

“Floating Mountains” – A Comprehensive Commentary on Qur’an 27:88

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Introduction

Qur’an 27:88 presents a striking image: “**You see the mountains and think them firmly fixed, but they are floating like clouds – [such is] the handiwork of God, who perfected all things. He is fully aware of what you do.**” This verse invites reflection from multiple angles – exegetical (tafsir), scientific, philosophical, and theological. In what follows, we explore classical and contemporary interpretations of this verse, drawing on renowned Quranic commentaries (al-Tabari, Ibn Kathir, al-Razi, al-Alusi, Sayyid Qutb, and others) and integrating insights from modern geology and cosmology. We will also survey related Qur’anic verses about mountains (e.g. 16:15, 21:31, 78:6–7, 79:32, 88:19) to build a thematic understanding of the Quran’s depiction of mountains, especially where scientific or symbolic implications arise. The discussion is organized into sections on **Exegesis, Scientific Commentary, Philosophical Symbolism, and Theological Meaning**, for a clear and scholarly treatment of this profound verse.

Exegesis of Qur’an 27:88 – Classical and Modern Tafsir

Classical Commentaries (Tafsir): Early and medieval exegetes overwhelmingly understand Qur’an 27:88 as a description of events on the **Day of Resurrection**. They note that the context in *Surat al-Naml* (verses 87– 89) is eschatological: the previous verse mentions the Trumpet Blast of Judgment Day, and the following verse speaks of the recompense of deeds ¹. Thus, classical scholars read “*you will see the mountains...*” as referring to that future Day. **Al-Tabari** (d. 923) and **Imam al-Qurtubi** (d. 1273) both affirm that on Judgment Day the mountains, seemingly solid, will be uprooted and scattered ². **Ibn Kathir** (d. 1373) explains that on that Day, although the mountains *appear* to an observer to be fixed in place, in reality “they will pass away as the clouds pass away,” i.e. they will move off and vanish from their locations ³. He supports this ⁴ citing parallel Qur’anic passages: “*On the Day the heaven will sway with a circular motion, and the mountains will pass on, departing*” (52:9–10) and “*My Lord will blow them away to bits and leave the earth a level plain*” (20:105–107) ⁵. Al-Qurtubi and the 19th-century commentator **Al-Alusi** ⁶ likewise describe multiple stages of destruction: first an earthquake shatters the mountains, then they turn to dust, then a wind scatters that dust – fulfilling verses that liken mountains to “wool tufts” and “scattered dust” on the Last Day ⁷. In short, the traditional view is that 27:88 vividly prophesies the **upheaval of the mountains in the apocalypse**, when Allah’s power will crumble even the mightiest landforms.

Most classical mufasssūrūn were aware that the Arabic verb “*tara*” (you see) in this verse can be interpreted in present or future tense. However, due to the context, they leaned to a future-tense reading (“*you will see*”)

⁸ This yields: “*On that Day, you will see the mountains you thought were solid, but they will be passing away like clouds*”. As **Al-Jalalayn** succinctly paraphrases, at the moment of the Trumpet Blast the mountains will drift “like the drifting of clouds when blown by wind,” eventually collapsing into nothingness ⁸. Classical exegetes also reconciled this verse with other eschatological descriptions of mountains – e.g. that they will become “like carded wool” (101:5, 70:9) or “turned to dust” (56:5-6) – by explaining these as **successive stages** of the mountains’ disintegration during the end of the world ⁹ ¹⁰. In *Ruh al-Ma’ani*, Al-Alusi cites reports that after being pulverized, the mountains’ dust will form a cloud covering the earth, which an

onlooker might mistakenly perceive as a stationary haze even as it swiftly disperses ¹¹. Thus “floating like clouds” is interpreted literally as the **swift removal** of mountains by winds under Allah’s command, part of the perfected plan by which He will make the earth a flat plain on Resurrection Day ¹².

It is noteworthy that a few classical scholars did consider other nuances. Fakhr al-Din **al-Razi** (d. 1209) discusses whether the verse could also allude to an inherent motion in all physical things – a concept in philosophy that even solid objects are not truly static ^{13 14}. However, Razi ultimately stays with the obvious meaning of a real event, not perceivable now but to occur at the world’s end. Overall, the dominant *tafsir* tradition is exemplified by **Ibn Kathir’s** conclusion: “*You see them as if they are fixed... but they will move away like clouds*”, i.e. “**they will be removed from their places**”, as confirmed by other verses ⁴. The phrase “*such is the work of Allah Who perfected all things*” is taken as a reminder that these astonishing transformations are part of God’s perfect decree and power ¹⁵.

Contemporary Tafsir Perspectives: In the modern era, some interpreters revisited this verse in light of scientific knowledge. While many remain in line with the classical eschatological understanding (e.g. scholars like Thanwi, Yusuf Ali, and Maududi translate “*you see*” in present but still refer the actual “*floating*” to the future Day of Judgment ¹⁶), others have posited that **Qur’an 27:88 might also hint at present-day realities**. They point out that nothing in creation is truly motionless: the Earth rotates on its axis and orbits the sun, and its crust is composed of moving tectonic plates. For example, modern Urdu scholar **Maulana Ashraf ‘Ali Thanwi** opted to render “*tara*” as present-tense (“*You see the mountains [now]*”) to emphasize our current perception versus the hidden reality ¹⁶. A number of recent writers suggest the verse subtly anticipated scientific facts – such as the **continental drift** of landmasses or the **planet’s rotation** – that were unknown to pre-modern observers ^{17 18}. They note that the Qur’an’s wording is remarkably apt: mountains do “*pass*” or *drift* like clouds over geologic time, carried by the slow movement of plates and the Earth itself ¹⁹. Some even see significance in the term “*tamurru*” (“*pass/flow*”) used in the verse, as it resembles the scientific term “*continental drift*” for the motion of continents ²⁰. **Sayyid Qutb**, in *Fi Zilal alQur’an*, while still anchoring the verse in the dramatic imagery of Resurrection, eloquently reflects on how it reminds us that what seems most firm and invincible in this world can be made to *vanish in an instant by God’s will*. Qutb emphasizes the *awe* evoked by imagining the solid mountains in flux – a sign that “*no power in the universe endures against Allah’s power*” (paraphrased).

It should be stressed that mainstream Islamic scholarship continues to favor the Day-of-Judgment interpretation, cautioning against forcing scientific readings that ignore the context ^{21 22}. Fatwas from senior scholars (e.g. Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen) reaffirm that 27:88 “*is about the Day of Judgment*” and not meant as proof of the earth’s daily motion ²³. The **majority opinion** holds that a single Quranic phrase should not be taken to simultaneously mean two different things (present and future) ²⁴. Nonetheless, the verse’s **extraordinary phrasing** has invited Muslims today to marvel at how it resonates with modern discoveries about our dynamic planet – a point we explore below. In summary, classical tafsirs see in Qur’an 27:88 a portrayal of *cosmic upheaval at the end of time*, whereas some contemporary commentators also find a *metaphorical allusion to the hidden motion of the earth*, showcasing the Quran’s layered meanings. Both views ultimately reinforce the same truth: the phenomenal stability we attribute to creation is subject to the command of the Creator.

Scientific Commentary – Mountains in the Qur’an and Geology

The Qur’an contains numerous verses referring to mountains, often in the context of the natural world’s order and stability. Many of these statements intriguingly **align with modern geological knowledge**, suggesting points of contact between scripture and science. Below, we examine key Qur’anic themes about mountains – as stabilizers, as pegs, as products of divine design – and relate them to contemporary scientific understanding (plate tectonics, mountain formation, crustal dynamics, etc.), including how they illuminate verse 27:88.

- **Mountains as Stabilizers of the Earth:** The Qur'an repeatedly mentions that mountains play a role in stabilizing the earth's crust. *"He has set firm mountains on the earth so that it would not shake with you"* (16:15, similarly in 21:31 and 31:10) ^{25 26}. Classical commentators took this to mean mountains prevent excessive earthquakes or crustal instability by anchoring the earth. Modern geology has a parallel concept: **isostasy**. Mountains have deep "roots" of lighter material that extend into the mantle, helping to balance the earth's crust much like a weight stabilizes a tent. Geologists have found that **mountain roots** often extend **5–6 times deeper** than the height of the mountains above ground, akin to how an iceberg's bulk lies beneath water ^{27 28}. For example, the Himalayan range (Mount Everest ~9 km high) sits on a crustal root ~60–70 km deep. These roots help *absorb and distribute tectonic stresses*, lending stability to the crust ^{29 30}. In this sense, mountains *do* contribute to preventing the "earth from shaking" dramatically by acting as natural "**shock absorbers**" or anchors ³⁰. Scientists describe that as massive plates collide and form mountains, much of their force is dissipated in crustal thickening and root formation, which can reduce widespread crustal drifting. Thus, the Qur'anic notion of mountains stabilizing the earth finds a scientific echo: *"Such deep roots stabilize the continental masses, as plate motions are almost completely halted by their formation"* ³¹. While mountains don't *completely* prevent earthquakes (in fact quakes occur often at mountain-building zones), their presence is integral to the balance of the lithosphere. From the perspective of planetary physics, having large mountains and continents of lower density distributed on the crust helps maintain Earth's rotational balance as well ^{32 33}, an idea some writers have extrapolated from the Quranic emphasis on equilibrium in creation.
- **"Mountains as Pegs" – Deep Roots and Isostasy:** The Qur'an uses a vivid metaphor in *Surat alNaba'*: *"Have We not made the earth a cradle, and the mountains as pegs (awtād)?"* (78:6–7) ²⁶. Classical scholars likened mountains to tent-pegs driven into the ground, holding the "tent" of Earth firm. Astonishingly, modern geology has shown this analogy to be more than poetic. Due to isostasy, **mountains literally have peg-like roots** beneath the surface. Encyclopædia Britannica notes: *"High mountains have low-density roots that extend deep into the underlying mantle... analogous to an iceberg floating on water, where the greater part is hidden below"* ^{34 35}. In other words, the Creator "perfected all things" such that the towering peaks we see are supported by an unseen substructure. Dr. Frank Press (a prominent geologist and former NAS president) described mountains as "like stakes" driven into the earth, with deep roots to support them ³⁶. For example, the Alps and Himalayas are undergirded by thickened crust penetrating into the mantle, discovered through gravity measurements and seismic studies in the 20th century ³⁷. The Quranic term *awtād* (stakes) uncannily captures this feature. It was only in the late 1800s that scientists (like Airy and Pratt) formalized the concept of these roots, after measurements showed mountains must have "deficits of mass" below to explain gravitational anomalies ³⁷. The Quranic imagery of mountains-as-pegs, stated **1400 years ago**, resonates strongly with this modern insight ^{38 39}. This congruence has been highlighted by many Muslim scholars as a sign of the Quran's miraculous wisdom in describing natural facts "unknown to anyone at the time" ^{40 41}.
- **Formation and Placement of Mountains:** The Qur'an teaches that mountains are deliberately placed as part of Earth's design: *"And the mountains, He firmly fixed (arsa-ha)"* (79:32), and it invites us: *"Do they not look at... the mountains, how they have been erected (nusibat)?"* (88:19). Today, we understand that mountains were formed through **geological processes** that reflect a long divine plan. Tectonic plate theory (developed in the 20th century) revealed that Earth's crust is broken into plates that move and collide. When plates converge, one may buckle upward or thrust over the other, forming mountain ranges. The Qur'an alludes to God "setting" or "raising" mountains, and geology shows this happened as continents migrated and crashed together. For instance, the Himalayas were formed when the Indian plate collided with the Eurasian plate; the rock strata folded and were pushed skyward. The Quranic phrase "how they are erected" is apt: mountains are *literally uplifted* by God's leave through tectonic forces. As one Muslim geologist notes, the ongoing collision that formed the Himalayas is "consistent with the Quran's depiction of mountains as enduring and stabilizing features of the earth's surface" ⁴². Moreover, volcanic activity (another way mountains form) also fits into this picture – underwater volcanoes create seamounts and island mountains, contributing to the

planet's topography. These processes underscore **God's craftsmanship (sun' Allāh)** in nature: through the gradual shifting of plates and eruption of volcanoes, *"He perfected everything"*, equipping Earth with mountains that benefit life (e.g. influencing climate and providing resources). The Quran even draws a link between mountains and weather: *"He sends the winds and they stir the clouds... He drives them... and you see the rain emerge"* (30:48). While 30:48 itself speaks of clouds, another verse (13:31) implies mountains could be moved by extraordinary means, and 15:19 mentions "lofty mountains" alongside Earth's spread. Modern science confirms that **mountains influence climate** by forcing air upwards (causing rain on windward slopes) and channeling wind patterns ⁴³. In a sense, mountains act as anchors not only for the land but for ecological systems – a role in line with the Quran's portrayal of a purpose behind their placement.

- **Mountains in Motion – Plate Tectonics and Earth's Rotation:** Returning to Qur'an 27:88, *"you see the mountains and think them firm, but they are moving like clouds,"* we find a remarkable parallel in the scientific discovery of **plate tectonics**. Geologists in the 20th century (starting with Alfred Wegener in 1912) realized that the continents are actually drifting slowly over the Earth's mantle ^{44 45}. What we experience as solid ground is in reality – a few centimeters per year – carrying the mountains with it. Over millions of years, this movement is significant: for instance, India has moved hundreds of kilometers, pushing up the Himalayas. Wegener's theory of continental drift, confirmed by later research in the 1960s, showed that today's continents were once united (in a supercontinent called Pangaea) and have since **"drifted" apart** ^{45 17}. The Quran's analogy "like clouds" is striking: clouds move gently, steadily, often unnoticed unless one observes over time. Likewise, mountains creep along on their tectonic plates invisibly to us. It's as if the verse is hinting: there is a *hidden motion* in these giants, as effortless as clouds floating in the sky. Some modern commentators indeed conclude that *"the Qur'an informed us 1400 years ago that mountains are not motionless as they seem, but in constant motion"* ^{46 17}. This scientific fact was unimaginable to people in the 7th century, when mountains were the epitome of immobility. Yet, the Qur'an's description fits beautifully with what we now know about **continental drift and plate tectonics**.

Furthermore, on an even grander scale, the Earth itself is rotating and orbiting the sun. Therefore, **everything on Earth, including mountains, is in motion through space** at high speed – much like passengers on a ship are moving even while feeling stationary. A mountain at the equator moves with Earth's rotation at about 1670 km/hour, and Earth orbits the sun at ~107,000 km/hour. We "think them firmly fixed" because we share the same frame of motion. This cosmic perspective adds another layer of meaning: what is solidly planted on Earth is still *"floating" in the heavens*. Some scholars have pointed out that the verse is sandwiched between 27:86 (which mentions the cycles of night and day, an allusion to Earth's rotation) and the Judgment Day verses – possibly indicating both a **natural reality now and an ultimate reality in the Hereafter** ^{18 47}. While classical exegesis did not consider Earth's rotation (it wasn't known then), today we can appreciate how elegantly the Quranic phrasing covers the truth that **nothing in creation is truly static**. As one commentator writes: "The earlier audience, with their belief in a flat, static Earth, struggled with this 'bizarre' idea of mountains in flux... They explained it as future only. But the verse's wording — negating our *perception* of stillness with the reality of motion — strongly suggests an ongoing phenomenon, not merely a future cataclysm" ^{48 49}. In any case, whether referring to present continental drift or future destruction (or both in a layered sense), Qur'an 27:88 stands as a testimony to **God's design in nature**: what appears rigid is actually part of a fluid, orderly system. Modern science, through plate tectonics and astrophysics, has illuminated this truth of a dynamically created world.

In summary, the Quranic theme of mountains encapsulates *stability and solidity* on one hand, and *movement and impermanence* on the other – a dichotomy now mirrored in scientific understanding. Mountains stabilize the earth, with deep roots acting as pegs ³⁴, and yet mountains themselves move, floating on the mantle like clouds in the sky ¹⁷. This interplay of meanings in the Qur'an invites wonder: the One who **"perfected all things"** equipped the earth with an appropriate balance (mountains and plains, firmness and flexibility) to support life ^{29 50}. And the One who set this stable stage can also cause it to

change in an instant when the appointed time comes. The scientific insights into mountain geology not only deepen our appreciation of verses like 27:88, 16:15, or 78:7 – they also reinforce a sense of awe at the *wisdom and power* behind these natural phenomena, as the Qur’an emphasizes.

Philosophical Symbolism – Mountains as Signs of Transience and Divine Power

Beyond the literal meanings, Qur’an 27:88 carries profound **symbolic and philosophical messages**. Mountains, in human thought, symbolize permanence, immovability, and grandeur. By declaring that they “float away like clouds,” the Qur’an delivers a jarring but enlightening metaphor: even the most enduring features of the world are ultimately **transient**. What we perceive as solid reality is, under closer scrutiny or in due time, as fleeting as vapor. This insight resonates with both Islamic spiritual teachings and even certain philosophical viewpoints (e.g. the idea of the material world’s impermanence). As one commentary notes, “the verse calls on man to journey from a shallow view to a profound vision” – to realize that **the apparent solidity of creation is an illusion when compared to the lasting reality of God** ^{51,52}. The mountains seem eternal, but they too are in **constant flux** or can be made to vanish at God’s command. In Islamic thought, this underscores the Qur’anic theme that “all things perish save His Face” (28:88) – only God is truly permanent, while creation is contingent and passing.

Impermanence and Illusion: The phrasing “you think them firmly fixed... but they are passing” sets up a direct contrast between human perception and reality ⁴⁹. Philosophically, this invites reflection on the **limits of our sensory knowledge**. We often take the world at face value – assuming stability where there is motion, assuming longevity where change is inherent. The Qur’an corrects this error of perception. It is a reminder of the *relative* nature of truth accessible to our senses versus the *absolute* truth known to God.

This aligns with a broader Islamic epistemology: do not be deceived by outward appearances, for the unseen reality (al-ghayb) may be very different. Indeed, the verse almost foreshadows a modern scientific worldview where, at fundamental levels, everything is dynamic (even solid matter is mostly moving particles and empty space). It also echoes the spiritual idea that the world is *mata’ al-ghurūr* – a deceiving enjoyment – not solid enough to lean on for ultimate fulfillment. Classical Sufi commentators, while not commenting on geology, might take a verse like this to symbolize that **reliance on worldly greatness (mountains)** is misguided, for it can dissolve like a cloud. True permanence lies only with the Divine.

The Power of God vs. the Might of Mountains: Mountains are among the greatest manifestations of natural power and majesty – towering, unyielding, “the bones of the earth.” Throughout the Qur’an, they are used as a measure to convey God’s supremacy. For example, “If We had sent down this Quran upon a mountain, you would have seen it humbled and rent asunder out of awe of God” (59:21). This verse (though about a different context) shows that **mountains symbolize the pinnacle of material strength**, yet even they would crumble under the weight of God’s word, demonstrating the **infinitely greater power of the spiritual reality**. Likewise, the fact that mountains “float away” when God wills (whether now or on Judgment Day) is a potent symbol: **no matter how immovable something appears, it is utterly subject to God’s command**. This humbles the human intellect and pride – for if the mountains cannot stand firm before Allah, how can human power or achievement? The Quranic narrative of the end times often emphasizes this symbolism: when the Hour comes, “the mountains will be like tufts of wool” (101:5) or “like a mirage” (78:20) before they are obliterated. Such images convey that **all worldly dominion and permanence will dissolve**, fulfilling God’s plan. Philosophically, it’s a memento mori on a cosmic scale: even the earth’s most gigantic structures are ephemeral.

Calls to Reflection: The Qur’an encourages believers to reflect on **mountains as a sign (ayah)** of God. “Have they not looked at the mountains – how they were raised up?” (88:19) is a rhetorical question prompting contemplation. A theme in these verses is *wonder and gratitude*: the mountains provide stability, beauty, and benefits (water sources, minerals, pasture in their valleys) by God’s grace. Simultaneously, their sheer size and firmness make us contemplate **the might of their Maker**. When Qur’an

27:88 is read not only literally but also metaphorically, it can be seen as pointing to a deeper moral: **do not be fooled by the seeming permanence of worldly life**. In a spiritual sense, the verse resonates with the Quranic comparisons of this life to a passing cloud or a vanishing shadow – something insubstantial. As one reflection puts it: *“In this universal flux, the apparent solidity and immobility of the mountains is only an illusion.”*⁵³. By drawing our attention to that illusion, the Qur’an is guiding us to place our hopes and fears appropriately – not in the “mountains” of material existence, but in the eternal reality of God and the Hereafter.

Moreover, the verse’s mention of “God’s handiwork, who perfected all things” immediately after the mountain analogy suggests a **philosophical insight into cosmic order**. The movement of the mountains (whether gradual or apocalyptic) is not chaotic; it is described as part of the perfected design (لَا يُغْنِي عَنْكَ كِبَاؤُكَ وَلَوْ رُدُّوكَ إِلَىٰ كُنُوزِكُم مَّا يُغْنِي عَنْكَ كِبَاؤُكُمْ وَلَوْ رُدُّوكَ إِلَىٰ كُنُوزِكُم مَّا يُغْنِي عَنْكَ كِبَاؤُكُمْ). Some modern writers have argued that this indicates a *subtle harmony*: even the drifting of continents or the eventual cataclysm of mountains follows laws that are finely tuned – an aspect of the world’s beauty and purpose^{54 55}. Thus, what might seem destructive (mountains flying apart) is actually one phase of Allah’s “perfect work” leading to the next stage of existence. Philosophically, this can be seen as an invitation to trust in the **divine wisdom** behind all processes of change, even the dramatic ones. Everything transitions in accordance with a higher order.

In summary, the **symbolic teachings** of Qur’an 27:88 are rich: (1) The transient nature of the world – even mountains will “pass,” so we should not be deluded by material stability. (2) The overwhelming power of God – what is unshakeable to us is trivial for Him to move. (3) The need for deeper vision – to see beyond what our eyes perceive (jamadat, solidity) to the underlying truth (motion and divine control). These lessons align perfectly with Islamic theology and ethics, reinforcing humility, reliance on Allah, and awareness of the Hereafter. The verse, therefore, operates on both a **metaphysical level** (altering our perspective on reality) and a **moral level** (prompting us to align our priorities with what truly lasts). As one classical footnote concludes: since God can make the mountains move, we should realize that He is also “*fully aware of what we do*” and will call us to account⁵⁶. The next section will delve more into this theological dimension.

Theological Reflections – Omnipotence, Purpose, and Accountability

The final part of Qur’an 27:88 ties the cosmic sign back to the Creator’s attributes and our relationship with Him: *“Such is the handiwork of God, who perfected all things. He is fully aware of what you do.”* Each element of this statement carries theological significance:

- **“The handiwork of God, who perfected all things”** (لَا يُغْنِي عَنْكَ كِبَاؤُكَ وَلَوْ رُدُّوكَ إِلَىٰ كُنُوزِكُم مَّا يُغْنِي عَنْكَ كِبَاؤُكُمْ) – This affirms that the phenomena described (mountains moving like clouds, day and night cycles, etc.) are not random or meaningless. They are **God’s craftsmanship**. In classical tafsir, scholars like Ibn Kathir note that after describing amazing natural events, the Qur’an often adds such a phrase to remind us that *Allah’s power and precision underlie the universe*¹⁵. The word *itqān* in Arabic implies meticulous perfection and firmness. Theologically, this means **God has created everything with purpose, order, and excellence**. From the shaping of mountains to their eventual unmaking, all follows divine wisdom. The verse invites us to marvel at the Creator’s work: the stable earth with its moving parts is a sign of **tawhīd** (the oneness of God in His creative power). As the *Ma’arif al-Qur’an* commentary says, this line emphasizes that none of these events (the alternation of day/night, the blowing away of mountains, etc.) should astonish us – “*because their Creator is not a human or angel of limited ability, but the Lord of all worlds*”^{15 57}. Thus, a theological takeaway is the **omnipotence and perfect wisdom of Allah**: He designed the earth with faultless engineering (mountains and all), and He can just as perfectly reconfigure it when the time comes. Believers are meant to recognize in this the hand of a **Master Craftsman**, and thus deepen in faith and reverence.

- **God’s Knowledge and Human Accountability:** The closing words, *“Indeed, He is fully aware of what you do,”* shift the focus from the cosmic sign to **personal responsibility**. This is a common Quranic move – signs in nature are coupled with reminders of judgment and ethics. The logic is that if God can “see” and govern something as grand as the mountains, then certainly *“He is acquainted with your deeds”* (لَهُۥٓ اَعْيُنٌۢ رَّاۤىۡ مَا تَعْمَلُوۡنَ). Classical scholars like **Maududi** explain that after depicting God’s might in creation, the verse warns us not to assume that such an all-powerful God would be oblivious to our actions ^{58 56}. In fact, just as the physical laws reflect God’s perfection, the moral law is too – and God’s awareness ensures justice. Theologically, this emphasizes **God’s attribute of omniscience** and the concept of *Murāqabah* (divine watchfulness). Nothing we do is hidden; the one who makes mountains move surely knows every move we make. It also reinforces belief in the **Day of Judgment**: the earlier part of the verse conjures the upheaval of the Last Day or at least alludes to the vulnerability of worldly life, and the latter part makes it explicit that on that Day our deeds will matter. Thus, the verse transitions from describing a sign of God’s power to a direct ethical implication: **prepare for accountability**. As one tafsir footnote put it, *“From such a God you should not expect that after giving you intellect and power, He will remain unaware of how you used them”* ⁵⁸

• In simpler terms, recognizing God’s mastery over creation should lead us to submit to Him and live righteously, knowing we answer to Him.

- **Integrating Science and Faith:** The theological message of 27:88 also helps reconcile scientific contemplation with spirituality. Learning that mountains “float” or that continents drift can be a purely material observation, but the Quranic context sacralizes it: this is **“the design of Allah”**, *Ayātullah* (signs of God). A Muslim scientist or believer sees plate tectonics not as a blind natural force but as part of God’s creative method – *“He perfected all things.”* In our era, some have used this verse to argue that the Quran not only anticipated certain scientific facts but did so to direct our hearts to God. For instance, the fact that the verse’s wording so perfectly fits continental drift can enhance one’s faith that **the Author of the Qur’an is also the Author of nature** ^{20 59}. However, even beyond any “scientific miracle” aspect, the theological core remains: **God’s wisdom is manifest in the natural order**. The mountains’ existence and movement are for a purpose. This invites an attitude of *tafakkur* (deep reflection) where studying geology or cosmology becomes a way to appreciate Allah’s attributes (His knowledge, power, intentionality). Many contemporary scholars encourage this integrated view, citing verses like 27:88 as examples where understanding the science can lead to a greater appreciation of *tawhid* and *rububiyyah* (Allah’s lordship over creation)

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- **Divine Purpose in Mountain Verses:** Taking a broader view of the Qur’an’s mountain motifs: Verses such as *“We placed in the earth firm mountains, lest it shake with them”* ²⁵ or *“We made the mountain stand firm”* are often immediately followed by mentions of benefits to humans (springs, paths, habitats) or calls to thankfulness. This indicates a theological theme of **Divine providence**. God made mountains to nurture life (catching rain, storing water, providing minerals, etc.), which reflects His mercy. On the flip side, verses about mountains being removed serve as warnings about the temporality of worldly provisions. Both aspects – mercy in creation, justice in resurrection – come together in understanding our place under God’s dominion. The mountains’ obedient submission (they tremble at God’s fear in 33:72 and 59:21, they glorify God alongside Prophet David in 34:10) further teaches us **humility and worship**. The Qur’an almost personifies mountains as servants of God that know their Master. In the end times, their “departure” is like the **dissolution of the old order** to make way for the resurrection, again by God’s command.

In conclusion, the theological meaning of Qur’an 27:88 can be summarized in a few key points: **God is Almighty and All-Knowing**, as demonstrated by His control over the greatest objects of creation; His creation is **purposeful and perfected**, inviting us to trust in His design; and we as moral agents are under His watch, responsible for our deeds as we traverse this transient world. The verse thus moves the reader from *cosmology* to *eschatology* to *ethics* in one sweep – a hallmark of the

Qur'an's holistic approach. It reminds us that understanding the signs of God in the universe should lead to recognising the **signs of God in our hearts and lives**, prompting faith and righteous action.

Conclusion

Qur'an 27:88 stands at the intersection of scientific wonder, philosophical reflection, and spiritual guidance. Classical exegesis paints it as a dramatic vision of the Last Day, when mountains – the prime symbols of stability – will dissolve into nothingness by God's command. Contemporary perspectives enrich this understanding by pointing out how the verse's words also uncannily describe realities like plate tectonics and Earth's rotation, truths uncovered centuries later. By surveying other mountain-related verses, we found a consistent Quranic motif: mountains are at once *firm* and *fragile*, providing stability by divine favor yet destined to pass away when their role is fulfilled. Modern geology affirms many specifics (mountain roots, crustal balance, continental drift) that resonate with the Quran's descriptions ^{34 19}, offering believers fresh opportunities to glorify God through His natural signs. Philosophically, the verse humbles our perception – cautioning that what we consider permanent is only temporarily so – and urges us to seek the True Permanence of God. Theologically, it underscores God's majesty in creation and His intimate knowledge of our actions ^{62 56}, thereby linking cosmic signs to personal accountability.

In light of all these facets, Qur'an 27:88 can be appreciated as a **multilayered miracle**: linguistically powerful, scientifically intriguing, philosophically profound, and theologically enlightening. Whether read in the context of Judgment Day or as a subtle hint of Earth's hidden motion (or both), the verse ultimately fulfills its purpose as a *reminder and a sign*. It reminds us that **nothing in creation is beyond the power of Allah**, and it serves as a sign for those "who reflect" – that behind the grand motions of the cosmos lies the hand of a Perfect Creator. Seeing the mountains "floating like clouds" in our mind's eye, we are moved to proclaim, like the Qur'an often does when mentioning the marvels of creation: "*Blessed is Allah, the Best of creators*", and to prepare for the Day when we meet Him, the One "*fully aware of what we do.*"

Sources:

- Classical Tafsīr: Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* (on 27:88) – see English in ^{4 5}; al-Jalalayn tafsir ⁸; *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān* (Mufti M. Shafi) ^{7 63 3}.
- Contemporary Tafsīr: Sayyid Qutb, *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān*; Maududi, *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* ^{64 56}; Islamweb Fatwa on 27:88 context ^{2 23}.
- Qur'anic Cross-References: 16:15, 21:31, 31:10 (mountains as stabilizers) ^{25 26}; 78:6-7, 79:32 (mountains as pegs, firmly fixed) ²⁶; 88:19 (reflection on mountains) ⁴²; 52:10, 18:47, 20:105, 101:5, 56:5 (mountains on Doomsday) ^{65 10}.
- Scientific Insights: *Geology & Quran – Mountains*: Barati (2022) on clouds-mountains simile ¹³; *Asian Mail* Geology article ^{29 66}; "Function of Mountains" (Questions on Islam) ^{39 67}; "Movement of Mountains" (Questions on Islam) ^{45 17}; Encyclopædia Britannica on Isostasy ^{34 27}.
- Philosophical/Reflection: Lamp of Islam blog commentary ^{52 49 68}.
- Theological: Ma'arif al-Qur'an on 27:88 ¹⁵; Maududi footnote ⁵⁶.

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¹ ² ⁴ ^{5 21 22 23 24 65} Passing of mountains in verse 2788 will be on Day of Resurrection

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