

# Commentary on Qur'an 21:22 – Divine Unity, Cosmology, and Classical Insights

## Introduction

Qur'an 21:22 declares a succinct yet profound argument for **divine unity (tawḥīd)** and sole governance: **"If there were in the heavens and the earth other gods besides Allah, they would both have been ruined."** Revealed in *Sūrat al-Anbiyā'* (The Prophets), a Makkan sura, this verse targets the polytheistic claims of the Prophet's contemporaries. It posits a **philosophical reductio ad absurdum**: the existence of multiple gods with independent wills would plunge the cosmos into disorder, something starkly contradicted by the observable harmony of creation. In what follows, we undertake a close reading of the Arabic text and its classical *tafsīr* (exegesis), explore the **theological reasoning** behind the verse (as elaborated in Islamic *kalām*), and reflect on how the verse's implications resonate with **modern cosmology and fine-tuning**. Cross-references to Qur'an 31:10–11 and 67:1–4 will illuminate complementary themes of creation, order, and divine wisdom, reinforcing the commentary's interdisciplinary perspective in theology, philosophy, and science.

## Close Reading of Qur'an 21:22 and Classical Tafsīr

**Text and Translation:** The Arabic of 21:22 reads: *لو كان فيهما آلهة إلا الله لفسدتا ... fasubḥānallāhi rabbil-'arsh 'ammā yaṣifūn*. Literally: *"If there were in them (both) gods illā Allāh (besides/other than Allah), lafasadatā (surely they would have been corrupted/ruined). So Glorified is Allah, Lord of the Throne, beyond what they ascribe."* The particle *illā* in this construction means "other than," as classical grammarians like **Sībawayh** noted <sup>1</sup>. Thus, the phrase implies "gods *besides* Allah." The verb **lafasadatā** is dual feminine, referring to the **two entities** mentioned (the heavens and the earth), and denotes utter corruption, disorder, or ruin. The verse concludes with a **tasbīḥ** – glorifying Allah as the exalted sovereign (the "Lord of the Throne") far above the false descriptions (partners or rivals) attributed to Him. This structure – a conditional clause leading to a dramatic consequence – drives home the **impossibility** of cosmic order under polytheism, then immediately reaffirms God's transcendence and sole authority.

**Classical Exegesis:** Major Qur'anic commentators unpacked this verse as a decisive proof of monotheism. **Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923)**, in *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, explains that had there been multiple deities governing, the **cosmic system could not hold**. He considers two hypothetical scenarios: either the supposed gods **always agreed** or they **disagreed**. If they unfailingly agreed on every matter, *"that would invalidate the claim of two-ness and amount to an admission of unity"*, since effectively **one will** is at work <sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, if they ever **differed** in will or decree, *"the heavens and earth would surely fall into ruin"*, as one deity's creative act would be undone by another's counter-act <sup>2</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī gives a vivid analogy: just as fire and ice have contradictory effects (one heating, the other cooling) when acting on the same object, two omnipotent beings with opposing wills would produce *incompatible outcomes*, collapsing the regularity of nature <sup>3</sup>. He concludes that the very **order and connectivity in the world** prove there is **one eternal Maker** managing it all, *"alone without partner, helper or supporter"* <sup>4</sup>.

Later commentators echoed and refined this reasoning. **Al-Jalālayn** tersely notes that the heavens and earth “*would have deviated from their observed order, because counteractive forces would exist among such gods – as usually happens when more than one ruler shares authority*” <sup>5</sup>. *Imam al-Qurṭubī* (d. 671/1273) adds that if two gods wanted opposite things, one of them must be rendered عاجز (impotent), which contradicts true divinity; or if neither could prevail, **orderly governance would cease** <sup>6</sup>. Thus “*laḥasadatā* – both [heaven and earth] would be ruined – and all who dwell in them would perish due to the conflict” <sup>6</sup>. Qurṭubī also highlights the grammar: **illā** here means “*ghayr*” (other than), reinforcing that the verse assumes any presumed god **besides** the One God would wreak havoc <sup>1</sup>.

**Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī** (d. 606/1210), a towering Ash‘arī theologian, regarded 21:22 as a *linchpin proof* for tawḥīd. He explicitly writes “*the claim of two gods leads to an impossibility (yufḍī ilā’l-muḥāl)... this is a complete proof in the matter of monotheism, and corruption (fasād) is the necessary result under every hypothetical scenario [of multiple gods]*” <sup>7</sup>. Al-Rāzī meticulously details why “**ruin is inevitable on all suppositions**”: If two gods shared power, either each is omnipotent – in which case they would eventually will conflicting things (leading to cosmos-breaking conflict) – or they limit one another – in which case neither is truly omnipotent, failing the definition of “god” <sup>8</sup>. By exhausting the logical possibilities, Rāzī upholds the Quranic assertion as “*حجة تامّة*” (an irrefutable proof) of God’s oneness <sup>7</sup>.

**Ibn Kathīr** (d. 774/1373) similarly interprets 21:22 as a *refutation of shirk* (associating partners with God). He cross-references Qur’an 23:91, which fleshes out the same argument: “*Allah has not taken any son, nor is there any god alongside Him. [If there were], each god would have taken away what he created, and they would have tried to overcome one another*” <sup>9</sup>. In Ibn Kathīr’s paraphrase, if multiple gods existed, “*each deity would have claimed exclusive ownership of different parts of creation and sought dominance, resulting in competition and turmoil*” <sup>9</sup>. The fact that nothing of the sort is observed – the heavens and earth operate seamlessly – is, for Ibn Kathīr, a **testimonial to the One Omnipotent God** who has no rival in His dominion.

Notably, the verse’s final phrase “*So Glorified is Allah, Lord of the Throne, above what they describe*” is seen by the commentators as a direct rejoinder to the very notion of polytheism. **Qatāda** (d. 118/736), an early exegete, said that Allah “**glorifies Himself [here] whenever something false is alleged about Him**” <sup>10</sup> <sup>11</sup>. In other words, after demonstrating the absurdity of plural gods, the Quran immediately declares God’s transcendence (**subḥānallāh**) beyond such blasphemous descriptions. The mention of “**Lord of the Throne**” highlights His ultimate sovereignty over the highest realm, implying that if even the greatest Throne is His alone, certainly the entire cosmos falls under His singular lordship <sup>12</sup>.

In sum, classical *tafsīr* unanimously reads 21:22 as the Quran’s **philosophical argument for monotheism** embedded in scripture. The verse’s language and logic convey that **cosmic harmony is incompatible with divine plurality**, and by pointing to the maintained **order of nature**, it invites reflection on the **oneness and wisdom** of the Creator. This interpretation laid the foundation for formal arguments in Islamic theology, as we discuss next.

## The Philosophical Argument for Divine Unity (Tawḥīd)

The logic of Qur’an 21:22 did not remain a mere scriptural assertion; it was developed into a rigorous **theological proof** by Muslim scholars. In Islamic systematic theology (*‘ilm al-kalām*), this line of reasoning is

often termed **Dalīl al-Tamānu'** (proof by "mutual exclusion/prevention") or sometimes **Burhān al-Tawāruḍ** (proof by "concurrency leading to contradiction"). It can be summarized as follows:

- **If multiple gods existed**, each would by definition possess *independent* supreme will and power. If they **always concurred** on every decision (never coming into conflict), then their wills would effectively be one – rendering the plurality of deities meaningless <sup>13</sup>. As Imam al-Rāzī noted, calling two perfectly synchronized wills "two gods" is an incoherent redundancy; it is akin to "*naming the one as two*" <sup>2</sup>. The **unity of decision** in running the universe points back to a **unity of agency**.
- If, on the other hand, the gods **disagreed** even once – for instance, one willing an object to move left, another to move right – the result would be a **conflict of will** with no rational resolution <sup>14</sup>. There are only two outcomes in such a scenario, both impossible for "gods": (a) One deity's will is **overpowered** by the other's, in which case the vanquished being is not truly omnipotent (and thus not truly God) <sup>15</sup>. Or (b) Neither yields, and the contradictory decrees simply **cancel out** or paralyze the effect, in which case "*nothing would come into existence or be sustained*", collapsing the functionality of the universe <sup>16</sup>. In either case, **multiple omnipotent beings cannot coexist** without nullifying the very concept of *omnipotence*.
- Crucially, we observe that **none of the expected chaos or dysfunction is present** in reality. The universe operates with consistent natural laws, balance, and purpose – "**a harmonious and orderly universe,**" as the sages of kalām emphasize <sup>17</sup>. This empirical fact – that the heavens and earth are not "ruined" – serves as evidence that the hypothetical of multiple gods is false <sup>18</sup>. Thus, by **reducing polytheism to absurdity**, the argument concludes there can be **only one truly sovereign** God, whose singular will sustains the cosmos without any contest <sup>19</sup>.

Muslim theologians from various schools wielded this argument in debates with dualists, Trinitarians, and other religious thinkers. It appears in the writings of **Mu'tazilī** rationalists and **Ash'arī** theologians alike as a **syllogism for tawhīd** grounded in both scripture and reason. The tenth-century scholar **Abū Ḥasan al-Ash'arī** alluded to Quranic proofs like this to show that "*if there were two creators, the cosmos could not endure*". Centuries later, Rāzī and others explicitly cite Qur'an 21:22 as "*ḥujja qaṭ'iyya*" (a decisive proof) of God's oneness <sup>7</sup>. They appreciated that the Quran had, in a few words, articulated what philosophy calls the **problem of divided sovereignty** – a problem which in their view can only be resolved by affirming a **single, unitary source** of all being.

Modern philosophers might compare this Quranic-kalām argument to a form of **Occam's Razor** (the simplest explanation – one deity – accounts for the data without multiplying entities) or note its resemblance to arguments by Greek thinkers like Aristotle, who posited a single *Unmoved Mover* to avoid cosmic disorder. The Quran's unique contribution, however, is framing it in vivid, accessible terms and connecting it to **moral and devotional implications**: if only one God sustains all, He alone deserves worship and absolute trust. The verse thus functions on two levels: a rational proof for the mind and a reminder to the heart of the sole object of devotion, "*far above what they ascribe*".

## Cosmic Order and Fine-Tuning: A Modern Resonance

Strikingly, the insight of Qur'an 21:22 – that a **well-ordered cosmos** signals a single organizing principle – resonates strongly with modern discussions in cosmology and physics about the **fine-tuning of the universe**. Scientists have found that the fundamental constants and laws of nature are balanced on a

**knife's edge** to permit the existence of a stable universe and life. Even minute deviations in these values or interference in these laws would render the universe hostile to matter, let alone living beings.

For example, the strength of gravity, the charge of the electron, the cosmological constant, and dozens of other parameters all fall within extremely narrow ranges. Physicist **Brian Greene** notes that there are about “20 numbers that describe our world”, and “even a small change in those known values...would cause the world as we know it to disappear.”<sup>20</sup> If gravity were slightly stronger or weaker, or if the expansion rate of the Big Bang had differed by a tiny fraction, **stars, galaxies, and planets would never form** – a scenario of cosmic dysfunction eerily akin to the “ruin” (fasād) the Quran speaks of. As cosmologist **Paul Davies** observes, “the entire universe is balanced on a knife-edge, and would be total chaos if any of the natural constants were off even slightly.”<sup>21</sup> In the words of Stephen Hawking, “the remarkable fact is that the values of these numbers seem to have been very finely adjusted to make possible the development of life.”<sup>22</sup> Modern science thus reveals a universe that is not randomly chaotic but **exquisitely ordered** – a single, coherent system governed by unified physical laws.

This empirical reality strengthens the Quranic contention that the heavens and earth are *not* in a state of “ruin.” Quite the opposite: they display **spectacular regularity and harmony**, from the macro-scale of galactic formations down to the micro-scale of atomic forces. Such harmony is what one would expect if **one Sovereign** set the laws and keeps all forces in check. The Quran explicitly invites us to reflect on this in *Sūrat al-Mulk* (67:3-4): “[Allah] Who created seven heavens in layers. You do not see in the creation of the Most Merciful any inconsistency. So return your vision [again]; do you see any flaw? Then look again and yet again – your sight will return to you humbled and exhausted [finding no defect].”<sup>23</sup> <sup>24</sup> Here the Quran uses empirical language – *search for a crack in the universe’s fabric, you will find none*. Classical commentators like *Maududi* explain that “there is no indiscipline, any disorder or discordance anywhere in the universe... all its parts are well-connected and in perfect harmony and coordination.”<sup>23</sup> The phrase “*ma tarā fī khalq al-Raḥmān min tafāwut*” can be rendered “thou seest no disproportion in the creation of the All-Merciful,” meaning no part of creation is out of balance with any other. This is essentially the **fine-tuning argument** expressed in Quranic terms 14 centuries ago.

From an Islamic perspective, such modern findings are not a coincidence but a **reflection of divine wisdom** in creation. The cosmos’ lawfulness is a “**sign**” (**āyah**) pointing to the One Lawgiver. Muslim thinkers engaged in science-religion discourse often leverage fine-tuning as a **scientific corroboration of tawḥīd**: the unity of physical law suggests the unity of the Creator. While science as such does not “prove” God’s oneness (and scientists propose various interpretations of fine-tuning, including multiverse theories), the remarkable orderliness of the universe “*monkeyed with the physics...deliberately designed*,” to quote astrophysicist Fred Hoyle, strongly evokes the Quranic assertion that **only a singular, purposeful Intelligence** could underlie it<sup>25</sup>.

In essence, the **cosmological harmony** we observe fulfills the condition laid out in Qur’an 21:22: since there is no chaos or ruin overtaking the universe, the implicit premise is that **no plurality of gods exists** to cause it. The verse and modern cosmology converge on a profound point: **one coherent set of governing principles** (whether one calls it the laws of physics or the will of Allah) sustains the **whole show**. Any schism at the ultimate level of causation would shatter this unity. Thus, believers see fine-tuning as modern scientific vocabulary for what the Quran calls “*the handiwork of Allah, who perfected all things*” (27:88) – a perfection incompatible with dueling deities.

## Creation, Order, and Divine Wisdom in Qur'an 31:10–11 and 67:1–4

To further cement the themes of **creation, order, and wisdom**, we turn to two other Qur'anic passages that complement 21:22. **Surah Luqmān 31:10–11** and **Surah al-Mulk 67:1–4** both underscore Allah's exclusive role as Creator and Sustainer and invite us to compare the observable world with any claims of rival gods.

**Qur'an 31:10–11** lists concrete aspects of the created world and issues a challenge: *"He created the heavens without pillars that you [can] see, and cast onto the earth firm mountains lest it shake with you, and spread within it all kinds of creatures. And We sent down rain from the sky and caused to grow therein [on earth] of every noble kind (of plant). This is the creation of Allah. So show Me what those other than Him have created! Nay, the wrongdoers are in manifest error."* <sup>26</sup> <sup>27</sup> . These verses highlight both **cosmic features** (the heaven's vastness and stability, the earth's equilibrium via mountains) and **biospheric features** (rainwater and vegetation sustaining life) as signs of **purposeful design**. The Qur'anic voice then pointedly asks the polytheists: *what have your alleged gods created, even remotely comparable to this?* The question is rhetorical; the expected answer is *"nothing."* By juxtaposing *"hādhā khalq Allāh – this is Allah's creation"* with an invitation to show any equivalent from others, the Qur'an emphasizes that **creative power and wisdom belong to God alone**. Classical exegesis (e.g. *Ibn Kathīr*) notes that this verse exposes the **powerlessness of idols and false gods**, since none can claim credit for the sky, mountains, or life-giving rain <sup>28</sup> <sup>29</sup> . The **"wrongdoers"** (ẓālimūn) are in clear error because they worship entities that *not only created nothing* but are themselves part of the created order. Thus, 31:10–11 reinforces tawḥīd by appealing to observable reality: the natural world's grandeur is **inseparable from Allah's agency**, and no other can stake a claim in it. It's a practical, even empirical argument, much like 21:22, but focused on **creative causation** (who made it?) rather than governance. Together, the two verses form a one-two punch: Allah alone **created** everything, and Allah alone **maintains** everything – therefore, Allah alone is God.

**Qur'an 67:1–4**, cited briefly earlier, is another powerful passage on divine unity and wisdom. It opens with a proclamation of **Allah's exclusive sovereignty**: *"Blessed is He in whose Hand is al-Mulk (the dominion/kingdom), and He is over all things Competent (Qadīr)"* (67:1). This ayah uses the term *al-Mulk* – the dominion or governance of existence – to assert that **ultimate control of the universe is singularly in God's hand**. No other being shares in this dominion. The next verse (67:2) adds a note of **purpose and wisdom**: *"[He] who created death and life to test you (humankind) as to which of you is best in deed – and He is the All-Mighty, the All-Forgiving."* Here, creation is not random; it is **teleological** – life and death were brought about deliberately as part of a moral examination, implying foresight, intentionality, and benevolence (notice He is also All-Forgiving, hinting at mercy in the design of life's trial). By stating that even death (usually seen as an "evil" or negative) is created for a wise purpose, the Qur'an is reinforcing that *everything in existence – both the seen (life) and unseen or difficult (death) – follows a divine plan*, free of the capricious whims that multiple gods would entail.

Finally, 67:3–4 (already discussed in context of fine-tuning) return to the **observable cosmos** as evidence of that unity and wisdom: seven heavens layered with no **tafāwut** (discrepancy), no **fuṭūr** (fissure or flaw) to be found despite repeated scrutiny <sup>23</sup> <sup>24</sup> . The **perfect coherency** of the natural world is thus explicitly tied to *ar-Raḥmān* (the Most Merciful) – one of Allah's names emphasizing benevolent wisdom. The mention of mercy here is significant: it suggests that the order in creation is not cold mechanism, but compassionate order – the kind that allows life to flourish. This counters any notion that multiple gods fighting would somehow "balance" each other; rather, the Quran implies **benevolent unity** is what yields a balanced cosmos. In short, 67:1–4 reinforce the lessons of 21:22 by affirming **single-handed sovereignty, purposeful creation, and flawless maintenance** of the universe, all of which point to tawḥīd. The **themes**

**of creation, order, and divine wisdom** are interwoven: only a **One God** could create with such intent and sustain with such perfection.

It is worth noting that Islamic scholars often connect these verses to theological doctrines. For instance, the **mountains as pegs stabilizing the earth** (31:10) are seen as a sign of Allah's grace in creation, preventing constant earthquakes – an early intimation of what we today understand as the role of geological features in maintaining Earth's livability. The **test of life and death** (67:2) is used in kalām to discuss **divine justice and wisdom** – that God didn't create life in vain but with a moral end, something multiple gods with clashing agendas could not coherently offer. And the **lack of flaws in the cosmos** (67:3–4) is cited by scholars like *Ibn al-Qayyim* to argue that the universe is the product of *hikmah* (wisdom) and *qudrah* (power) united in one Being, not a patchwork quilt of competing wills. Thus, the Quranic worldview presented across these verses is one of **unity at all levels**: unity of Lordship, unity of creative agency, unity of sustaining power, and unity of purpose – all stemming from the **unity of the Divine**.

## Conclusion

Qur'an 21:22 stands out as a terse yet **penetrating argument for monotheism**, one that integrates **rational analysis** with the Quran's signature eloquence. Our examination has shown how the verse's claim, *"had there been other gods, heaven and earth would be corrupted,"* is unpacked by classical Muslim exegetes into a robust doctrinal proof. It not only refutes polytheism on logical grounds but also elevates the discourse by linking cosmic order to God's singular governance. The **scientific and philosophical reflections** we explored reveal a remarkable alignment: what Islamic theology terms *tawḥīd* (oneness of God and unity of His will), modern cosmology describes in its own way as the *unity of physical law and fine-tuning*. The harmony that pervades the universe – from the laws of physics down to the conditions for life – can be read as a contemporary *ayat*, sign or testimony, to the truth that **a single, supremely intelligent cause underlies it all**.

Furthermore, by bringing in Qur'an 31:10–11 and 67:1–4, we saw that the Quran consistently invites people to **compare the evidence**: Allah's magnificent creation and providence versus the utter impotence of any purported partners. These cross-references reinforce that the world is neither chaotic nor aimless; it is orderly because **One Lord** planned it, and it is meaningful because that Lord imbued it with purpose. In classical kalām terms, the **"argument from design and order"** and the **"argument from mutual exclusivity"** dovetail, supporting the Islamic conviction that **tawḥīd** is not only a revealed truth but also something deeply woven into the fabric of reality. As the Quran declares in another verse, *"Had there been numerous gods in the heavens and earth, each god would have taken off with what he created, and they would have vied with one another for supremacy"* <sup>9</sup> – a scenario we never find, for which we can only say: *فَسُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَرْشِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ* <sup>5 30</sup> – "So exalted is Allah, Lord of the Throne, above what they ascribe!"

In conclusion, **Qur'an 21:22** serves as a meeting point of **faith and reason**. Its message has been engaged by scholars for over a millennium, from the pens of al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī to the lenses of modern telescopes observing a finely tuned cosmos. The verse's implications traverse theology, philosophy of religion, and even science, demonstrating the Quran's enduring capacity to speak to different domains of knowledge. For the believer and researcher alike, it offers a profound paradigm: **unity** – in the divine, in truth, and in the tapestry of creation. Such unity, the Quran suggests, is no mere philosophical abstraction, but the very reality that holds the heavens and earth together without the slightest fracture. <sup>23 24</sup>

## Sources:

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- Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Aẓīm*, commentary on 21:22 <sup>9</sup> and 31:11 <sup>28</sup> .
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<sup>13 14 15 16 17 18 19 32</sup> Proofs of God's Oneness: Concurrence and Prevention — Open Madrasa

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<sup>23</sup> [And] who created seven heavens in layers. You do not see in | surah Mulk aya 3

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<sup>24</sup> Then return [your] vision twice again. [Your] vision will return to you | surah Mulk aya 4

<https://surahquran.com/english-aya-4-sora-67.html>

26 He created the heavens without pillars that you see and has cast | surah Luqman aya 10  
<https://surahquran.com/english-aya-10-sora-31.html>

27 28 29 This is the creation of Allah. So show Me what those other | surah Luqman aya 11  
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