

**Mercy through the Ages: A Glance into the Window of Paradise**  
**A Study of Surah al-Rahman with Six Exegeses, Dating from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century**

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## INTRODUCTION

*For everything there is a bride, and the bride of the Qur'an is surah al-Rahman.* – Prophet Muhammad<sup>1</sup>

This paper explores the distinctions in interpretation of surah al-Rahman of the Holy Qur'an based on the exegeses of al-Tabari, al-Huwari, al-Qushayri, al-Qurtubi, al-Jalalayn, and al-Maraghi. These commentaries range in time period from the late ninth century to the late twentieth century and are also representative of different modes of thought, such as mainstream, Sufi, and modernist frameworks. Interpretations also reflect emphasis upon grammatical explanations or legal issues in some cases. The study first discusses a context for the time and location of each commentator, whereupon the paper moves into an analysis of the components and depictions of the *surah*, or chapter. The final section of the paper illustrates the timelessness of this *surah* and its significance to Muslims everywhere.

### Background

Surah fifty-five was revealed during the early Meccan period. It consists of seventy-eight *ayat* or verses and is best known for its vivid depictions of paradise. It is the only *surah* in the Holy Qur'an that begins with one of the ninety-nine Names of God.<sup>2</sup> It is also the only one in which God directly addresses *jinn*, sentient beings created from fire. This occurs through a verse that repeats thirty times throughout the *surah*: “So which of your Lord’s blessings do you, O *jinn* and man, both deny?”

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<sup>1</sup> Fadhlalla Haeri. *The Mercy of Qur'an and the Advent of Zaman: Commentary on Four Suras*. (Blanco, TX, USA: Zahra Publications, 1984), 63

<sup>2</sup> Haeri, 63

The chapter “divides mankind and *jinn* into three classes: the disbelievers (verses 41-5), the best of the believers (verses 46-61), and the ordinary believers (verses 62-77).”<sup>3</sup> Through this short chapter, various pieces of creation appear in contrast: “visible man and invisible *jinn*; heaven and earth; land and sea; happiness and wretchedness.”<sup>4</sup> Amidst the brief and clear warnings of hell and the beautiful descriptions of the gardens of heaven, these contrasting pairs are unified under one Creator as signs of His glory.<sup>5</sup>

### **Approach**

The exegeses or *tafsir* (*tafsir* in the singular) of these six Islamic scholars were specifically selected for this study in the hopes of representing different schools of thought and a broad range of time. Tabari, Huwwari, and Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti are traditional mainstream exegetes, Qushayri represents a perspective from Sufism, Qurtubi presents a legalistic view, and Maraghi is a modernist scholar. The Qur’anic exegeses of these scholars span approximately one thousand years, the earliest ones appearing around three hundred years after the life of the Prophet Muhammad.

After obtaining Arabic copies of these exegeses on surah al-Rahman, selected portions were translated into English using the fourth edition of *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* for comparative analysis within this study. A modern translation of the *surah* itself was also used as a reference and is included in the appendix– Aisha Bewley’s 2007 translation of the *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* into English. All transliterations in this work follow the guidelines of the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies.

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<sup>3</sup> M. A. Abdel Haleem. *The Qur’an*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 353

<sup>4</sup> Haeri, 63

<sup>5</sup> Haeri, 63

Before looking at our analysis of these exegeses, it is recommended that the audience visit the translation of surah al-Rahman and allocate some attention to it as one unit. This paper studies the *surah* by examining it piecemeal and does not adequately present the effect of experiencing it as a whole.

### CONTEXT

The Holy Qur'an is regarded in Islam as the literal word of God and the primary source for religious doctrine (the second being the *Sunnah*, which is the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad and includes his sayings, manners, and behaviors). It is believed that pieces of the Qur'an were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (most of the time through the angel Gabriel) over a period of twenty-three years in the seventh century. The Qur'an is comprised of one hundred fourteen chapters, each called a *surah*. Each *surah* differs in length and consists of numbered sentences or verses, each one called an *ayat*, acting as a component of sophisticated poetry.<sup>6</sup> With the exception of the ninth *surah*, each one opens by invoking the Name of God (*In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind*).<sup>7</sup> Although the word "chapter" does not encompass the entire Islamic meaning of *surah*, they are treated as equal for the purposes of this study.

Since the life of the Prophet Muhammad and the revelation of the Holy Qur'an, scholars of Islam have produced formal explanations of the sacred text. These formal explanations are called *tafsir*, which rely heavily on *hadith* to provide accurate interpretations and guidance in conveying historical context.<sup>8</sup> *Tafsir* rank below the Holy Qur'an and the Prophet's *Sunnah*, but

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/574938/surah>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/574938/surah>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/580209/tafsir>

they are revered and studied to help better understand God’s message. To understand the different approaches of Qur’anic interpretation for this study of surah al-Rahman, basic knowledge of the authors of our six exegeses of interest is needed. Brief histories of each commentator follow.

### **Tabari**

Abu Ja’far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (839-923) is one of the most prominent Persian historians and Islamic scholars. His *History of al-Tabari* “is by common consent the most important universal history produced in the world of Islam.”<sup>9</sup> His most well known work is his commentary on the Holy Qur’an, *Tafsir al-Tabari*, which carries a notable “scholastic look to it.”<sup>10</sup>

Tabari was born in Muslim Tabaristan near the middle of the ninth century.<sup>11</sup> From what is known of his family, he inherited a portion of his father’s property, and with this financial independence allowed him to travel for the purpose of furthering his education and development as a scholar.<sup>12</sup> In the earlier years of his studies, he gained a strong base of knowledge of pre-Islamic and early Islamic history.<sup>13</sup> Before the age of seventeen, he ventured to the city of Baghdad, “the center of the Muslim world” at the time to continue his studies.<sup>14</sup> After a short while, he continued on to al-Basrah and al-Kufah, towns south of Baghdad known for their famous religious authorities.<sup>15</sup> After his travels in southern Iraq, Tabari spent his next research

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<sup>9</sup> Franz Rosenthal. *The History of al-Ṭabari*. (New York: State University of New York, 1989), ix

<sup>10</sup> Hugh Kennedy. *al-Ṭabari: a Medieval Muslim Historian and His Work*. (Princeton, NJ: Darwin, 2008), 4

<sup>11</sup> Rosenthal, 10-11

<sup>12</sup> Rosenthal, 14

<sup>13</sup> Rosenthal, 18

<sup>14</sup> Rosenthal, 19

<sup>15</sup> Rosenthal, 19

endeavors in Syria, Palestine, and Egypt.<sup>16</sup> When he first arrived in Egypt in his late twenties as an unknown student, he immediately made important intellectual contacts and greatly expanded his knowledge of *hadith* (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) and Qur'an with the help of the Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam family, through which he gained ties to the teachings of Imam Malik and Imam al-Shafi'i.<sup>17</sup> After some years in Egypt, Tabari returned to Baghdad, no longer as a student but as a fully trained scholar of Islam.<sup>18</sup>

His first works focused on legal theory and practice and were followed by his *Tafsir* and then his *History*.<sup>19</sup> He was strikingly productive and a prolific writer all through his career and for the rest of his life.<sup>20</sup> Regarding his *Tafsir*, Tabari had "little or nothing to say on what one might call the aesthetic aspects of Qur'anic exegesis."<sup>21</sup> He "chose instead to emphasize the Qur'an's manifest linguistic intelligibility."<sup>22</sup> Regarding his extensive commentary, Kennedy identifies five principle areas of his exegesis: "theory of exegesis, theology (*jadal*), *fiqh* [jurisprudence], rhetoric and linguistics, and historiography."<sup>23</sup> "Al-Tabari's *Tafsir* is a *tour de force*, one of the most impressive monuments of early Arabic Islamic culture."<sup>24</sup>

*Tafsir al-Tabari* is heavily laced with support in *hadith* with lengthy *asanid* (chains of narration, *isnad* in the singular). It addresses grammatical constructions and provides numerous definitions for noteworthy words. This *tafsir* is a prime example of a traditional exegesis of the Qur'an. The commentary on surah al-Rahman spans over sixty pages in Arabic text.

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<sup>16</sup> Rosenthal, 21

<sup>17</sup> Rosenthal, 27-28

<sup>18</sup> Rosenthal, 31

<sup>19</sup> Rosenthal, 44

<sup>20</sup> Rosenthal, 32

<sup>21</sup> Kennedy, 3

<sup>22</sup> Kennedy, 3

<sup>23</sup> 3

<sup>24</sup> Kennedy, 9



## Huwwari

Hud ibn Muhakkam al-Huwwari of the tenth century was a Qur’anic exegete who was influenced by Kharijism,<sup>25</sup> a religio-political philosophy from the mid-seventh century.<sup>26</sup> Not much information on the Muslim scholar exists in English.

The *tafsir* of Sheikh Huwwari follows the standard style of Qur’anic exegesis with support from relevant *hadith*. The commentary on surah al-Rahman spans over ten pages in Arabic text.

## Qushayri

Abu al-Qasim ‘Abd al-Karim ibn Hawazin al-Qushayri (986-1072) was born in Khurasan in northeastern Iran to a “prosperous and learned” family.<sup>27</sup> He spoke Farsi at home but also learned Arabic extensively for his studies.<sup>28</sup> He travelled to the center of Islamic scholarship in Khurasan, where he learned from prominent Sufi masters.<sup>29</sup> He was a diligent student of the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad and also learned of Shafi‘i jurisprudence.<sup>30</sup>

Although there was considerable political turmoil in Khurasan during his adult life, he significantly contributed to his community through his extensive expertise in *hadith*, his teaching of Sufism, and his many scholarly works, including a long Qur’anic exegesis. “As one may expect of a Sufi master, al-Qushayri showed little interest in the historical and legal aspects of

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<sup>25</sup> Josef W. Meri. *Medieval Islamic Civilization: an Encyclopedia*. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 701

<sup>26</sup> Kharijism traces its roots to a political controversy over the succession of the third caliph Uthman with Prophet Muhammad’s son-in-law Ali. The Kharijites opposed Ali’s claim to the caliphate and believed that any Muslim could serve as caliph based only on the will of the entire Muslim community.  
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/316391/Kharijite>

<sup>27</sup> Barbara R. Von Schlegell. *Principles of Sufism*. (Berkeley: Mizan, 1990), i-ii

<sup>28</sup> Alexander Knysh and Muhammad S. Eissa. *al-Qushayri’s Epistle on Sufism*. (Reading, U.K.: Garnet, 2007), xxi

<sup>29</sup> Knysh and Eissa, xxi

<sup>30</sup> Knysh and Eissa, xxii

the Qur’anic text. For him, they serve as mere windows onto the all-important spiritual and mystical ideas and values of Sufism.”<sup>31</sup>

*Tafsir al-Qushayri* also follows the standard style of Qur’anic exegesis with support from relevant *hadith*. The commentary on surah al-Rahman spans ten pages in Arabic text.

### **Qurtubi**

Abu ‘Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Abu Bakr al-Ansari al-Qurtubi (1214-1273) was a Maliki scholar of *fiqh* and *hadith* from Cordoba, Spain, which was at the time one of the jewels of Islamic civilization.<sup>32</sup> He was educated in Spain until the Spanish takeover, at which time he relocated to Cairo to live peacefully.<sup>33</sup> His expertise in commentary, narrative, and law is exemplified in his Qur’anic exegesis, which represents a an authoritative legalistic and Maliki point of view.<sup>34</sup>

*Tafsir al-Qurtubi* is characterized as a legalistic exegesis with extensive references from the Qur’an itself and from *hadith*. The commentary on surah al-Rahman spans over thirty pages in Arabic text.

### **Jalalayn**

*Tafsir al-Jalalayn (Commentary of the two Jalals)*, was written by Jalal al-Din al-Mahalli and completed by Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti.<sup>35</sup> Jalal al-Din Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Mahalli (1389-1459) was an Egyptian scholar of Islam “who excelled in jurisprudence, theology, grammar, rhetoric, and Qur’anic commentary.”<sup>36</sup> He was a Shafi‘i scholar who produced several

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<sup>31</sup> Knysh and Eissa, xxiii

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.bysiness.co.uk/quran/qurtubi.htm>

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.bysiness.co.uk/quran/qurtubi.htm>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.bysiness.co.uk/quran/qurtubi.htm>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/575880/al-Suyuti?anchor=ref759794>

<sup>36</sup> Abdalhaqq Bewley. *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*. (London: Dar Al Taqwa, 2007)

commentaries throughout his career and spent most of his days in Cairo.<sup>37</sup> However, he was not as prolific a writer and well-known as his student Suyuti.<sup>38</sup>

‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Abi Bakr ibn Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr ibn ‘Uthman ibn Muhammad ibn Khidr ibn Ayyub ibn Muhammad ibn al-Humam al-Khudayri al-Suyuti (1445-1505) was an Egyptian scholar of Islam who is known for his high quality compilations and abridged versions of extensive texts.<sup>39</sup> Suyuti’s family was from upper Egypt with his father being the first in the family to become an academic.<sup>40</sup> This gave Suyuti an advantage in entering the world of scholarship.<sup>41</sup> Having committed to memory the entirety of the Holy Qur’an before the age of eight, Suyuti continued his studies in legal matters, *hadith*, and Arabic grammar.<sup>42</sup> He managed to have read a great many of the reputable textbooks and commentaries of his day and took his first teaching post at the age of eighteen.<sup>43</sup> On a personal level, he studied various practices of Sufism.

In his early career, he travelled to Mecca, Daimetta, and Alexandria before he established his regular teaching regimen in Cairo.<sup>44</sup> Through these travels, he interacted with and learned from prominent scholars of Islam.<sup>45</sup> As he started writing, his works began to spread out of Egypt, reaching “Syria, the Hijaz, the Yemen, India, the Maghrib, and Takrur.”<sup>46</sup> Suyuti grew to

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<sup>37</sup> Feras Hamza. *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*. (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2008), xxi

<sup>38</sup> Hamza, xxi

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/575880/al-Suyuti?anchor=ref759794>

<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Mary Sartain. *Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP for the Faculty of Oriental Studies, 1975), 21

<sup>41</sup> Sartain, 22

<sup>42</sup> Sartain, 27

<sup>43</sup> Sartain, 31, 37

<sup>44</sup> Sartain, 39-40

<sup>45</sup> Sartain, 39-40

<sup>46</sup> Sartain, 41

be known as one of the foremost scholar in Egypt, but he dealt with many controversial disputes throughout his career.<sup>47</sup> As Mahalli's student, he completed the *Tafsir* after his mentor's death.<sup>48</sup>

Commentary of surah al-Rahman falls into the portion written by Mahalli. He had started with surah al-Kahf and ended with surah al-Nas and surah al-Fatiha.<sup>49</sup> Suyuti then completed the commentary of the first half of the Holy Qur'an within months after Mahalli's death.<sup>50</sup> "The *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* has, since its publication more than half a millennium ago, been considered the essential first text in the study of the meaning of the Qur'an by teachers and students of the Qur'anic text throughout the entire Islamic world from West Africa to Indonesia."<sup>51</sup>

*Tafsir al-Jalalayn* is the most concise and compact commentary out of the six chosen for this study. Explanations are mostly made in terse phrases with occasional reference to *hadith*. This *tafsir* is recognized as a classic mainstream Sunni exegesis and is popular for its simplicity and brevity. The commentary on surah al-Rahman exists alongside the Qur'anic text in five pages of Arabic text.

### **Maraghi**

Mustafa al-Maraghi (1881-1945) was a modernist Islamic scholar who engaged in much legal, social, and educational reform.<sup>52</sup> He served as rector of al-Azhar University in Cairo and was a strong proponent of personal, independent interpretation of the Holy Qur'an and the *Sunnah* (Esposito).<sup>53</sup> Not much information on the Muslim scholar exists in English.

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<sup>47</sup> Sartain, 53

<sup>48</sup> Bewley, xi

<sup>49</sup> Bewley, xi

<sup>50</sup> Bewley, xi

<sup>51</sup> Bewley, xi

<sup>52</sup> John L. Esposito. *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004)

<sup>53</sup> Esposito

*Tafsir al-Maraghi* also follows the standard style of Qur'anic exegesis with support from relevant *hadith*. The commentary on surah al-Rahman spans twenty pages in Arabic text.

## **IMAGERY**

Before examining the work of these six commentators, it is worthwhile to highlight one of the jewels of the beauty of this *surah* – the colorful and elegant imagery. First, the major themes or areas of focus within the *surah* will be discussed. Then, the various poetic ways of conveying imagery will be studied, and finally, the resounding emphasis inherent to the *surah* will be brought to light.

Many Muslims note the vibrant imagery of surah al-Rahman as one of its defining qualities. In studying the progression of images throughout the *surah*, it is evident that there are five distinct themes that are chronologically described in the following sections. The *surah* opens with God's design of creation and its balance and then moves into various wonders of the universe. Near the middle of the chapter, a discussion of the end of the world takes place, and depictions of hell and heaven follow. Over one-third of the *surah* focuses on the qualities of the gardens of paradise, making it one of the best sources for individuals to use in learning about the heaven of Islam.

### **Themes**

This chapter addresses five distinct areas in exemplifying God's mercy: design and balance, wonders in creation, the end of the world, hell, and heaven. Great focus is given to the glory of God's design of the living and the non-living and the wonders of the universe. The parts of the chapter that examine the end of the world and hell are brief but nonetheless convey a clear

and strong message. The theme of paradise takes garners much attention and is noted as a hallmark of the chapter.

The first four verses describe God’s creation of man, the knowledge of the Qur’an instilled upon man, and the skill of communication endowed to man. The imagery then starts with elements of God’s design on earth, such as fruit, corn, and plants. A few examples of the perfect Balance of the universe follow – the synchronicity of the cycles of the sun and moon and the movements of the stars and trees. God created perfect order in the universe for all his creatures to follow and abide by it.

The next set of verses focus on various wonders of the world that exemplify the glory of God. Such wonders include the locations of the sunrise and sunset, the natural separation between salt water and fresh water, and the production of pearl and coral. There is a heavy emphasis on God’s ownership over all of these phenomena. Verse 24 reminds that even man-made contraptions (like ships) all belong to the Lord.

Following descriptions of God’s creation are images of the Last Day, in which everything on earth will come to an end; all that remains is the Face of the Lord. Verses 29 and 33 demonstrate *jinn* and man’s complete dependence on God and their failure without Him. Verses 35 and 37 hold vivid depictions of the turmoil and awe of the end of the world including flashes of fire and smoke and the sky torn apart and turned red. Verse 39 states that the sins of *jinn* and men will be made so clear that they will not need to be questioned.

Although there are only a few verses describing Hell in this *surah*, the warning to *jinn* and men is clear and the punishment severe. The warning example presented in verse 41 is of the *mujrimun* [criminals; disbelievers], who will be taken to hell by their hair and feet. Verse 44 states that a continuous interchange of fire and boiling scalding water awaits such sinners.

The *surah* then takes a drastic shift in tone as descriptions of hell end and images of heaven flow through the rest of the verses. Two tiers of experience in paradise are described in detail. There are two gardens for the believers with flowing water and fruit of all kinds and also beautiful couches with virgin maidens sitting and waiting on them. Under these gardens, there are two other gardens, functioning as the second tier. These are gardens of green life and gushing springs and various fruits. Lovely chaste women also await on green cushions and fine carpets in cool pavilions.

### **Presentation of Imagery**

Poetic and literary patterns appear throughout the chapter, helping to weave together all the vivid images. For example, the use of simile appears in verses 14, 24, 37, and 58. Verse 14 likens God's creation of mankind out of dry clay with the fashioning of pottery. In verse 24, in a description of the wonders of creation, it is said that even the ships belong to God and float like mountain peaks in the sea. Verse 37 describes the sky splitting apart and turning red like oil. Finally, the modest and untouched maidens from verse 56 are compared to the beauty of rubies and the purity of white pearls in verse 58. These figurative comparisons provide readers with a lead into making a few of the abstract concepts discussed in the *surah* more understandable and tangible.

The colors of *surah al-Rahman* evoke strong impressions in the reader's mind as most references are to degrees of red, green, blue, and white. Around twenty verses exhibit words that infer such colors throughout the chapter. The color red is used to emphasize the fierce and bright quality of fire and also broach the idea of bold beauty. Verses 5, 35, 37, 44, and 58 discuss the sun, piercing flame and fiery smoke, the sky going red, the fire of hell, and the precious gem of ruby. Green expresses vibrancy, life, growth, and emphasizes the wonder of God's creation.

These concepts are present in the forms of trees, date-palms, leafy stems, the lush and deep green of the gardens of paradise, spreading branches, and green quilts of virgin maidens in verses 6, 11, 12, 46, 48, 54, 62, 64, 68, and 76. Blue and white demonstrate the refreshing attribute of purity. In verses 19, 22, 24, 50, 58, and 66, these colors are attached to the mentioned seas, glistening pearls, and the flowing gushing springs of paradise.

### **Repetition**

Emphasis is placed on different aspects of God’s mercy throughout the chapter. Four verses discuss the end of the world, two discuss a feature of hell, and sixteen are reserved for the rewards of paradise. Six verses alone (of the sixteen) directly describe the beautiful virgin maidens waiting for those who fear God.

The most emphasized message of surah al-Rahman is repeated thirty-one times – “So which of your Lord’s blessings do you [O *jinn* and man] both deny?” It is clear from this *ayat* that these two types of beings are on entirely equal footing regarding judgment and the punishments or the rewards of the hereafter. With regards to *jinn* and mankind, this chapter distinguishes not on the type of God’s creation but rather on belief. As mentioned earlier, *jinn* and man are divided into three classes – the disbelievers, the best of the believers, and the ordinary believers.<sup>54</sup> The fire and scalding water of hell await the disbelievers (verse 44), while the best of the believers will enjoy beautiful gardens (verse 46), and the rest of the believers will enjoy another set of gardens (verse 62). The repeating verse clearly invokes in its reader serious consideration of God’s mercy to His creation.

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<sup>54</sup> Haleem, 353



## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

With a brief knowledge of the chapter's content from our last section, it is now appropriate to look at the *tafsir* side by side. The following section examines the five identified themes of surah al-Rahman with support from the six selected *tafsir*. This is not meant to be a comprehensive analysis of the *surah*, by any means. It is merely pointing out observations made through reviewing these *tafsir* and highlighting certain explanations that help either elucidate concepts or provide alternative interpretations. Certain stylistic differences among these commentaries are also mentioned. As a general introduction to the surah fifty-five, in the words of Maraghi in his opening section on al-Rahman, "This is a Meccan chapter with seventy-eight verses, revealed after the chapter al-Ra'd."

### **Design and Balance (1-16)**

Surah al-Rahman appropriately opens with the divine attribute *al-Rahman* – the Most Merciful. From the *tafsir al-mufradat* or interpretation of vocabulary of Maraghi's first grouping of verses (1-13), he says, "al-Rahman: one of the ninety-nine names of Allah [*al-Asma' al-Husna*], and for mankind He is the Most Kind, in clear expression..." This idea of God's great mercy prefaces and formulates a framework over everything else that follows. The next few verses discuss the Holy Qur'an, the creation of man, and the inherent balance in the universe.

Qurtubi says about verse 2: "(He [God] *taught the Qur'an*) – This means that He taught his Prophet, may the peace and blessings of God be upon him, until his outreach to the whole of mankind." God's act of teaching the Prophet Muhammad comes before the creation of man (verse 3) and before God's teaching the rest of mankind. Tabari addresses verse 3 and analyzes possible explanations of the number of the word *insan*, or mankind:

Ibn Humayd related to us, he said: Mihran related to us, he said: Sa'id related to us, on the authority of Qatada: (*He created man*) he said: the man is Adam, upon him be peace. And others said: Nay rather he meant by this mankind all together, and he only specified it as being a singular in being a word because of his fulfillment of the entire class of humanity, just as that which is said: (*Verily man is in loss*) [al-Asr: 2], and both sayings are not far from the truth because of the miscibility of plain speech concerning the both of them.

According to Tabari, *insan* may refer to either just Adam or all mankind, meaning that, having been taught clear expression (verse 4) by God, Adam may have helped inform the rest of human creation. The next several verses focus on the balance of God's creation. Tabari explains verse 6: "Ibn Bashshar related to us, he said: Muhammad b. Marwan related to us, he said: Abu Al-'Awwam, on the authority of Qatada: (*The stars and the trees all bow down in prostration*) everything from His creation that He sent down from heaven will worship Him willingly or unwillingly." The focus of balance is centered here on the worship of creation's Creator, with Tabari telling us that, animate or inanimate, these pieces of creation all are unified in the worship of God. Qurtubi offers an alternative meaning to "balance" as *al-'adl* or justice. The next few verses describe some of the blessings God has provided to all living creatures.

Qushayri explains verse 10: "He [God] created the earth and made it in expanse and a lodging for living creatures." Verses 11 and 12 discuss some of the natural beauties and food of the earth. Verse 13 is the first appearance of the line that repeats thirty times throughout the entire chapter. Tabari elucidates this verse:

Muhammad b. 'Ibad b. Musa and 'Amr b. Malik al-Basri related to us, both of them said: Yahya b. Salim al-Ta'ifi related to us, on the authority of Isma'il b.

Umayyah, on the authority of Naf'i, on the authority of Ibn 'Umar, he said: the Messenger of Allah, may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, recited Surah al-Rahman, or it was recited in his presence, so he said: "What is it to me that I hear that the *jinn* have a better answer to your Lord than you do?" They said: what, O Messenger of Allah? He said: "Every time I have brought the word of Allah: (*So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?*) So each time the *jinn* have said: we do not deny any of the graces of our Lord."

In Tabari's interpretation, the Prophet Muhammad is contrasting and comparing the strong belief of the *jinn* and the apparent weak belief of some of mankind. This explanation is notable because this *surah* is the only in which God directly addresses *jinn* in addition to mankind. The Holy Qur'an is a book for both sentient beings.

*Tafsir al-Jalalayn* provides an account similar to that of Tabari regarding verse 13:

(*So which*) yes (*of your Lord's blessings*) O you mankind or *jinn* (*do you both then deny?*) this one was mentioned thirty-one times, and the question in it is for the purposes for an establishment because of that which al-Hakim related that al-Jabir said, "The Messenger of Allah, may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, recited to us Surah al-Rahman until its end, then he said: Why do I see you silent? The *jinn* were better than you in reply, which I never recited for them this particular verse at any time "So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?" without them saying: We do not deny any of the blessings of your Lord nor call it a lie, and so to You be all praise.

Jalalayn's language is slightly different, and this reference presents the belief of the *jinn* on another level. Here, they replied to the Prophet Muhammad in affirmation of God's blessings

without even hearing this particular verse from surah al-Rahman. Jalalayn also hint at the emphasis and significance of this recurring question throughout this *surah*. This explanation is one of the lengthier ones in the entire commentary of surah al-Rahman in *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*.

Huwwari does not delve into much detail regarding verse 13; he comments that it is directed at *al-thaqalayn* or the two weighty throngs (*jinn* and man). Concerning verse 16, the first repetition of this question, he says, “(So which of your Lord’s blessings do you both then deny?) means *jinn* and man. Al-Hasan said: mankind, all of them from the first of them to the last of them are children of Adam. And the *jinn*, all of them from the first of them to the last of them are the children of Iblis [Satan].”<sup>55</sup>

For the following appearances of this question, Huwwari explains that these “blessings” of the Lord refer to *al-ni’am*, or the graces of the Lord. Qushayri also interprets “blessings” as “graces,” but after the first two appearances (verses 13, 16), he does not comment further on this recurring question. Qurtubi comments on verse 13 in saying, “The word of the Most High: (So which of your Lord’s blessings do you both then deny?) It is an address to man and *jinn*; for living creatures are affected by both of them.” This leaves open the discussion of what effects result from the denial of *jinn* and man of God’s blessings.

Maraghi explains this verse with, “It means so which of the advanced/developed graces, O you two weighty throngs from *jinn* and mankind, do you deny?” Maraghi then comments on this verse each time it appears throughout the chapter, providing further explanation based on the respective context. He uses *al-ni’am* and *al-manafi’* (benefits) to explain the Lord’s “blessings” depending upon the context.

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<sup>55</sup> Huwwari

Tabari is quite fond of providing grammatical analyses in his exegesis. He gives an explanation of verses 13-15:

So he said to us what was said: (*So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?*) so He addressed the two, and as for the mention in the first one of the words, was it mankind? It is said: he returned with addressing concerning His word: (*So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?*) to man and *jinn*, and he indicates to that just like that which was after that word, and it was His saying: (*He created man from dry earth like baked clay, and He created the jinn from a fusion of fire*), it had been said: as for making the words in addressing the dual, the predicate had begun concerning one, in accord with what was normative among the practice of the Arabs, and this was that they would address a single person with a verb that is in the dual, so they say: leave it, O young man, and things which are similar to that which had been clarified in our book in more than one place.

Tabari comments again on the number of “man” and that of “*jinn*,” with an explanation of colloquial Arabic practice.

On the subject of *jinn*, Qurtubi discusses verse 15: “al-Hasan said: the *jinn* Iblis, he is the father of the *jinn*. And it is said: the *jinn*, one of the *jinn*, and a jumble of flames; on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas, he said: Allah created the *jinn* from pure fire.” Even though mankind is designed from baked clay and *jinn* from a fusion of fire, God reminds us thirty-one times of His blessings to all of us.

### Wonders of the Lord (17-25)

The next theme of the *surah* focuses on examples of wondrous phenomena within God's universe. Tabari expands on verse 17:

The One Whose Mention is the Most High says: You are astray, O you two weighty matters, (*Lord of the two Easts*) means with those two places that the sun rises: the place where the sun rises in the winter, and the place where the sun rises in the summer. His word: (*and Lord of the two Wests*) means: Lord of the place where the sun goes down in the winter, and the place where the sun goes down in the summer. Concerning that we said in that what the people of interpretation had said.

This explanation of the two Easts and the two Wests stands strong through the other *tafsir*. *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* presents a similar interpretation: “(*The Lord of the two Easts*) the East of the winter and the East of the summer (*and the Lord of the two Wests*) like so.” This is actually very similar to the style of Huwwari's interpretation on this matter. Qushayri says, “The East of the winter and the East of the summer and like that the same for the West (for both of them).” Maraghi says, “(The Lord of the two Easts and the Lord of the two Wests) It means the Lord of the East of the summer and the winter of both of the west...” The commentaries of Huwwari and Jalalayn are much shorter and more concise than the others on this topic. Verse 18 is then the repeating question from God.

Regarding verse 19, because it was quite uncommon for individuals in early Islam or medieval Islam to have had the opportunity to witness large bodies of water, explanations such as the following were quite necessary. Tabari says of this verse: “The people of knowledge differed concerning the two seas both of which Allah the Exalted mentioned in interpretation in

this verse, which seas are these two? So some of them said: both seas: one of the two is in the heavens, and the other is on the earth.”<sup>56</sup> Qurtubi says, “(the two seas): Ibn ‘Abbas said: a sea of the sky and a sea of the earth, and also Mujahid and Sa’id b. Jabir said so.” On the continuation of this sentence in verse 20, Tabari also narrates, “...He said: Yahya b. Wadih related to us, he said: Fitr related to us, on the authority of Mujahid, His word: (*with a barrier between them they do not break through*) he said: between the both of them is an obstacle from Allah, one of them does not break through its owner.” The repeating question from God follows in verse 21.

Verse 22 describes the fruits of such seas, and Qurtubi provides a nice analogy: “The word of the Most High: (*From out of them come glistening pearls and coral*) It means pearls and coral come out to you from the water, just as grains of leafy stems and fragrant herbs [like those mentioned in verse 12] come out of soil.” These descriptions of natural phenomena are followed by a man-made wonder – the ship. Verse 24 says that even these ships belong to God and are one of his boundless blessings to his creation. Qushayri emphasizes the continuous attribute of the ship in contrast with the immovable mountain in the sea. The repeating question to *jinn* and man is then posed again in verses 23 and 25 at the end of the discussion of the wonders of God’s creation.

### **The End of the World (26-40)**

This next set of verses depict the glory and might of God as mankind and *jinn* perish on the Last Day. Verse 27 says that nothing will remain on earth except for the Face of the Lord, upon whom every being is completely dependent. Qurtubi expands on this dependence in his exegesis:

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<sup>56</sup> Tabari

The word of the Most High: (*Everyone in the heavens and the earth requests His aid. Every day He is engaged in some affair*) It is said: the meaning is that whoever is in the heavens asks Him for mercy, but whoever is in the earth asks for sustenance. Ibn ‘Abbas and Abu Salih said: the people of heaven ask Him for forgiveness and do not ask for sustenance; the people of earth ask for both together. Ibn Jurayi said: the angels ask for sustenance on behalf of the people of earth; and so the askers were together from the people of heaven and the people of earth on behalf of the people of earth.

Qurtubi is highlighting here dependence of all people and especially that of the people of earth, all of whom are concerned with earthly sustenance and some of whom are concerned with the sustenance of the afterlife. The repeated question to *jinn* and man that follows now carries a different tone than before – one of awe with respect to the dependence of all beings to Almighty God for worldly and spiritual sustenance.

On the Day of Judgment, God will settle our affairs in determining our destination in the afterlife (verse 31). Qushayri explains this verse: “It is for the account on the Day of Judgment – there will be no dealings with you...only Most High Allah regarding that. And the verse means: it will be intended for your account.” He interprets that there will be no last minute concessions for man or *jinn* during judgment; God will settle our affairs.

Verse 33 is a challenge to the arrogance of man or *jinn*, and 35 describes the result of such arrogance – God will not help some among both the *jinn* and man.<sup>57</sup> Qurtubi emphasizes that some among us will not be helped at a time in which the world will be falling apart and filled with chaos. Tabari explains what will happen to the sky (verse 37): “‘Abdullah b. Ahmad

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<sup>57</sup> Qurtubi



b. Shubuyah related to us, he said: Shahhab b. ‘Ibad related to us, he said: Ibrahim b. Hamid related to us, on the authority of Isma’il b. Abu Khalid, on the authority of Abu Salih concerning His word: (*red like dregs of oil*) he said: it becomes like the color of a pink horse, then later it becomes like red oil.” Huwwari describes the color of sky in the same manner with reference to Mujahid. *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* adds that the splitting of the sky marks the opening of the gates of heaven and the descent of angels on earth, bringing about a reddish color like that of red leather. Maraghi provides a more vivid explanation of what will happen to the universe on the Last Day: “It means when the Day of Judgment splits the heavens and mixes their systems, and their graves and planets scatter from their orbits, in a red color and melted until it becomes as oil from that which is of paint.”

The discussion of the Last Day ends with verse 39 in the simple assertion that no man or *jinn* will be asked of his or her sin. Qushayri proposes one explanation: “He [God] wanted in some conditions of the Last Day that they not ask, and they ask in some of them...so that the Day of Judgment will be long.” This allows for plenty of discussion on what these conditions of the Day of Judgment might be. The repeating verse to *jinn* and man surrounds the aforementioned scenes of the Last Day as verses 32, 34, 36, 38, and 40.

### **Hell (41-45)**

The following few verses now provide a glimpse into the punishment of hell, starting with what will happen to evildoers on the Last Day. Several of our selected commentaries provide clear descriptions of the “mark” of the evildoers. *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* reports of verse 41: “(*The evildoers will be recognized by their mark*) the darkness of their faces and the blueness of their eyes (*and seized by their forelocks and their feet*).” Huwwari asserts the same explanation, and Qurtubi affirms, “al-Hasan said: the darkness of their faces and the blueness of their eyes...”

Qurtubi along with Qushayri also explain that these marks will be recognized by angels who will seize these individuals.

Verse 43 plainly states that the existence of hell; Qurtubi comments, “(This is the hell which the evildoers deny) This means that He told them about this fire of which He informed you with that which you denied.” Qushayri’s explanation of verses 43-33 is on a harsher tone: “He says to them: this is the hell which you were denying!”

Verse 44 delivers the only direct description of hell in this chapter. Tabari relates, “Ibn Bashshar related to us, he said: Muhammad b. Marwan related to us, he said: Abu al-’Awwam related to us, on the authority of Qatada: (*Fire and scalding water*) he said: it has been cooking since the day Allah created the heavens and the earth.”<sup>58</sup> Qurtubi presents the same explanation: “It has been cooking since Allah created the heavens and the earth...” Although surah al-Rahman does not contain further depictions of the hellfire, this imagery nonetheless serves as a strong warning to the reader. Verses 42 and 45 are the repeating question to *jinn* and man, this time administering a tone of admonition.

### **Heaven (46-78)**

The lengthiest theme expressed in surah al-Rahman is quite appropriate as demonstrating the pinnacle of God’s mercy to His creation, *jinn* and men in particular. About a third of the entire chapter is focused on heaven and features of its glory. The recurring question to *jinn* and man appears in this section alone sixteen times and carries a much different tone than what came before. God provides numerous examples of His blessings in quite vivid and easily understandable detail; the question posed here to his audience makes it quite difficult to turn our hearts away from such promised rewards and pleasures.

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<sup>58</sup> Tabari

Verse 46 introduces the gardens of paradise to “those who fear the station of their Lord.” Tabari elucidates what it means to be among “those”: “Bishr related to us, he said: Yazid related to us, he said: Sa’id related to us, on the authority of Qatada, His word: (*For those who fear the Station of their Lord, there are two Gardens*) he said: if the believers fear Your rule, they fear that standing and they work toward it, they profess it, they worship in the night and the day.” Huwwari provides another point of view: “He said: (*For those who fear the Station of their Lord*) it means the one who resides between the hands of his Lord to the account, in the commentary of al-Hasan, (*there are two gardens*). And the commentary of Mujahid: he is whoever desired in sin but remembered Allah and remembered His existence and so left it [the sin].” These two explanations help piece together what it may mean to be worthy of the first tier of paradise – to be devout in worship and to remember God before action.

The next several verses discuss what is found in these two gardens – shade from spreading branches, flowing springs, fruit, and maidens. On the flowing springs of verse 50, Tabari says, “The One Whose Mention is the Most High says: in these two gardens is a spring of water flowing through the both of them, and so which of these blessings of your Lord do you both deny?” Qushayri explains what these springs are called: “One of the two is named *Tasneem*, and the other is named *Salsabil*.” The same names appear in Qurtubi’s commentary.

*Tafsir al-Jalalayn* explains the kinds of fruit to be found in the gardens (verse 52): “(*In them are every fruit*) of this world or all kinds in it (*two kinds*) fresh [moist] and dry, and that which is bitter in the world like the *hanzal* will be sweet in the next.” Huwwari adds that these fruits will be of pleasing colors. Verse 54 continues in describing that these fruits of paradise will be easily accessible and within comfortable reach to the people of heaven.

It is then in verse 56 that God introduces the companions to the inhabitants of paradise. *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* explains a few qualities of these maidens: “(In them) in both gardens and places high from it and palaces (*are maidens with eyes for them alone*) their eyes on their reclining husbands whether man or *jinn (untouched)* [virgin] these are those *hur* [women] of paradise and some women from this world by birth (*before them by either man or jinn*).” This commentary answers the reader’s possible concern for state of female believers and their place in paradise. Some of these beautiful maidens will be from among the believers of the people of earth. Huwwari further confirms this matter with his explanation: “It means whoever was from among the believers among the women of the earth.”

Tabari remarks on the simile of verse 58:

“Bishr related to us, he said: Yazid related to us, he said: Sa’id related to us, on the authority of Qatada: (*Like precious gems of ruby and pearl*): pure ruby in white coral, it was mentioned to us by the Prophet of Allah, may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, he said: ‘He who enters paradise, so for him in it are two spouses of whom he sees their leg marrows from beneath their clothes.’”

This is a way to emphasize the beauty emanating from these women. On the same verse, Qushayri gives his perspective: “It means: in the purity of sapphire and the color of coral.” The concept of purity in this chapter is quite evenly shared between the refreshing flowing springs and the chaste companions waiting for the believers.

Verse 60 calls further attention to the offered blessings of paradise. Huwwari explains this verse: “The Most High said: (*Will the reward for doing good be anything other than good?*) It means: will the reward of belief be anything except paradise?” Qurtubi expands on this idea of verse 60:

‘Ikrimah said: it means what penalty is there for the one who said there is no god but Allah except paradise? Ibn ‘Abbas: what penalty is there for the one who said there is no god but Allah and worked with that which Muhammad, may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, brought except paradise. It was said: what penalty is there for the one who did good on earth except for good to come to him in the afterlife...

Also on verse 60, Qushayri conveys: “He says: the first [foremost] reward is from Allah, and the second is from the servant...” From Huwwari and Qurtubi’s commentary and from Qushayri’s assertion, it can be inferred that believers will be treated with justice and mercy simultaneously. They will be rewarded with good for the good they have done themselves – justice, but the good of God is far better than the good of *jinn* or man – mercy.

From verse 62 to the end of the *surah*, God now discusses two other gardens of paradise, which are said to be for the ordinary believers, as opposed to the best of the believers.<sup>59</sup> These descriptions of the second tier are nonetheless quite similar to those in the previous verses and still depict a rather pleasant state of being. *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* comments on verse 62: “(As well as those two) remembered gardens (there will be two other Gardens) those who fear the time when they will stand before their Lord.” The fear that is mentioned here is of a different nature compared to the fear of verse 46. While the fear of verse 46 is one of constancy throughout the believers life – so constant that he or she would spend day and night in worship, the fear explained of verse 62 is of a specific consequence – the fear of judgment. This difference may be enough to distinguish one of the best of the believers from an ordinary one.

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<sup>59</sup> Haleem, 353

In describing these other two gardens, the next few verses (64, 66, 68, and 70) perfectly parallel what was described of the first two gardens (verse 46) – gardens of green, springs, fruit, and maidens. Huwwari says of the maidens of verse 70: “He said: (In them are sweet lovely maidens) It means women, one from among them being the finest.” Maraghi also explains, “It means in these two gardens there will be women beautiful in ethics, and good in countenance.” Verses 72, 74, and 76 go on to affirm the chastity and beauty of these women and their surroundings. Tabari provides a general commentary of these few verses regarding the desirability of these gardens: “Qatada said: he used to say: the dwelling place of the believers in paradise is such that a rider will ride on a steed in it three nights, and its streams and gardens and that which Allah has prepared for him from His generosity.”

The *surah* closes with verse 78: “Blessed be the name of your Lord, Master of Majesty and Generosity!” Qurtubi says that “...it means that is the name which opened this *surah*...” The last verse is to provide a final reminder of God’s immense mercy encapsulated in the name al-Rahman. This *surah* walked its reader through his or her creation all the way through a vivid glimpse at the afterlife, with the mercy of God guiding the entire journey.

## DISCUSSION

It is apparent that the *tafasir* of Tabari, Huwwari, Qushayri, Qurtubi, Jalalayn, and Maraghi present commentary with very similar content but with varying styles and instances of varying perspectives. The different time periods represented among them most greatly influenced vocabulary choice and the complexity of commentary. The philosophical stances of the commentators (mainstream, Sufi, legalist, modernist) most greatly influence style of writing and points of focus throughout their respective exegeses.

*Tafsir al-Tabari*, the oldest commentary of the selection, is an extensive exegesis with heavy repetition through references of many sources. Tabari comprehensively and regularly cites hadith to support his explanations, usually opening with a long *isnad*, (chain of narration). With the exception of Qurtubi, Tabari is unique in the group for presenting such lengthy references. Tabari and Qurtubi both utilize occasional examples from the works of various poets to aid interpretations of certain verses. It is also characteristic of Tabari to provide grammatical analyses of passages – Qurtubi does this sometimes also. Common grammatical explanations include reasons for plurals or duals in certain verses. Tabari and Qurtubi also group several verses together at a time occasionally in their interpretations. For example, Qurtubi grouped together verses 41-45, which all deal with hell. In addition to utilizing other Qur’anic verses to aid in explaining a section, Qurtubi also uses verses from the same *surah* some for his interpretations.

*Tafsir al-Jalalayn* is on the opposite side of the spectrum. The Jalals are brief and to the point. It is helpful to begin a study with this *tafsir* as it will provide a foundation of short and most common interpretations of passages. Huwwari’s *tafsir*, which came not too long after that of Tabari, shares similar style with *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*. Many of the same explanations are given between Huwwari and Jalalayn. It may be fair to even say that *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* seems to be very concise, abridged version of *Tafsir al-Huwwari*.

Huwwari does not explain every verse in his exegesis of surah al-Rahman. For example, he does not pay much attention to some of the verses descriptive of paradise near the end of the *surah*. Qushayri, the third oldest, actually does not comment on the repeating question (verse 13) after its first few appearances. He also does not comment on every verse, but he does selectively provide much detail for others, clearly emphasizing certain aspects of the *surah*. Huwwari and

Qushayri both combine verses in their explanations sometimes instead of treating them individually.

Maraghi, the most recent scholar of interest, differs from the rest of the *tafsir* most notably in style of commentary. He presents a clear and organized approach to exegesis. First, he provides a grouping of verses, and then he presents his explanations in three parts: *tafsir al-mufradat* or interpretation of the vocabulary, *al-ma'na al-jumla* or meaning of the sentences, and *al-idah* or clarification. His *tafsir al-mufradat* provides a general context description with the particular words used in the selection. *Al-ma'na al-jumla* breaks down the purposes of the verses. Finally, *al-idah* addresses each verse individually and is most similar in style to the other commentaries. His departure from the traditional style of exegesis may be attributed to his modernist approach to Islam.

Maraghi also occasionally uses poetry to supplement the context and approach to his commentary. His groupings of verses before each set of his three-part exegesis actually fall quite similarly to the breakdown of themes as discussed earlier. He approaches surah al-Rahman in these sections: verses 1-13, 14-25, 26-30, 31-36, 37-45, 46-61, and 62-78. Throughout his *tafsir*, Maraghi presents no long *isnad* nor any footnotes.

## CONCLUSION

Surah 55: al-Rahman is timeless. It concisely encapsulates the journey of the *jinn* and of mankind from the point of our creation up to our eternal dwelling-place after life on earth. It provides a number of examples of God's mercy and His blessings bestowed upon His creation. It serves to inform the reader, question the reader, warn the reader, inspire the reader, and give



hope to the reader. It is clear that this three-page chapter of the Holy Qur'an deserves more than one glance.

For the extensive look at a few of the many features of paradise, this chapter has been for centuries and will always be cherished by Muslims. For Muslims and non-Muslims alike, it is easy to appreciate the levels of imagery and the poetic beauty of repetition. The colors are made real with universal concepts of the natural world, and the wonders within God's creation are brought to life through simple and clear analogies.

This study of al-Rahman consisted of an appreciatively broad cross-section of scholars of different time periods, different philosophical approaches to life and to the study of Islam, and different degrees of readership. Through an elucidation of the five major themes of the surah, which bring the reader from God's design of the universe and His wonders to the Day of Judgment, and finally the two possible destinations of the afterlife, a comparative analysis of our six *tafsir* demonstrated each commentator's exegetic approach and style. Tabari and Qurtubi provide the most extensive and referenced interpretations, Huwwari and Jalalayn present concise and simpler explanations, Qushayri directs attention to particular areas of the surah, and Maraghi offers an alternative structure of exegesis with different levels of commentary.

It is clear that there are universal interpretations of each part of the chapter, but there are also multiple angles of view for each verse. Each commentator brings a different lens and opens a different window into the meaning of God's message. The study of such a text has no bounds but the ability to connect with any open-minded student. This particular study was by no means comprehensive or conclusive. It merely attempted to knock at the door and unlock a little meaning from the rich and classical Arabic. On its surface, al-Rahman conveys a refreshing

simplicity, but just as a bride, it is beautiful on multiple levels and full of seemingly hidden meaning.

## APPENDIX

### English Translation of Surah 55: al-Rahman<sup>60</sup>

In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind

1 The All-Merciful

2 ...taught the Qur'an.

3 He created man

4 ...and taught him clear expression.

5 The sun and the moon both run with precision.

6 The stars and the trees all bow down in prostration.

7 He erected heaven and established the balance

8 ...so that you would not transgress the balance.

9 Give just weight – do not skimp in the balance.

10 He laid out the earth for all living creatures.

11 In it are fruits and date-palms with covered spathes

12 ...and grains of leafy stems, and fragrant herbs.

13 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?

14 He created man from dry earth like baked clay

15 ...and He created the *jinn* from a fusion of fire.

16 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?

17 The Lord of the two Easts and the Lord of the two Wests.

18 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?

19 He has let loose the two seas converging together

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<sup>60</sup> Bewley, 1152-1158

- 20 ...with a barrier between them they do not break through.
- 21 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?
- 22 From out of them come glistening pearls and coral.
- 23 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?
- 24 His, too, are the ships sailing like mountain peaks on the sea.
- 25 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?
- 26 Everyone on it will pass away
- 27 ...but the Face of your Lord will remain, Master of Majesty and Generosity.
- 28 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?
- 29 Everyone in the heavens and earth requests His aid. Every day He is engaged in some affair.
- 30 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?
- 31 Soon We will settle your affairs, you two weighty throngs.
- 32 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?
- 33 Company of *jinn* and men, if you are able to pierce through the confines of the heavens and earth, pierce through them. You will not pierce through except with a clear authority.
- 34 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?
- 35 He will pursue you with a piercing flame and fiery smoke and you will not be helped
- 36 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?
- 37 When heaven is split apart and goes red like dregs of oil.
- 38 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?
- 39 That Day no man or *jinn* will be asked about his sin.
- 40 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?
- 41 The evildoers will be recognised by their mark and seized by their forelocks and their feet.

42 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?

43 This is Hell which the evildoers deny.

44 They will go back and forth between fire and scalding water.

45 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?

46 For those who fear the Station of their Lord, there are two Gardens.

47 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?

48 Shaded by spreading branches.

49 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?

50 In them are two clear flowing springs.

51 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?

52 In them are two kinds of every fruit

53 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?

54 They will be reclining on couches lined with rich brocade, the fruits of the Gardens hanging close to hand.

55 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?

56 In them are maidens with eyes for them alone – untouched before them by either man or *jinn*

57 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?

58 Like precious gems of ruby and pearl.

59 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?

60 Will the reward for doing good be anything other than good?

61 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?

62 As well as those two, there will be two other Gardens

63 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?

64 Of deep viridian green.

65 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?

66 In them are two gushing springs.

67 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?

68 In them are fruits and date-palms and pomegranates.

69 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?

70 In them are sweet, lovely maidens

71 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?

72 Dark-eyed, secluded in cool pavilions.

73 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?

74 Untouched before them by either man or *jinn*.

75 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?

76 Reclining on green quilts and exquisite rugs.

77 So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?

78 Blessed be the name of your Lord, Master of Majesty and Generosity!

## Glossary<sup>61</sup>

*ayat* – verse

*hadith* – sayings of the Prophet Muhammad

*hur* – expression of purity; maidens of paradise

*al-idah* – clarification; the title of the third type of explanations in Maraghi's exegesis, verse by verse interpretations

*insan* – mankind

*isnad*, pl. *asanid* – chain of narration, used to relate sayings of the Prophet Muhammad

*jinn* – sentient beings created from smokeless fire, inhabitants of earth who are invisible to man

*al-manafi'* – benefits

*al-ma'na al-jumla* – meaning of the sentences; the title of the second type of explanations in Maraghi's exegesis, explains the purposes of the verses

*mujrimun* – criminals; disbelievers

*al-ni'am* – graces

*Qur'an* – the holy book of Islam, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad over a course of 23 years in the seventh century A.D.

*Sunnah* – the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad

*surah* – chapter of the Qur'an (a total of one hundred fourteen comprise the entire book)

*tafsir*, pl. *tafasir* – commentary, exegesis of the Holy Qur'an

*tafsir al-mufradat* – interpretation of the vocabulary; the title of the first type of explanations in Maraghi's exegesis, general context description of a grouping of verses

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<sup>61</sup> This reference provides extensive and comprehensive definitions: Hans Wehr and J. Milton Cowan. *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic: (Arabic-English)*. Ithaca, NY: Spoken Language Services, 1994.

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