

## 1.2 Faith: *sūrat al-bayyina* (98), ‘The clear sign’ (also known as *sūrat lam yakun*, ‘It would not be’)

In the name of God, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate.  
*bismiʿllāhi ʿr-rahmān ir-rahīm*

1. The unbelievers of the people of the book and the idolaters would not leave off until the clear sign comes to them,  
*lam yakuni ʿlladhīna kafarū min ahli ʿl-kitābi waʿl-mushrikīna munfakkīna ḥattā taṭiyahumu ʿl-bayyina*
2. a messenger from God, reading aloud pages purified,  
*rasūlum mina ʿllāhi yatlū ṣuḥufam muṭahhara*
3. therein true books.  
*fīhā kutubun qayyima*
4. And those who were given the book did not separate except after the clear sign came to them.  
*wa mā tafarraqa ʿlladhīna ūtū ʿl-kitāba illā min baʿdi mā jāʿathumu ʿl-bayyina*
5. They were commanded only to serve God, making the religion His, sincerely as men of true faith, and to establish prayer and pay the alms; and that is the religion of the true.  
*wa mā umirū illā li-yābudū ʿllāha mukhliṣīna lahu ʿd-dīna ḥunafāʿa wa-yuqīmū ʿṣ-ṣalāta wa yutū ʿz-zakā wa dhālika dīnu ʿl-qayyima*
6. The unbelievers of the people of the book and the idolaters will be in the fire of Gehenna, therein dwelling forever. Those are the worst of creatures.  
*inna ʿlladhīna kafarū min ahli ʿl-kitābi wa ʿl-mushrikīna fī nāri jahannama khālidīna fīhā ulāʿika hum sharru ʿl-bariyya*
7. But those who believe and do righteous deeds, those are the best of creatures,  
*inna ʿlladhīna āmanū wa ʿamilū ʿṣ-ṣāliḥāti ulāʿika hum khayru ʿl-bariyya*
8. their recompense is with their Lord; gardens of Eden, underneath which rivers flow, therein dwelling forever and ever; God is well pleased with them and they are well pleased with Him; that is for him who fears his Lord.  
*jazāʿuhum ʿinda rabbihim jannātu ʿadnin tajrī min taḥtiḥā ʿl-anhāru khālidīna fīhā abadar raḍīya ʿllāhu ʿanhum wa raḍū ʿanh dhālika li-man khashiya rabbah*

### 5.7 Al-Zamakhsharī on *sūrat al-bayyina* (98)

Abū ʿl-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī (467/1075–538/1144) was a philologist, theologian and Qurʾān commentator. For most of his life al-Zamakhsharī lived in the region of his birth, Khwarazm in Central Asia, although he did spend some time studying in Bukhara and Baghdad, and twice he visited Mecca. Motivated by a great appreciation of Arabic (although he was a native Persian speaker) and influenced by rationalist Muʿtazilī theology, al-Zamakhsharī wrote one of the most widely read commentaries on the Qurʾān called *al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq ghawāmid al-tanzīl*, ‘The unveiler of the realities of the sciences of the revelation’. Despite what came to be regarded as its heretical theological slant, the work has been an essential part of the curriculum of religious education throughout the Muslim world for centuries. It attracted many super-commentaries which attempted to explain its terse style and intricacies, as well as refutations (e.g., by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī; see section 5.8) and bowdlerized versions (e.g., by al-Bayḍāwī, d. c. 691/1292). Al-Zamakhsharī comments on each phrase of the Qurʾān in sequence, providing philosophical, lexicographical and philological glosses while displaying a concern for the rhetorical qualities of the text. His text is also imbued with his theological vision which is characterized by a thorough-going de-anthropomorphization and support for the doctrines of human free will and the created Qurʾān. Among al-Zamakhsharī’s numerous other works are books on Arabic grammar, rhetoric and lexicography, and a collection of proverbs.

#### Further reading

Lutpi Ibrahim, ‘Al-Zamakhsharī: his life and works,’ *Islamic studies*, 19 (1980), pp. 95–110.  
 Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qurʾānic Christians: an analysis of classical and modern exegesis*, Cambridge 1991, pp. 49–54.  
 Sabine Schmidtke, *A Muʿtazilite creed of az-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144): al-Minhāg fī uṣūl ad-dīn*, Abhandlung für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 51/4, Stuttgart 1997.

#### Source text

Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq ghawāmid al-tanzīl*, Cairo 1966, vol. 4, pp. 274–5.

1. The unbelievers are of two types, the people of the book and the worshippers of idols. Before the mission of the prophet they all used to say, ‘We will not leave off from what we have in our religion. We will not leave it until the prophet who is promised and described in the Torah and the Gospel is sent.’ He is Muḥammad. God reported what they used to say. Then He said, *And those who were given the book did not separate*, meaning that they promised in the agreement of their words and in conforming with the truth that when they were sent the messenger, then they would not separate from the truth. Then they established themselves in disbelief at the coming of the messenger.

2. This is parallel to what is said in speech, as in when a poor and corrupt person says to someone who admonishes him, 'I will not be stopped from my evil actions until God bestows wealth upon me.' When God does bestow wealth on him, his corruption only increases. So, his admonisher says to him, 'You have not left off from your corruption even though you are able to. You slip your head into corruption even after the situation has eased.' This was said as a rebuke and a rejection of the argument.
3. Separating something from something else means that something leaves something else after having adhered to it. This is like a bone which becomes separated from the joint. So the meaning is that they are those who cling to their religion and do not leave it until the time of the coming of the clear sign.
4. *The clear sign* means the evident proof; *a messenger* is in apposition with *the clear sign*; in the reading of 'Abd Allāh [ibn Mas'ūd] it reads *rasūlan* and is a circumstantial phrase related to *the clear sign*. *Pages, sheets of paper, purified of impurity. Books, things written; true, endowed with truth and justice.*
5. The sense of 'their separating' is that they separated and scattered from the truth. Or, it could mean that they separated into groups, among whom some believed and some rejected the truth. It could not be, however, that there were those who were stubborn and resistant [and some who were not]. If you say, why did He bring together the people of the book and the idolaters at the beginning and then separate out the people of the book in His saying, *And those who were given the book did not separate*, I would say that they had knowledge of Muḥammad since he appeared in their books. If the idolaters were described as separating from him, then the verse would have suggested that those who did not have a book were included in this description.
6. *They were commanded only*, that is, in the Torah and the Gospel and, except for the *ḥanīfī* aspects, they altered and changed their scriptures. *That is the religion of the true*, that is, the religion of the true community. This is also read, 'That is the true religion' by understanding 'religion' as 'community' [i.e., in order to explain the feminine ending on 'true']. If you ask, 'What is the meaning of His saying, *They were commanded only to serve God?*', I would reply that its meaning is that they were only commanded by what is in the two books to worship God in this way. Ibn Mas'ūd reads this, 'except that they worship' with the meaning, '(they were commanded) in the service . . .'. Nāfi' reads *al-barī'a* with a *hamza* while the (majority of the) readers have it with a doubled *yā'*. This is the same as *al-nabī* in that it utilizes the doubling of the letter rather than following the root. There is also a reading 'best of creation' using the plural *khiyār* of 'best' [*khayr*, as in the standard text] as in the plural forms of 'outstanding' (*jiyād*) and 'good things' (*tiyāb*) from the singulars *jayyid* and *tayyib*.
7. It is reported on the authority of the messenger of God that he said, 'Whoever reads *lam yakun* [i.e., Q 98] in the evening in his resting place will be with the best of creation on the day of resurrection.'