

The Throne Theophany/Prophetic Call of Muḥammad

Daniel C. Peterson,
Stephen D. Ricks

Walther Zimmerli, in his magisterial commentary on the book of Ezekiel, distinguishes between two kinds of prophetic call in the Hebrew Bible—the narrative type of call that is characterized by a dialogue with Yahweh and the divine call and commission preceded by a “throne vision,”¹ “the apocalyptic vision of God (in human form) seated on his throne preceding the call of the prophet.”²

Details of the traditions providing the background to Qur’ān 74:1–7, among Muḥammad’s first revelations—or, according to some Muslim and Western commentators, his *first* canonical revelation³—contain elements that are strikingly similar to features of the “throne-theophany” type of prophetic call outlined by Zimmerli and described in greater detail by John J. Collins and others.⁴ In this paper, we consider these verses, as well as other passages from the Qur’ān and the *ḥadīth* or traditions of the Prophet Muḥammad—with accompanying discussions and explanations by the commentators, medieval and modern—that illuminate our understanding of their meaning. In particular, we pay attention to the context and use of the word *throne*, which is crucial to a proper understanding of the background of these verses.

On the authority of Jābir b. ‘Abdullāh,⁵ the following background to Qur’ān (hereafter Q) 74:1–7 is given in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī. Preceding the receipt of Q 74:1–7, Muḥammad is said to have completed his period of meditation in Mount Ḥira’ and to be descending from the mountain when he heard a voice. He looked around but saw no one. He then looked above his head, “and there He was, sitting upon the throne.” After this, being “burdened [i.e., troubled] thereby,” Muḥammad went home to his wife Khadīja and begged her to cover him up, which she did.⁶ Thereupon he received the message contained in Q 74:1–7: “O thou wrapped up in thy raiment! Keep vigil the night long, save a little—A half thereof, or abate a little thereof, Or add (a little) thereto—and chant the Qur’ān in measure. For We shall charge thee with a word of right. Lo! the vigil of the night is (a time) when impression is more keen and speech more certain. Lo! thou hast by day a chain of business.”⁷

Who is the “He” in the statement of Bukhārī: “and there He was sitting upon the throne”? There seems to be a reticence on the part of certain Muslim Qur’ānic commentators to answer this question. According to al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad at this juncture saw “something” (*shay*).⁸ Others, such as Muslim and Ibn Kathīr, assert that it was the angel Gabriel.⁹ However, an analysis of the Qur’ān’s use of the term *throne* (Arabic *kursī*/*‘arsh*) serves to strengthen the assumption that it is none other than God himself who is referred to here, a possibility allowed by some Muslim commentators and one that many Western scholars hold to.¹⁰

A survey of Qur’ānic data supports the association of the throne exclusively with God. Throughout the Qur’ān, God is described as “the lord of the throne.” He is *rabb al-‘arsh* (“lord of the throne”) at Q 9:129, 23:86, and 43:82; at Q 27:26 he is uniquely so. In Q 40:15, 81:20, and 85:15, he is *dhū al-‘arsh* (“possessor of the throne”). While nondivine thrones are mentioned Qur’ānically in both the story of Joseph and his parents (Q 12:100) and the Queen of Sheba (Q 27:23, 38, 41, 42), neither Gabriel nor any other angel is ever associated with a throne. Indeed, at Q 17:42 (cf. Q 21:22), God is asserted to be uniquely *dhū al-‘arsh* in distinction even to hypothetical other gods. It seems unlikely, therefore, that Gabriel, a mere angel and thus a creature, would possess a throne.

W. Montgomery Watt and others further argue that Gabriel was only identified as the vehicle of revelation quite late, and that, at the first, it was God himself who was viewed as the agent of inspiration. “This indicates a growing and changing understanding of spiritual things in the minds of Muḥammad and the Muslims,” Watt writes, contending that the earlier view gave way to a theological principle that God could not be seen.¹¹

In his eleventh-century compilation *al-Mufradāt*, al-Raghīb remarks somewhat irritably that the ‘*arsh* of God “is one of the things which mankind know not in reality, but only by name; and it is not as the imaginations of the vulgar hold it to be [namely, the throne of God].”¹² Edward Lane offers yet other definitions of a spiritualized character, giving us such renderings as “the highest sphere” (i.e., highest of the celestial spheres) and “the empyrean.”¹³ Yet the phrasing of al-Raghīb’s exclamation clearly implies that there were those who took the ‘*arsh* literally, and, indeed, Lane’s “spiritual” definitions are not logically inconsistent with some formulations of a more literal understanding of the term: “God is on his throne,” reports Abū Dā’ūd, “and his throne is above the heavens.”¹⁴ Such Qur’ānic passages as 67:16–17 seem to imply that God is located in the sky, and the omnipresence of such verbs as *anzala/yunzilu/inzāl* (“to send down” = “to reveal”) certainly seems to reflect such a concept. Al-Ṭabarī relates a tradition that expressly describes the Qur’ān as a *tanzīl* (“a sending down” = “a revelation”) from a God who has *istawā* (“mounted up”; see discussion below).¹⁵

Equally straightforward are some of the descriptions of the “Throne Verse” in Q 2:255, which declares that *wasi’ al-kursī yuhu al-samawāt wa ’l-ard* (“his *kursī* extends over the heavens and the earth”)—*kursī* usually having the meaning, much like ‘*arsh*, of “elevated chair”—and which is thought by many Muslims to be “the best verse in the Book of God.”¹⁶ This is one place where the modern commentator A. Yusuf Ali’s urge to allegory may have some foundation, for surely no literal throne could be so large as to cover heavens and earth. Thus, when Ali says that *kursī* is metaphorical, connoting “majesty,” we are inclined to agree with him,¹⁷ as well as when he describes the throne as “seat, power, knowledge, symbol of authority.”¹⁸

But such an explanation opens up a new way of understanding the verse, which indicates that literalism is not yet out of the running. There were—and are—real, tangible thrones. Symbolism generally *follows* literal reality. When, for example, one says of a king in English that his scepter extended over all the known world, one does not mean to deny that he had a real metal scepter. It is surely this kind of thought that lies behind Heinrich Speyer’s summary of the Qur’ānic data as, “Der göttliche Thron . . . erstreckt sich (in seiner Wirksamkeit) über Himmel und Erde” (“The divine throne . . . extends [in its efficacy] over heaven and earth”).¹⁹

Some traditionists make a distinction between *kursī* and ‘*arsh*. For example, while the *kursī* is vast, the ‘*arsh* is immeasurably greater.²⁰ Some traditions, in fact, emphasize that the *kursī* dwarfs the seven heavens, in turn being dwarfed by the ‘*arsh*,²¹ which reminds us of the huge dimensions used to emphasize God’s greatness in rabbinic and mystical Judaism.²² (It should be noted in this context that, where any distinction is made between *kursī* and ‘*arsh*, the former is always subordinated to the latter, never the opposite.)

Other traditionists take an approach that A. Y. Ali would find congenial: The *kursī* is God’s *knowledge*. Thus, say the commentators generally known as the Jalalayn, the import of Q 2:255 is that God’s knowledge encompasses heaven and earth. But also, “the throne itself contains them (*mushtamil ‘alayhima*) because of its greatness (*li-‘azamatihi*).” They then transmit a *ḥadīth* according to which “the seven heavens are no more than seven dirhams [= medieval coins] thrown into a shield (*turs*) as compared with the throne.”²³

Al-Ṭabarī relates two traditions to this effect, namely that the *kursī* is ‘ilm Allāh (“God’s knowledge”), and declares this to be his own opinion.²⁴ Still, in al-Ṭabarī’s own commentary,²⁵ such traditions are greatly outnumbered by those who hold the *kursī* to be God’s footstool (*mawdi‘ qadamayhi*). Accordingly, and by analogy to earthly footstools, it is below the ‘arsh. In fact, says one, heaven and earth are within (*fi jawf*) the *kursī*, and the *kursī* is before (*bayna yaday*) the ‘arsh. Similar opinions are passed on by Ibn Kathīr.²⁶

Ibn Kathīr also knows of traditions that identify the *kursī* as the eighth celestial sphere, the *falak al-thawābit* or “sphere of the fixed stars.” Above it is the ninth, the *falak al-athīr* or “sphere of the *athīr*” (cf. Gk. “ether”), which is also known as the *falak al-‘arsh* (“sphere of the throne”), a designation that fits our data perfectly. It is said to be so called “because it affects the others” (*yu’aththiru fi ghayrihi*)—which is obviously a folk etymology to make sense of the foreign *athīr*. Lane reports that *kursī* can signify “the sphere of the stars.”²⁷ In this context, we note that the constellation of Cassiopeia is known as *dhāt al-kursī* (“possessor of the *kursī*”).

But, again, some commentators take this idea of the *kursī* as footstool in a very literal fashion. In al-Ṭabarī’s *Tafsīr*, for instance, the *kursī* as footstool makes the sound of a creaking camel saddle.²⁸ This compares closely with the view in the ancient Near East and the Old Testament, where the “footstool was an indispensable part of the throne.”²⁹ In the Bible, the *earth* is said to be God’s footstool (see, e.g., Isaiah 66:1; Matthew 5:35).³⁰

Further, Ibn Kathīr reminds us of the necessity of taking Q 2:255 as it stands, although he cautions us to do it *min ghayr takyīf wa la tashbīh* (“with no question as to how, but also without anthropomorphizing”).³¹ If we are to do so, we must note that the other occurrence of *kursī* in the Qur’ān involves a very real throne belonging to Solomon (Q 38:34), a fact that will have some bearing on our exegesis. This may be why such early Muslims as Hishām b. al-Ḥakam and Hishām al-Jawālīqī took the throne verse as literally true.³²

Numerous other Muslim traditions describe Muḥammad’s theophanic experiences. In some versions, he saw the deity as luminosity (*nūrānī*) or light (*nūr*).³³ In a tradition preserved by Muslim, it is stated that “God’s veil is light.”³⁴ This is reminiscent of the language of many religions, in which theophany is described as an experience of light. Other traditions are less reticent. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, for instance, preserves at least two traditions that state quite matter-of-factly that Muḥammad saw God.³⁵ On the other hand, some traditions are equally forceful in their denial of such theophanies. According to traditions related on the authority of Muḥammad’s young wife ‘Ā’isha and preserved in the writings of Muslim, Tirmidhī, and Aḥmad ibn anbal, anyone claiming that Muḥammad saw God is a liar.³⁶ The very fact that Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal preserves such contradictory traditions is an indication that the question of literal theophanies became a source of conflict in later Muslim history.

If our understanding of the foregoing traditions is correct, several features in the call of Muḥammad (based, in this case, primarily on the tradition given by Bukhārī as background to Q 74:1–7 cited above) correspond to accounts of throne theophanies preceding prophetic commissions found in Jewish canonical and extracanonical literature, among which the following may be cited:³⁷

- ***A theophany, where the appearance of God on his throne (in the case of certain apocalypses, a chariot) is described.*** In Ezekiel 1, Ezekiel saw a manlike God seated on a throne of sapphire or lapis lazuli “on a vault glittering like a sheet of ice—a hemisphere of transparent crystal.” This language is reminiscent of the vision described in Revelation 4, especially 4:6, where John sees the throne of God and “in front of it stretched what seemed a sea of glass, like a sheet of ice.” We may further compare Exodus 24:10, where

God stands on a clear-blue sapphire. In Isaiah's call to prophethood in Isaiah 6:1 it is recorded: "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple." The account of Lehi's throne theophany records that Lehi "was carried away in a vision, even that he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God" (1 Nephi 1:8). The Ethiopic *Enoch*, a composite work originally dating to the second century B.C., features a vision of an anthropomorphic God who is seated on a crystalline throne.³⁸

In these theophanies, in the "historical prologue," which provides the background for the theophany and surrounding events, place and time play a significant role. In the case of Muḥammad, the vision occurred at the bottom of the wadi at the foot of Hira' following his sojourn there. Isaiah, we have noted, prefaced his call with: "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw . . . the Lord [in the temple]" (Isaiah 6:1). Ezekiel's vision is prefaced by the historical note: "Now it came to pass, in the fifth day of the month, which was the fifth year of King Jehoachin's captivity, the word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel, the priest, in the land of the Chaldeans by the Chebar River" (Ezekiel 1:1). In the *Ascension of Isaiah*, probably influenced by Isaiah 6, we read: "In the twentieth year of the reign of Hezekiah, king of Judah, . . . Isaiah . . . was seeing a vision."³⁹ Enoch's ascension, recorded in the Slavonic Enoch, occurred at the New Year: "On the first day of the first month . . . there appeared two men to me."⁴⁰ Further, Ezra prefaced his theodicy with, "In the thirtieth year after the downfall of the city, I . . . began to address the Most High . . . and . . . thereupon the angel answered me who had been sent to me."⁴¹ Nephi sets the scene of religious turmoil in Jerusalem as background to Lehi's throne theophany: "For it came to pass in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah, . . . and in that same year there came many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed" (1 Nephi 1:4).

What Norman Habel notes concerning the theophany and prophetic commission of Isaiah's call is equally true of the others: "Despite the overwhelming glory of the sacred locale (the temple for Isaiah), the historical moment is just as important to the prophet's proclamation. The year was a year of transition, crisis and import; it was the year of the king's death."⁴² Further, the historical information "underscores the significance of the historical orientation of the experience."⁴³

- **An auditory revelation that clarifies the epiphany or theophany.** John J. Collins summarizes his data on Judeo-Christian throne theophanies by noting that the initial "epiphanies are always followed by auditory revelation"; and we cannot fail to remember that this is emphatically the case with Muḥammad. In this instance the auditory revelation is Q 74:1—7, whose function intersects with a further element of the genre, the concluding words of the vision, here implying the *prophetic call and commission*, where the recipient of the revelation is called to represent deity. Similarly, in the "throne theophany" in Isaiah 6, the divine commission, "Go and say to this people, hear . . .," represents the initial auditory revelation following his vision. Nephi's account of Lehi's vision obscures his father Lehi's formal call to prophesy, but Nephi implies that Lehi accepted the call as prophet and that he began to preach to the people: "After the Lord had shown so many marvelous things unto my father, Lehi, yea, concerning the destruction, behold he went forth among the people, and began to prophesy and to declare unto them concerning the things which he had both seen and heard . . . and also the things which he read in the book" (1 Nephi 1:18—19).
- **Reaction of the recipient, where the overpowering awe and/or perplexity of the recipient confronted with the revelation are described.** Following the theophany, Muḥammad reports that "I was burdened thereby, and went to Khadija, saying: 'Cover me with a *dathar* (cloak), which they did.'" Similarly, Isaiah was

overcome by the glory of his heavenly vision, exclaiming: “Woe is me! For I am undone” (Isaiah 6:5). As a result of his encounter with the fiery throne chariot, Ezekiel fell upon his face (see Ezekiel 1:28). Lehi, because of his vision of God’s glory and of the imminent judgment on Jerusalem, “did quake and tremble exceedingly. . . . [A]nd he cast himself upon his bed, being overcome with the spirit and the things which he had seen” (1 Nephi 1:6—7). In the Ethiopic *Enoch*, Enoch, who saw lightning and fiery cherubim who spoke with fiery tongues, reported, “I quaked and trembled, I fell upon my face.”⁴⁴ So also in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, following Abraham’s encounter with the glorious angel Jael, Abraham said, “There was no breath of man, and my spirit was affrighted, and my soul fled me, and I became like a stone, and I fell upon the earth, for I had no more strength to stand.”⁴⁵

We have restricted ourselves herein to a discussion of events surrounding the receipt of Q 74:1–7 and have noted their similarity to Jewish and Christian “throne theophanies.” But the many-faceted accounts of heavenly visions in the Jewish and Christian pseudepigrapha are far richer than the few features discussed above. Strikingly, other elements of these accounts find resonances in Muslim traditions—Qur’ān, *ḥadīth*, biography—concerning Muḥammad. The pattern that emerges in this literature “is that of a righteous individual who, concerned for the wickedness of his people, prays and weeps on their behalf until physically overcome by the spirit of revelation” and is thereupon “carried away in a vision.”⁴⁶ There, he sees a vision of the throne chariot, or of “God on his throne attended by the heavenly council.”⁴⁷ He may be given a tour of the world and heavens, and also “receives a heavenly book which explains the secrets of the universe and the impending disaster of his people. The vision is completed with a call or commission extended from the heavenly council to warn his people about their inevitable destruction; however, he is also forewarned that his people will reject him.”⁴⁸ It is not difficult to apply this to Muḥammad’s practice of *taḥannuth* (an obscure term that may refer to meditation) in Āḥira’ before the revelation, to the story of the *mi’rāj*—Muḥammad’s ascent to heaven⁴⁹—to the giving of the Qur’ān, with its contents of apocalyptic warning, and even to Waraqa b. Nawfal’s prediction of the rocky reception to be given to the new prophet.

What role might the throne-theophany vision, an important component in the account of the prophetic commission of earlier Abrahamic prophets, including the great writing prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel, have played in Mu-ḥam-mad’s call as a prophet? Representing as it does a very typical Near Eastern literary genre designed to affirm publicly the authority of the prophet, it seems worth investigating whether it originally performed the same function in Muslim belief and may have been an essential part of Muḥammad’s credentials as a prophet in the ancient Abrahamic tradition.⁵⁰

Notes

1. Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, trans. Roland E. Clements (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 100.
2. Matthew Black, “The Throne-Theophany Prophetic Commission and the Son of Man,” in *Jews, Greeks, and Christians: Religious Cultures in Late Antiquity*, ed. Robert Hamerton-Kelly (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 57, cited in Blake T. Ostler, “The Throne-Theophany Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi: A Form-Critical Analysis,” *BYU Studies* 26/4 (1986): 69.
3. Abū Ja’far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh al-Rusul wa-’l-Mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Ma’ārif, 1961), 2:303–4, explicitly denies the primacy of Qur’ān 96:1–5; cf. Richard Bell,

“Mohammed’s Call,” *The Moslem World* 24/1 (1934): 16–18.

4. The elements of this type of pattern are found in the paradigm of the genre *apocalypse* developed by John J. Collins in “Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 1–20. On page 9 Collins defines *apocalypse* as “a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another supernatural world.” While not all prophetic call narratives display the characteristics of apocalypses (e.g., the solely auditory prophetic calls do not), both canonical and extracanonical visual prophetic call narratives do display the characteristics of the apocalyptic genre.

5. It must be acknowledged that Jābir b. ‘Abdullāh is described by Bell, “Mohammed’s Call,” 17, as “not a very reliable” transmitter of prophetic tradition. Bukhārī’s inclusion of him, however, in the most prestigious and authoritative *ḥadīth* collection suggests that early Muslims viewed him otherwise.

6. Khadīja was Muḥammad’s first and, while she lived, only wife.

7. Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Cairo: Ma‘ābi‘ al-Sha‘b, 1958). This and other citations from the Qur’ān are from the version of Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (New York: Mentor Books, n.d.).

8. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, 2:304.

9. Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (Cairo, a.h. 1384), 1:98–99; Abū Fidā Ismā‘īl ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm* (Aleppo: Maktabat al-Irshād, 1980), 1:387.

10. See W. Montgomery Watt, *Bell’s Introduction to the Qur’an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), 19; Bell, “Mohammed’s Call,” 17–19; Rudi Paret, *Mohammed und der Koran* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1957), 44–45.

11. Watt, *Bell’s Introduction*, 19; cf. 23; cf. also W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 15; Frants Buhl, *Das Leben Muhammeds*, trans. Hans H. Schaeder (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1955), 136; Aloys Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammad* (Berlin: Nicolaische Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1861), 297 and 297 n. 3.

12. Edward W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1980), 5:2000.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Abū Dā‘ūd, *Sunan* (Cairo: Mu‘āfa al-Bābī al-‘Alabī, 1952), 2:534.

15. Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1954), 16:138.

16. So Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, 1:304–6.

17. A. Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur’an: Translation and Commentary*, 2nd ed. (n.p.: American Trust Publishers, 1977), 355 n. 1032.

18. Ibid., 103 n. 298. According to L. E. Toombs, "Throne," in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 4:637, "By metonymy 'throne' represents royalty in all its aspects."
19. Heinrich Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1961), 2.
20. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1:309–10; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad M. Shakir and Aḥmad M. Shakir (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1961), 5:399.
21. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1:309–10.
22. Of the rich literature that deals with this topic, the following may be cited: Arthur Marmorstein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God: II. Essays in Anthropomorphism* (New York: Ktav, 1937), 51; Ira Chernus, *Mysticism in Rabbinic Judaism: Studies in the History of Midrash* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1982); David Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1988); Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*, 2nd ed. (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965).
23. Jalalayn, *Tafsīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.), 56; cf. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1:309–10.
24. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, 5:397–98, 401–3.
25. Ibid., 398–99.
26. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1:309.
27. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 7:2605–6.
28. See Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, 5:398, 400; cf. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:66.
29. Toombs, "Throne," 637.
30. Cf. G. Henton Davies's interesting article on "Footstool" in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Buttrick, 2:309.
31. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1:310.
32. See Henri Laoust, *Les schismes dans l'Islam* (Paris: Payot, 1977), 408–9; cf. Wilfred Madelung, "The Shiite and Kharijite Contribution to Pre-Ash'arite Kalam," in *Islamic Philosophical Theology*, ed. Parviz Morewedge (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979), 122; contrast Rudolf Strothmann, "Tashbīh," in *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. H. A. R. Gibb and J. H. Kramers (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961), 584–85.
33. See Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī li-'l-Ṭaba'ah, 1969), 5:170–71, 175.
34. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1:111.
35. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 1:285, 290.
36. See Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1:109–11; Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 6:49; Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad ibn 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī, *Tuḥfat al-Aḥwadhī bi-Sharḥ Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī* (Medina: Al-Maktaba al-Salafiyya, 1964), 8:441–43.

37. See Collins, "Introduction," 1–20.
38. *1 Enoch* 14:15–18.
39. *Ascension of Isaiah* 6:1, 12.
40. *2 Enoch* 1:2, 4.
41. *4 Ezra* 3:1–3; 4:1.
42. Norman Habel, "The Form and Significance of the Call Narrative," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 77 (1965): 310.
43. Ostler, "Throne-Theophany," 74.
44. *1 Enoch* 14:14. Compare Collins, "Introduction," 6; Ostler, "Throne-Theophany," 76–77.
45. *Apocalypse of Abraham* 10:2.
46. Ostler, "Throne-Theophany," 67.
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*
49. Geo Widengren has devoted two fascinating monographs to the ancient Near Eastern background of the *mi'rāj* of Muḥammad in *The Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book*, *Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift* 1950:3; and *Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and His Ascension*, *Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift* 1955:1.
50. Widengren, in *Muhammad, the Apostle of God*, 215, makes a similar point concerning ancient Near Eastern ascension texts and accounts of Muḥammad's *mi'rāj*: "The ascent to heaven is, in a way, necessary for the Apostle. Without it he would never be given his commission as Apostle, nor his command of the heavenly revelation which he has to impart to humanity"; cf. Tor Andrae, *Die Person Muhammad im Leben und Glauben seiner Gemeinde* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1918), 10–13.