

Surah 17. Al-Israa

Asad: LIMITLESS in His glory is He who transported His servant by night from the Inviolable House of Worship [at Mecca] to the Remote House of Worship [at Jerusalem] - the environs of which We had blessed¹ - so that We might show him some of Our symbols: for, verily, He alone is all-hearing, all-seeing².

Malik: Glory be to Him Who took His devotee (Muhammad) one night from Masjid-al-Haram (in Makkah) to Masjid-al-Aqsa (in Jerusalem), whose vicinity We have blessed, so that We may show him some of Our signs: surely He is the One Who is the Hearer, the Observer.

Pickthall: Glorified be He Who carried His servant by night from the Inviolable Place of Worship to the Far Distant Place of Worship the neighborhood whereof We have blessed, that We might show him of Our tokens! Lo! He, only He, is the Hearer, the Seer.

Yusuf Ali: Glory to (Allah) Who did take His Servant for Journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque whose precincts We did Bless in order that We might show him some of Our Signs: for He is the one Who heareth and seeth (all things). 2166 2167 2168 2169

Transliteration: Subhāna allathēe asrā biAAabdihi laylan mina almasjidi alharami ilā almasjidi alaqsa allathēe barakna hawlahu linuriyahu min ayatina innahu huwa alIssameeAAu albaseeru

Khatab:

Glory be to the One Who took His servant ?Mu?ammad? by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque whose surroundings We have blessed, so that We may show him some of Our signs.¹ Indeed,

He² alone is the All-Hearing, All-Seeing.

Author Comments

1 - The above short reference to the Prophet's mystic experience of the "Night Journey" (al-isra') to Jerusalem and the subsequent "Ascension" (mi'raj) to heaven is fully discussed in Appendix IV at the end of this work. - "The Inviolable House of Worship" (al-masjid al-haram) is one of the designations given in the Qur'an to the Temple of the Ka'bah, the prototype of which owed its origin to Abraham (see surah {2}, note [102]) and was "the first Temple set up for mankind" (3:96), i.e., the first ever built for the worship of the One God. "The Remote [lit., "farthest"] House of Worship", on the other hand, denotes the ancient Temple of Solomon - or, rather, its site - which symbolizes here the long line of Hebrew prophets who preceded the advent of Muhammad and are alluded to by the phrase "the environs of which We had blessed". The juxtaposition of these two sacred temples is meant to show that the Qur'an does not inaugurate a "new" religion but represents a continuation and the ultimate development of the same divine message which was preached by the prophets of old.

2 - Although the term ayah is most frequently used in the Qur'an in the sense of "[divine] message", we

must remember that, primarily, it denotes "a sign [or "token"] by which a thing is known" (Qamus). As defined by Raghib, it signifies any perceivable phenomenon (irrespective of whether it is apparent to the senses or only to the intellect) connected with a thing that is not, by itself, similarly perceivable: in brief, a "symbol". Hence, the expression min ayatina may be suitably rendered as "some of Our symbols", i.e., insight, through symbols, into some of the ultimate truths.

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Al-Isrâ' refers to the Prophet's Night Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem about a year before his emigration (or Hijrah) from Mecca to Medina. This journey came as a comfort for the Prophet after several years of hardship and persecution, which included a 3-year siege by Meccan pagans, who drove the Muslims out of the city and forbade anyone from trading, marrying, or feeding them. This was followed by the "Year of Sadness," which included the death of the Prophet's uncle Abu ?âlib, the major defender of Mu?ammad (?) despite his disbelief in his message, as well as the death of the Prophet's beloved wife Khadîjah. The Prophet was carried overnight by a noble steed (called Burâq) from Mecca to Jerusalem where he met some earlier prophets and led them in prayer. He was later carried to the heavens (this journey is called Al-Mi'râj, or the Ascension) where he received direct orders from Allah to observe five daily prayers. The Ascension is referred to in 53:13–18.

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i.e., Allah.

2166 - The reference is to the Isrâ' for which see the Introduction to this Sura.

2167 - Masjid is a place of prayer: here it refers to the Ka'ba at Makkah. It had not yet been cleared of its idols and rededicated exclusively to the One True God. It was symbolical of the new Message which was being given to mankind.

2168 - The Farthest Mosque must refer to the site of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem on the hill of Moriah, at or near which stands the Dome of the Rock, called also the Mosque of Hadhrat 'Umar. This and the Mosque known as the Farthest Mosque (Masjid-ul-Aqsa) were completed by the Amir 'Abd-ul-Malik in A.H. 68. Farthest, because it was the place of worship farthest west which was known to the Arabs in the time of the holy Prophet: it was a sacred place to both Jews and Christians, but the Christians then had the upper hand, as it was included in the Byzantine (Roman) Empire, which maintained a Patriarch at Jerusalem. The chief dates in connection with the Temple are: it was finished by Solomon about B.C. 1004; destroyed by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar about 586 B.C.; rebuilt under Ezra and Nehemiah about 515 B.C.; turned into a heathen idol-temple by one of Alexander's successors, Antiochus Epiphanes, 167 B.C.; restored by Herod, B.C. 17 to A.D. 29; and completely razed to the ground by the Emperor Titus in A.D. 70. These ups and downs are among the greater Signs in religious history.

2169 - Allah's knowledge comprehends all things, without any curtain of Time or any separation of Space. He can therefore see and hear all things, and the Mi'raj was a reflection of this knowledge. In this and the subsequent verses, the reference to Allah is generally in the first person and plural. But in the first and the last clause of this verse it is in the third person singular: "Glory to Allah, Who did take His Servant..."; "He is the One...". In each of these two instances, the clause expresses the point of view of Allah's creatures, who glorify Him, and whose hearing and seeing are ordinarily so limited that they can do nothing but glorify Him when one of His creatures is raised up to hear and see the Signs. It is they who glorify Him.

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