for what they earn.

⁸⁰ And they say, "The fire shall not touch us except for a limited number of days." Say, "Have you taken a covenant ('*ahd*) with God? If so, God shall never break His covenant ('*ahd*). Or do you ascribe to God what you do not know?" (Q 2:78–80)

Before expounding the relevance of these verses from Sūrat al-Baqarah for the argument that the Mosaic *kitāb* as presented in the Qur'an did not have a developed notion of an afterlife, we need to consider the object of the Qur'an's polemics here. The passage contrasts the Mosaic *kitāb* that the Jews have neglected with the *kitāb* that they have written themselves, which latter, I contend, is an allusion to the rabbinic corpus, the oral Torah (which of course came to be written down) that accompanies the written Torah in rabbinic thought. That both are called *kitāb* would appear to be a polemical device, accusing the Jews of concocting a scripture to rival God's.¹⁷ In support of this reading, note that the qur'anic recognition of and frustration with the rabbinic lens through which Jews approached the Torah has a clear late antique precedent. The Emperor Justinian, as part of his legal reform

¹⁶ For the translation of *ummī* as unscriptured, see Dayeh, "Prophecy and writing in the Qur'an," and before him Hans Zirker's German translation of the Qur'an, which renders the term *schriftunkundig*. I am grateful to Nicolai Sinai for this reference. This verse provides a good reason to avoid translating *ummī* as Gentile (even if the former is very frequently co-extensional with and connotes the latter): the point made in the verse is that the Israelites, despite possessing a scripture (unlike the *ummiyyūn*), are ignorant of it, and thus effectively "unscriptured." See also Sinai, *Key Terms*, s.v. "*ummī*."

¹⁷ See Hussain, "Review Article: A History of Muslim Views of the Bible."

project, published Novel 146 in 533 CE on the question of the language in which Jews may perform their Synagogue service. In it, he prohibits the Jews from reading the Torah alongside its rabbinic exposition, which latter is denounced as “an invention of men in their chatter, exclusively of earthly origin and having in it nothing of the divine. Let them read the holy.” He insists that they “read the holy words themselves, therefore, ... without hiding what is said in them, on the one hand, and without accepting extraneous and unwritten nonsense they themselves had contrived to the perdition of the more simple-minded, on the other hand.” Justinian is clearly hopeful that by avoiding the “evil of the commentators when they hear the Holy Books,” the Jews will come to understand the true message of scripture.¹⁸

With this in mind, v. 80 from the Sūrat al-Baqarah passage above appears then to cite from the self-serving *kitāb* that the Jews have written, very plausibly a reference to the teachings found in the Mishnah, that “all Israel will have a share in the world to come” (m. Sanh. 2:1), and in the Bavli, that “The fire of Gehinnom has no power over the transgressors of Israel” (b. Ḥag. 27a).¹⁹ Significantly, despite the

¹⁸ Justinian’s legal corpus (the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*) comprises the *Codex*, the *Digest*, and the *Institutes*, published in 529 CE. An earlier version of the *Codex* had been published in 529 CE, but was superseded by the second edition, which is the one that survives. Following the publication of the tripartite *Corpus*, Justinian continued to issue new laws (*Novellae*) up to 554 CE, which thus constitute a fourth element of the *Corpus*. For an introduction to the *Corpus*, see Humfress, “Law and Legal Practice in the Age of Justinian.” For Novel 146 in particular, see de Lange, “Hebraists and Hellenists in the Sixth-Century Synagogue”; Smelik, “Justinian’s Novella 146 and Contemporary Judaism”; Boustan, “Rabbinization and the Persistence of Diversity in Jewish Culture in Late Antiquity,” 439–440. For the text and translation of the Novel, with a useful introduction, see Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*, 402–411. In recent scholarship, Juan Cole stands out as drawing attention to the potential significance of Justinian’s legal corpus for Qur’an Studies. See Cole, “Infidel or Paganus”; idem, “Muhammad and Justinian”; idem, “Late Roman Law and the Quranic Punishments for Adultery.” I am grateful to the author for sharing a draft of this last paper with me.

¹⁹ Note that the Qur’an seems quite clearly to polemicise against this teaching elsewhere, using a cognate of the Hebrew *ḥēleq* (“share [in the world to come]”); e.g., “And they (i.e., the Israelites) know that those who buy it (i.e., magic) have no share (*khalāq*) in the hereafter.” See Sinai, *Key Terms*, s.v. “*khalāq*.”

contrast that the passage sets up between the divine and rabbinic *kitābs*, The Qur'an does not refute the claim of limited punishment found in the latter by reference to the former. Rather, the passage in Sūrat al-Baqarah goes on to recall the covenant (*'ahd* in v. 80, and later *mīthāq* in vv. 83–84)²⁰ that the Israelites made with God, and how they were not faithful to it, fulfilling some of their obligations but not others (vv. 83–85). The passage concludes by reasoning: “Do you believe in one part of the *kitāb* and disbelieve in another part? So what is the requital of those of you who do that except disgrace in the life of this world? And on the Day of Resurrection, they shall be consigned to the severest punishment. And God is not oblivious of what you do.” The argument is *not* that the rabbinic *kitāb* outright contradicts the theology proclaimed in the Mosaic *kitāb*, as one might expect if the Qur'an's portrayal of the Mosaic *kitāb* was one which had a developed notion of eschatological accountability similar to the Qur'an's. Rather, the logic of the Qur'an is that the theology of limited punishment in the man-made *kitāb* is unreasonable given the Israelites' flagrant disregard of the covenant with God recorded in the divine *kitāb*.

The above argument against the presence of eschatological warnings in Moses's *kitāb* is admittedly *e silentio* – the divine Mosaic *kitāb* is not evoked where it would have been apropos to do so had the Qur'an envisioned it as providing the correct instruction about the hereafter. Nonetheless, the argument is somewhat strengthened by the fact that in matters of legal dispute, the Qur'an *does* demand that contemporaneous Jewish practices be compared to the *tawrāh*, in Q 3:93

²⁰ On these terms, see Firestone, “Is There a Notion of ‘Divine Election’ in the Qur'ān?,” esp. 405–407.

regarding dietary restrictions, and Q 5:43 in relation to some unspecified legal dispute.

It is a commonplace observation in modern scholarship that the Torah does not have a developed theology of an afterlife in which one enjoys rewards for faith and good deeds or is punished for rebellion against God.²¹ That the Qur'an may evidence an awareness of this theological lacuna in the Torah is not anachronistic, however. The dispute over the existence of an afterlife was one of the well-known points of disagreement between Pharisees and the Sadducees, one in which Jesus himself became embroiled, as mentioned above. While the rabbis emphatically accept the idea of a "world to come" (*ha-'olam ha-ba'*), the Talmud's insistence that whoever denies that bodily resurrection can be proven from the Torah will have no share in the world to come could reflect contemporaneous disputes among Jewish communities over whether such a doctrine was indeed to be found in the Torah.²² Indeed, Justinian's Novel 146, discussed above, explicitly refers to those among the Hebrews who deny resurrection or the last judgement, indicating that this remained a point of controversy among Jews into the sixth century.

There thus seem to be good grounds from both a close reading of the Qur'an and from a historical perspective that the qur'anic characterisation of Moses's *kitāb*, or the *tawrāh*, is that it did not teach about the hereafter. But what about the *ḥikmah* revelations? Recall from chapter 6 that Jesus's bringing *ḥikmah* to the Israelites followed immediately after his being described as "knowledge of the Hour"

²¹ See, for example, Raphael, *Jewish Views of the Afterlife*, 33–60.

²² On the diversity of Jewish beliefs and practices even after the destruction of the Second Temple, and the presence of non-rabbinic Judaism in late antiquity, see the recent collection of articles in McDowell, Naiweld, and Ben Ezra, *Diversity and Rabbinization*. See also Wasserman, "Rabbis and Their Others"; Klawans, "Imagining Judaism after 70 CE."

(which again suggests that this was Jesus’s unique contribution to Israelite scripture, and thus not a part of the Mosaic *kitāb*):

⁶¹ [Say,] “He is indeed knowledge (*‘ilm*) of the Hour; so do not doubt it and follow me. This is a straight path.

...

⁶³ When Jesus brought clear proofs (*al-bayyināt*), he said, “I have brought you wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*)....

As for the *zabūr*, there is only passage in which we are given any information as to its content: “And We have indeed written in the *zabūr*, after the remembrance (*al-dhikr*), that My righteous servants shall inherit (*yarithu*) the earth” (Q 21:105). The Qur’anic eschatological scheme includes both an inner-worldly punishment for those who reject messengers accompanied by salvation from the punishment for the believers, all of which prefigures a final accountability before God.²³ The mention of inheriting the earth suggests that it is the former that is intended here (cf. Q 7:100, 128, 137; 28:5; 33:27; 39:74; but see also Q 14:48, where the earth is said to be replaced by a new earth in the eschaton). Thus, although this verse is probably not about news of the afterlife, the eschatological associations are nonetheless clear. Indeed, as we saw in chapter 4, *ḥikmah* in Q 54:4–5 refers primarily to news of inner-worldly punishment for rejection of God and His messengers. Note also that, as Goudarzi argues convincingly, *dhikr* here probably refers to the Torah, which is a record of Israelite history, and hence a record or “remembrance.” The verse therefore supports the thesis that in the Qur’an’s scripturology, eschatological revelation proceeded the *dhikr* (=Mosaic Torah), and was not a part of it.²⁴

²³ For the two-part eschatology, see in particular Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers*, and Ghāmidī, *Mīzān*, 532–549 [= *Islam*, 500–515].

²⁴ Goudarzi, “The Second Coming of the Book,” 293–295.

In several verses, the Qur'an speaks of the *zabur* in the plural, a category of scriptures to which it would seem David's *zabūr* (in the singular) belongs. From Q 3:183–184 we see that the *zabur* were proclaimed to the Israelites by their prophets, alongside the *kitāb*. Similarly, Q 16:43–44 associates the *zabur* with the *ahl al-dhikr*, who are probably the Israelites.²⁵ It seems plausible that the *zabur* refer to the various books that belong to the Israelite scriptures after the Pentateuch (or *kitāb*), particularly those associated with prophetic figures, and one of which is the *zabūr* of David. We would expect, on the basis of the earlier argument that all scripture is either *kitāb* or *ḥikmah*, that the *zabur* too are *ḥikmah* revelations, and thus that their contents too share the concerns of other *ḥikmah* scriptures.

This is indeed what we find in the one passage in the Quran that gives any information as to the contents of the *zabur*. In Sūrat al-Shu'arā' (Q 26), after the destruction stories associated with various messengers, viz., Moses, Abraham, Noah, Hūd, Šāliḥ, Lot, and Shu'āyb, the *sūrah* continues as follows:

¹⁹² And indeed it is (*wa-innahu la-*) sent down (*tanzīl*) by the Lord of all people,
¹⁹³ brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit,
¹⁹⁴ upon your heart, so that you may be one of the warners,
¹⁹⁵ in a clear Arabic language.

¹⁹⁶ And indeed it is (*wa-innahu la-*) in the *zabur* of the ancients.

¹⁹⁷ Is it not a sign for them that the learned of the Children of Israel recognize it?

¹⁹⁸ Had We sent it down upon some non-Arab,

¹⁹⁹ and had he recited it to them, they would not have believed in it.

The parallel structure of verses 192 and 196, despite the interlude of a few verses that describe the *tanzīl*, suggests that the pronouns after *inna* have a single

²⁵ Ibid., "The Second Coming of the Book," 105.

referent. Evidently, they should both be taken to refer to the punishment stories recounted in the *sūrah*, or rather the key lesson to be derived from them, namely, that wrongdoers and rejectors of God’s messengers face inner-worldly damnation.²⁶ Moreover, the *wa-innahū la-* locution at the start of each of the two verses echoes a refrain throughout the *sūrah* that bookends each punishment story: *inna fī dhālika la-āyah* (“Indeed in that is a sign,” vv. 8, 67, 103, 121, 139, 158, 174, 190).

The purpose of the parallelism between vv. 192 and 196 is evidently that what previously had been revealed in the *zabur* in a foreign language (viz., as I am arguing, that those who persist in wrongdoing and reject the messengers will be destroyed in the present life) is now being revealed in an Arabic Qur’an (vv. 195, 198–199), and the conformity between the two is attested to by the scholars among the Israelites (v. 197). Thus, just like the *zabūr*, the other *zabur* give news of an inner-worldly victory for God’s servants that prefigures the eschatological judgement.

10.3.2. Natural Morality

Apart from news of the eschaton, we have seen that the other common use of *ḥikmah* in the Qur’an is for natural moral considerations:

- In chapter 5, we saw how *ḥikmah* was adduced as a check against the potentially oppressive legalism that can result from some interpretations of the *kitāb*.
- In chapter 6, I argued that Jesus’s phrase “I have brought you wisdom (al-*ḥikmah*), and (I have come) to make clear to you some of the things

²⁶ This is one of the opinions noted by al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, 24:533.

that you differ (*takhtalifūna*) about” (Q 43:63) is a precursor to the Medinan *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah* locution, as the differing (*ikhtilāf*) among the Israelites usually relates to the *kitāb* itself. We further saw that, when read in light of other verses about Jesus’s role vis-à-vis the Israelites, the implications of this *ḥikmah* that removes *ikhtilāf* is that it involves a lifting of legal difficulties.

- Again in chapter 6, we again saw how the Sabbath, along with the *ikhtilāf* that it occasioned (Q 16:120–125), is dismissed in favour of *ḥikmah*, which in context suggests a return to the Abrahamic normative ideal.
- In chapters 7 and 9 we saw the qur’anic Decalogue and the Golden Rule referred to as *ḥikmah*.

As we have seen over the course of this study, every one of these features of *ḥikmah* was, in late antique Christian discourse, associated with natural law: a rejection of what was regarded as Jewish legalism, Jesus’s legal reform of Israelite law, a return to the pre-Mosaic law practiced by the patriarchs, the Decalogue, and the Golden Rule. Most intriguingly, the maxims of Sahdona, discussed in chapter 3, seem to present scripture (*ktābā*) and wisdom (*ḥekmtā*) as, respectively, scripture and what is knowable about God through nature, corresponding to Ephrem’s distinction between scripture and natural law (*nāmūsā d-kyānā*). The Qur’an stands firmly in line with this discourse.

10.4. THE QUR'ANIC SYNTHESIS AND THE ROLE OF THE PROPHET

In the Qur'an, these two genres of revelation, *kitāb* and *ḥikmah*, are united. This is seen most prominently in the series of verses in which the Qur'an outlines the four-fold Prophetic duty of reciting to his audience God's verses (*āyāt*), purifying them (*tazkiyah*), and teaching them *kitāb* and *ḥikmah*, e.g., "Thus We have sent to you a messenger from among yourselves, who recites to you Our signs, and purifies you, and teaches you scripture (*al-kitāb*) and wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*), and teaches you what you did not know" (Q 2:151; see also Q 2:129; 3:164; 62:2). In this tetralogy, *kitāb* and *ḥikmah* clearly make up a formulaic pair, and thus even when the tetralogy is rearranged – as happens in Q 2:129, where "purifies you" is moved to the end – the two remain together, and together represent the fullest possible scope of scriptural content.

As for the other two elements, the recitation of God's signs is of course the proclamation of the Qur'an generally, which therefore always heads the list, and purification is evidently the ultimate purpose for which the Messenger has been sent (cf. Q 87:14, 91:9, where the Qur'an links purification to salvation). (We thus see once again a diverse use of the conjunction *wa* within a single list – see above.) We should, in order to convey the proper intent of the verses in question, translate the various verses in which the tetralogy occurs as follows:

... who recites to you Our signs and purifies you – he teaches you scripture (*al-kitāb*) and wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*). (Q 2:151; 3:164; 62:2)

... who recites to you Our signs – he teaches you scripture (*al-kitāb*) and wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*) – and purifies you. (Q 2:129)

10.5. ĀYĀT ALLĀH AND ḤIKMAH

As discussed in chapter 1, it was at Q 33:34 that *ḥikmah* was first identified as the Prophet's normative *sunnah* by the *mufassirūn*. Addressing the wives of the Prophet, the Qur'an commands: "And remember [feminine plural] what is recited (*yutlā*) in your homes of the signs of God (*āyāt allāh*) and wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*). God is certainly all-attentive, all-aware." Given its somewhat unusual locution, and that it was the locus of the classical opinion that equated qur'anic *ḥikmah* with the Prophetic *sunnah*, it merits some special attention.

Al-Farāhī objects to the equation of *ḥikmah* in this verse with Prophetic *sunnah* by noting that the *ḥikmah* in the verse is being recited (*yutlā*), a term not used in the Qur'an except for the recitation of scripture. For al-Farāhī, both the *āyāt* and the *ḥikmah* could therefore only be referring to the Qur'an itself.²⁷ He could also have cited Q 3:58 as a parallel text in support of his position: "This is what We recite (*natlū*) unto you of the signs (*āyāt*) and the wise (*ḥakīm*) reminder."

To my knowledge, none of the *mufassirūn* have addressed this point directly, though some – probably also having spotted the difficulty – such as Abū l-Su'ūd (d. 982/1574) and Ibn 'Āshūr,²⁸ do not interpret *ḥikmah* as Prophetic *sunnah* for this verse, and instead, like al-Farāhī, opt for the view that *āyāt* and *ḥikmah* in this verse both constitute aspects of scripture. Al-Farāhī's student Iṣlāḥī, and the latter's student Ghāmidī, retain the understanding of *ḥikmah* as Prophetic *sunnah* at this verse; both circumvent al-Farāhī's objection by translating *yutlā* as "the instruction

²⁷ Al-Farāhī, *Mufradāt al-Qur'ān*, 177.

²⁸ Abū l-Su'ūd, *Irshād al-'aql al-salīm*, 7:103; Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr*, 22:18.

(*ta'lim*) that is delivered” in their Urdu *tafsīrs*, though they provide no comment on why the verb should be translated as such.²⁹

The grammatical challenge to the Prophetic *sunnah* interpretation is serious, then, but not insurmountable. The Qur'an occasionally coordinates two operands of seemingly a single operator, where it is clear that in fact the operator applies only to one of the operands, and some other suitable, readily deducible operator must be supplied for the second. Consider Q 16:15, “And He cast (*alqā*) firm mountains [accusative] in the earth, lest it shake beneath you, and streams [accusative], and pathways [accusative], that haply you may be guided.” As it stands, it seems the verse is claiming that God cast into the earth three things: mountains, streams, and pathways. However, although the idea of casting mountains into the earth is quite common (e.g., apart from the verse here under consideration, Q 15:19, 31:10, and 50:7), rivers are either made (*ja'ala*) by God, e.g., Q 6:6, 13:3, 27:61, or caused to burst forth (*fajjara*), e.g., Q 18:33. Several *mufassirūn*, such as al-Qurṭubī,³⁰ therefore reasonably suggest that *ja'ala* be supplied, rendering the verse: “And He cast firm mountains in the earth, lest it shake beneath you, and (He made) streams and pathways....” Further examples of this type of ellipsis can be found in al-Farāhī's *Asālib al-Qur'ān*.³¹

Returning to Q 33:34, *ḥikmah* could therefore be interpreted as Prophetic *sunnah* if an appropriately elided verb were supplied: “And remember that which is recited (*yutlā*) unto you in your homes of the signs of God and [that which is mentioned (*yudhkar*) of] *ḥikmah*.” This is a possible reading, but it certainly does not

²⁹ Ghāmidī, *al-Bayān*, 4:133; and Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān*, 6:215, 223.

³⁰ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 10:91.

³¹ Al-Farāhī, “*Asālib al-Qur'ān*,” 171–176.

seem to be the most natural reading of the passage. Far more likely, I think, is that the verse simply condenses the established four-part formula associated with the Prophet: God's *āyāt*, *tazkiyah*, *kitāb*, and *ḥikmah*. Note that the previous verse has already mentioned *taḥhīr* ("purification"), a synonym of *tazkiyah* ("purification"), which latter forms part of the above-mentioned tetralogy.

And yet, the change in locution from *kitāb wa-ḥikmah* to *āyāt allāh wa-l-ḥikmah* remains suggestive. We saw in the tetralogy verses how the *āyāt allāh* stood for the whole of the revelation, which was then divided into a *kitāb* and a *ḥikmah* element. The missing *kitāb* element here suggests that perhaps *ḥikmah* may have a slightly different valence. Recall that David was both the recipient of *ḥikmah* (Q 2:251) and able to judge by it (Q 38:20). Also, in chapter 3, we saw the distinction in the Bavli between *miqra'* (i.e., the Bible and Mishnah) and *ḥokmā* (i.e., the exposition of the Bible and Mishnah by the rabbinic sages). In the same chapter, we saw the fusion of the prophet and sage with Origen. While on the whole, as has been argued throughout, the Qur'an aligns much more closely to the Christian tradition of wisdom, it is possible that here, as recognised by an early circle of Basran *mufassirūn*, in a *sūrah* in which the status of the Prophet is particularly exalted,³² and in which he is described as "an excellent example for those who hope for God and the Last Day and remember God often" (v. 21), *ḥikmah* alludes not only to the natural morality to which scripture calls, but also the exemplary Prophetic embodiment of that morality.

³² O'Connor, "Obeying God and His Messenger," 304.

CONCLUSION

Although reading the Qur'an as a text of late antiquity that is profoundly engaged with the Judaeo-Christian tradition in particular has been a staple of Western scholarship on the Qur'an since the nineteenth century, the relationship between the scripture and texts in the wisdom genre, and more generally wisdom discourse, has been almost wholly neglected. It has been the aim of the present study to demonstrate the ongoing vitality of wisdom literature and discourse throughout late antiquity, and that the Qur'an's invocation of *ḥikmah* in its various passages is either difficult to grasp in all its nuance, or perhaps understand at all, unless read in light of the Qur'an's antecedent wisdom traditions.

We have seen that the chronologically earliest *ḥikmah* passage in the Qur'an, Sūrat al-Qamar (Q 54), aligns with texts that merge wisdom and apocalyptic traditions and call the news of the impending eschaton "wisdom." Without an awareness of this background, understanding why the Qur'an invokes *ḥikmah* in Q 54 would be puzzling. While this sense of *ḥikmah* in subsequent Meccan wisdom passages is not as evident, the term still retains its eschatological associations: Jesus's bringing *ḥikmah* to the Israelites is mentioned immediately after he is presented as "knowledge of the Hour," and part of Luqmān's wisdom that he imparts to his son includes the inevitability of the final judgement before God.

More prominently, the Meccan *ḥikmah* passages start associating the term with moral virtue and knowledge of God's unicity, with Q 17 (the qur'anic Decalogue) and Q 31 (Luqmān) providing a list of moral virtues as examples of *ḥikmah*. The use of *ḥikmah* in Q 38 (David) and in the later Medinan Q 2:231 (the

divorce laws) suggest furthermore that the term includes a moral sense through which legal instruction is to be interpreted and understood. It is in this usage that the word comes closest to Christian notions of natural law. Indeed, the overlap is impressive: both qur'anic *ḥikmah* and Christian natural law include a critique of Jewish legalism as onerous and post-Mosaic; a portrayal of Jesus as a bringer of legal ease to the Israelites; a return to the law that was practiced by the patriarchs; and most significantly the Decalogue (albeit, in the case of the Qur'an, one that is reformulated in line with Second Temple Jewish, New Testament, and patristic trends) and the Golden Rule.

Even though, as one might expect given the Qur'an's theocentricity, it is God who grants *ḥikmah* even when the latter is not associated with prophets (e.g., to Luqmān in Q 31:12, and whoever God wishes in Q 2:269), both Luqmān's *ḥikmah* pericope and the passage in Sūrat al-Qamar suggest strongly that the teachings of *ḥikmah* are epistemologically available to all who are willing to pay attention to God's signs in nature. Luqmān is not a prophetic figure, yet is sufficiently cognisant of God's blessings to recognise that he has a duty of gratitude and will face an afterworldly reckoning. The *ḥikmah* proclaimed to the unbelievers in Sūrat al-Qamar is identical to what is available to them through God's natural signs, but they ignore both.

Perhaps the most significant *ḥikmah* verse in the Medinan corpus is Q 3:81, which divides God's revelatory communications to His prophets into two categories: *kitāb* and *ḥikmah*, while at the same time affirming that all prophets were given both. We have seen how this is both an organic development of the way Meccan verses used *ḥikmah*, and at the same time evokes the Christian division between

scripture and wisdom / natural law, such as with Ephrem and Sahdona. Of the scriptures mentioned by name in the Qur'an, Moses's Torah is presented as the unique pre-qur'anic *kitāb* par excellence, a book of sacred history and law. It is not however a scripture that warns of the afterlife. Within the Qur'an's scripturology, admonition regarding a future accountability is the function of the post-Mosaic *ḥikmah* revelations, in particular the *zūbur*, which includes David's *zabūr*, and the *injīl*. Thus, the Mosaic *kitāb* is supplemented by *ḥikmah* revelations that complete it: they include eschatological warnings that the *kitāb* lacks, and they insist on an interpretation of the *kitāb* that accords with natural morality.

At the same time, insofar as *ḥikmah* includes an affirmation of monotheism, it would be true to say that none of the scriptures mentioned in the Qur'an has lacked *ḥikmah*. Nonetheless, the Qur'an's emphases are clearly: the Torah was primarily *kitāb*, and subsequent Israelite scripture primarily *ḥikmah*. In the Qur'an, these two modes of revelation are united in a single scripture, which provides sacred history, law, eschatological warning, and an admonition to live up to one's God-given moral and theological knowledge.

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EQ = *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*. Edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe. 6 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2001–2006.

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