

Scientific Explanation of the Movement of Mountains in Verse 88 of *Sūrah al-Naml*

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ABSTRACT:

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Verse 88 of *Sūrah al-Naml* has likened mountains to moving clouds. Although in the previous centuries, most exegetes considered the movement of mountains to be one of the pre-resurrection events, new scientific findings in geology and meteorology have brought new aspects of this similarity to scholars. This study aims to present a new understanding of verse 88 of *Sūrah al-Naml* and identify the similarities between the movement of mountains and clouds, according to the reference scientific texts in geology and meteorology. The results showed that the similarity of mountains to clouds, in addition to the direction and speed of movement previously specified, is in the mechanism of motion, layers, and constituents. Earlier, many exegetes considered the movement of the mountains to be related to the resurrection and did not see it as compatible with the current conditions of the mountains but today, scientific findings show that the movement of mountains in several aspects is like that of the clouds: (1) Mountain movements are influenced by the movement of the earth's twenty plates, in different directions including orbital, meridian, combination of the two and ascending. Clouds also show all four sides of movement in the atmosphere. (2) The movement of mountains is slow and at a speed of several millimeters or a few centimeters per year, and the movement of clouds is also slow in the sky. (3) The mountains move on the edge of the plates in an upward motion on the edge of the opposite plate, and this phenomenon can be seen in the front clouds of the warm air mass, i.e., the cold air mass creeps upwards at the front. (4) The mountains continue to evolve even as they move with tectonics forces from below and erosion forces from above.

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Clouds also evolve from above while moving, by converging currents from below and diverging from above.

KEYWORDS: Mountains, Clouds, Similarity of Motion.

I. Introduction

One of the most frequent references of the Noble Qur'an is references to atmospheric phenomena. In verse 88 of *Sūrah al-Naml*, the cloud phenomenon of the atmosphere system is likened to the mountain phenomenon from the earth system in terms of the aspect of motion.

The simile mentioned in this verse, after 1,400 years of the revelation of the Qur'an, can be examined and adapted in terms of both the form and the content, and the new findings of both geology and meteorology.

This simile has challenged the Qur'anic exegetes for many centuries and has caused different problems. Mountains in the human mind have always represented persistence, strength, stability of the shape, and belonging to the earth's surface. On the contrary, clouds have always represented instability, steaminess, shape variability, and belonging to the sky. It is while the Qur'an has given the mountains a very obvious and tangible movement like a cloud. Although this similarity has been somewhat obscure for centuries, it is now fully understandable with the advances made in meteorology and geology.

This issue lies at the common boundary between the two realms of atmosphere and cryosphere. In this paper, I intend to explain the different scientific aspects of this similarity by examining the verse linguistically and scientifically.

2. Literature Review

Many researches have been conducted so far with the subject of scientific explanation of the verses of the Noble Qur'an. In this research, it has been tried to explain a collection or case of scientific references of the Noble Qur'an. From there, knowledge is continuously expanded, the explanations mentioned, and new dimensions are found every day. One of the researches that have been focused on the position of some forces in the Qur'an is the research of Iravani and Pourkhosravani (2013). According to the researchers, these are the forces that shape the Earth.

Among the masses of explanations carried out according to the subject of the current study, two studies including “References of the Noble Qur’an to the Position of Mountains” (Mohajjal 2011) and “Scientific Miracle of the Qur’an on How the Mountains were Created” (Mohajjal 2012) are worth noting. In these two studies, the position of mountains in the earth and their role in the firmness of the Earth’s crust have been investigated. Another research in this field has been conducted by Marouf and Rajabi (2012) titled, “The Special Place of Mountains in the Noble Qur’an”. In this research, the reasons of emphasis of the Noble Qur’an on the firmness of mountains have been investigated by means of library method.

Another research in this field has been conducted by Diari et al. (2014) titled, “Moving Mountains from the Perspective of the Qur’an and Geology”. In this research, after conceptualization of the passages of verse 88 of *Sūrah al-Naml*, the exegetes’ views on the purpose of the world or the hereafter of this reference have been reviewed. One of the main themes of this research is addressing the similarity of mountains with clouds.

One of the first scientific explanations for verse 88 of *Sūrah al-Naml* is that of Karnegar (2003) in Egypt. Describing the constituents of the planet and the position of mountain ranges on the crust, the researcher considers the reference of the Holy Qur’an to the movement of mountains as a scientific miracle and adapts it to the latest findings of geological knowledge.

In the present study, we aim to discuss new aspects of the similarity of mountains to clouds in the field of meteorological and geological knowledge based on the verse in question to determine more dimensions of the scientific position of this simile.

3. *Data and Method*

The data of this study were obtained from reference books and articles of geology and meteorology by library method. Then, the scientific findings were presented on the expressions of verse 88 of *Sūrah al-Naml* by a comparative method. In order to make this adaptation more accurate and visual, the necessary patterns in geological and meteorological sciences were designed. Components of geological pattern including earth plates, impact foreheads, sediments and folds, and components of

meteorological pattern including air masses, fronts, water vapour and clouds.

In the supplementary discussion, the similarity patterns of the elevation classes of mountains and clouds were drawn to show the similarity of mountains and clouds in addition to the “movement” in the constituent components.

4. Results and Discussion

The Noble Qur'an is a book of guidance and considers the creation of the universe as a sign of God's power and knowledge. Among these creations are mountains. In verse 88 of *Sūrah al-Naml*, the Qur'an has proposed one of the most explicit and scientific propositions about the mountains: “Moving mountains like moving clouds”. The text of the verse is as follows:

وَتَرَى الْجِبَالَ تَحْسَبُهَا حَامِدَةً وَهِيَ تَمُرُّ مَرَّ السَّحَابِ صُنْعَ اللَّهِ الَّذِي أَتَقَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ إِنَّهُ خَبِيرٌ
بِمَا تَفْعَلُونَ

Now you see the mountains, thinking they are firmly fixed, but they are travelling 'just' like clouds. 'That is' the design of Allah, who has perfected everything. Surely, He is All Aware of what you do.

Some commentators have attributed the movement of mountains in this verse to the events before the Day of Judgement. Tabataba'i (1995), according to the context, attributed the movement of mountains to pre-resurrection events. Some other commentators have attributed the verse to current events on the Earth. Qorashi (1998) and Tayyib (1999) interpreted the movement of mountains under the Earth's motion.

4.1. The Time of Likening Mountains to Clouds

There are clear pieces of evidence in the verse that show that the meaning of the verse is likening the movement of mountains to clouds in the current condition of the earth, not in the future. In this regard, Makarem (1995) mentioned several proofs in the verse, which indicate this meaning, including:

1. The verse says, “You suppose that mountains are fixed”,¹ but the events before the resurrection are so obvious and severe that there is no room for supposition anymore. The Qur’an (Q. 22:2) describes the events of that day in such a way that due to the severity of the events, every nursing mother will abandon her child, every pregnant mother will have a miscarriage, and people will act like drunkards when they are not drunk.
2. The movement of mountains was likened to the movement of clouds, which is a slow movement, while the Qur’an says, the intensity of the movement of mountains before the resurrection is so great that they will fall apart (Q. 20:105).
3. The verse emphasizes the firmness of the world system,² which is incompatible with the disintegration of this system at the events of the Resurrection.
4. The phrase “God is aware of what you do”³ in the verse is in the present tense. If the verse was meant to refer to the events before the Resurrection, the future tense verb should have been used and it would have been said, “God is aware of what you will do” (Marouf and Rajabi 2012). They also believe that the present tense verb in the verse is a proof that the verse refers to the current conditions of the mountains, not their future conditions.

Now, in order to explain the verse more thoroughly and confirm the verse’s reference to the current conditions of the Earth, it is necessary to introduce here the types of movements that can be considered for the mountains. These movements are based on today’s findings of astronomy and geology:

1. Moving mountains along with the Earth’s rotation around its axis means one rotation every 24 hours: The speed of this movement varies in different geographical orbits. This speeds up from the Earth’s poles toward the equator.
2. Moving mountains along with the Earth’s circulation around the sun:

I. تَحْسِبُهَا جَامِدَةً

2. صُنِعَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي أَنْتَقَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ

3. إِنَّهُ خَيْرٌ بِمَا تَفْعَلُونَ

Scientists believe this movement is on the edge of ecliptic plane (Dalaki 2008) at a speed of 106,200 km/h.

The Qur'an (Q. 77:25) testified to this issue centuries ago by comparing the Earth to a bird that folds its wings while flying (Sadeqi 1977).

3. Moving mountains independent of the rotational movements of the Earth and on the crust. This movement is on the surface of the Earth, slow and intangible.

4.2. The Relation of the Movement of Mountains and the Earth

Motion is relative; that is, a moving object can be stationary or moving compared to other moving objects. Humans first noticed different movements of the Earth with simple tools and then advanced tools, like a rotational movement in 24 hours and a circulation in 365 days around the sun.

Among these movements, the mountains move so slowly on the surface that not on the scale of the day, year, and decade, but on the scale of life, humans have not been able to observe their movement with the ordinary eye for centuries. Therefore, the movement of mountains was discovered later than other movements. Based on scientific evidence, three types of movements for mountains can be examined:

1. Rotational motion of the Earth: In this motion, the main moving object is the Earth, while the moving object that the verse is referring to is the mountains. Due to this rotational movement, not only mountains, but also seas, plains, rivers, and cities are moving with the earth, but also the verse only refers to the movement of mountains.
2. The Earth's circulation around the sun: In this type of motion, the Earth has a permanent circulation in the interplanetary space of the solar system and on the edge of the ecliptic plane. Naturally, due to this motion, everything on the Earth, and around it, like the atmosphere, is orbiting around the sun.
3. Movement of mountains on the surface of the Earth: Based on the available evidence, this type of movement was not known until 1970 (Mohajjal 2012). The research showed that based on the similarity of the shape of the beaches and the geological evidence, the lands scattered on the surface of the earth were once together. These lands

are now thousands of kilometres apart (Mohajjal 2011) and can even be seen on both sides of the globe, such as South America and Africa, which were once joined together.

Complementary research gradually showed that on the one hand, Earth is composed of three main layers, including nucleus, mantle, and crust. The Earth's crust is solid, but the mantle has a fluid nature at a temperature of 800 to 1,300 degrees Celsius (Earle 2015). On the other hand, the Earth's crust is composed of fragments and, in fact, 20 plates (Mohajjal 2012). Some of them have come up the oceanic surface due to their high elevation and are seen as dry.

These plates float on a fluid mantle like a plank of wood, and the fluid mantle, with its cyclic movements, tries to drive them from beneath them permanently or apart. As a result of these movements, some lands on Earth and, naturally, the mountain ranges on them have been separated over millions of years. Geological findings show that this movement continues with intensity and weakness for many lands, resulting in mountains on them (Figure 1).

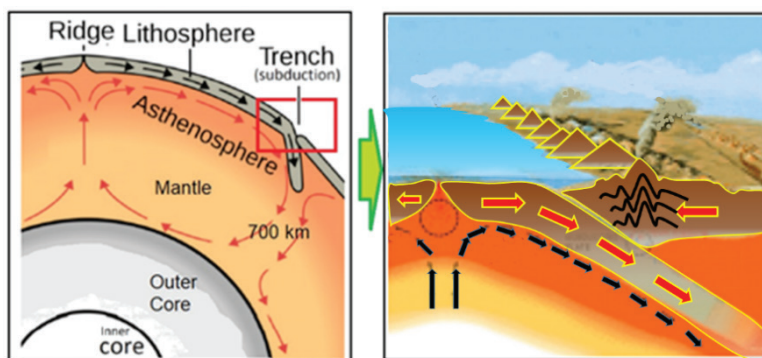


Figure 1. *Subduction of plates (Earle 2015: 12 and 61).*

Scientists consider the speed of plates to move from a few millimetres to a few centimetres per year (Mohajjal 2012). Scotese (2015), for example, considers this speed for plates such as Pacific, Nazca and India more than 5 mm per year. Oceanic plates are said to have a slower rate than continental plates for reasons such as thickness 6 to 8 times lower (Najjar 2003: 58) and consequently higher density.

4.3. *Similarities of the Movements of Mountains and Clouds*

1. In many cases, clouds can be seen moving in different positions in the sky, resulting from different currents that are pushing them. Similar to this feature, the Earth plates have different orbital, meridian, and vector movements along latitude and longitude. These movements cause the different side of the mountain ranges that are riding on them.
2. The terrestrial observer sees the clouds moving slowly in the sky. The detection of the distance that the clouds have travelled is achieved by reversing the look from them within a few minutes. The Earth plates also have a calm movement and can only be measured in terms of their time intervals of several million years, their direction, and speed of movement.
3. Each cloud is composed of countless liquid droplets or icy needles floating in the air (Ahrnes 2002). Each cloud in the sky is the ascension of a stream of air whose water vapour content has reached saturation, density, and droplet formation, and hence it is visible. Even small cumulus clouds growing behind the cold front show small warm air climbs adjacent to the ground through convective motions (William 1999).

In meteorology, the movement and ride of the warm air mass on the cold air mass is known as the hot front. This move creates a system of clouds known as the warm front. Over-thrust in the mountains (Earle 2015) is also a phenomenon that is similar to the mechanism for mounting the hot air mass at the forehead on the cold air mass. Therefore, as the warm front clouds are the result of a warm air mass mounted at the collision site on the cold air mass; the mountains are also seen at the site of the pushing of a plate on the other (Figure 2).

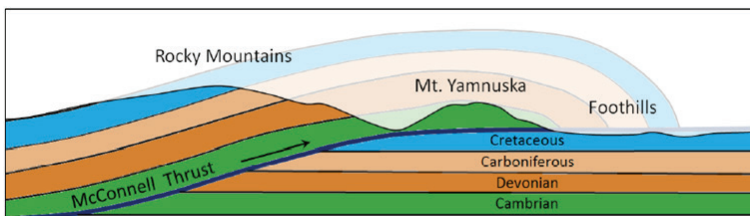


Figure 2. Thrust and over thrust in the mountains (Earle 2015: 362).

4. The clouds are constantly moving and have no stopping. Figure 3 corresponds to the movement of cloud systems over the Middle East over three consecutive days. The figure shows that the cloud system sequence has moved from the Persian Gulf to southeastern Iran and then eastern Afghanistan during these three days, respectively. During the third day, the sky of Iran can be seen cloudless.

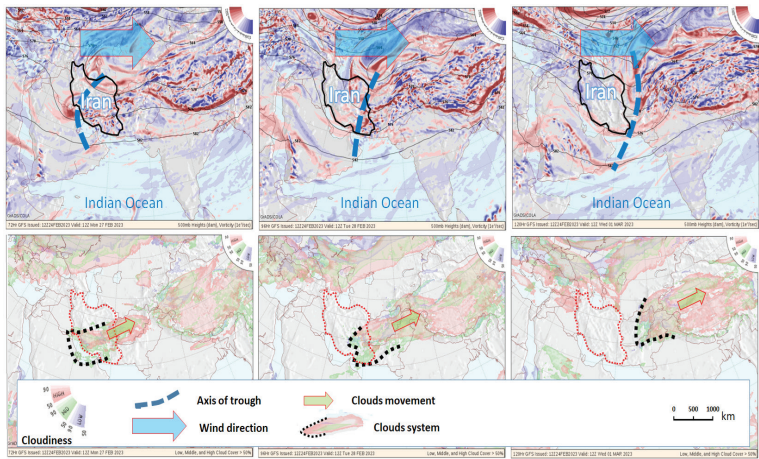


Figure 3. The movement of clouds (Forecast maps-wxmaps.org).

Figure 4 also shows the path of clouds moving from one side of the sky to the other using neural networks and Lucas Kanade method. Images show 69% of the sky's surface as cloudy. Similarly, geological findings attest to the continuous movement of mountains on the edge of the Earth's plates.

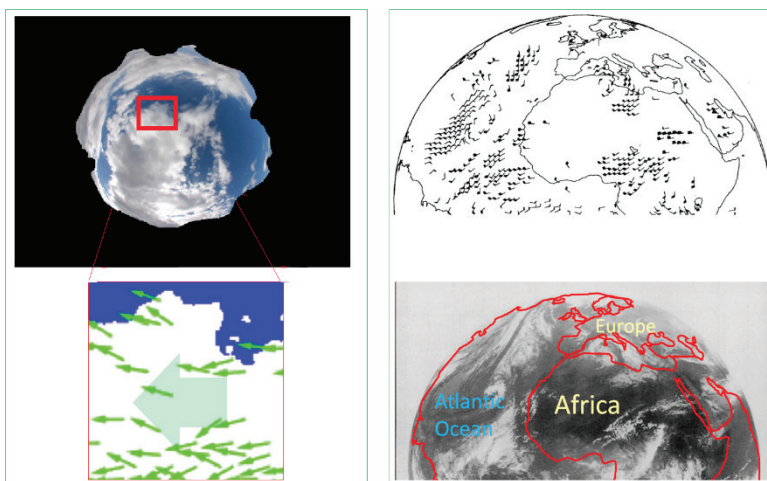


Figure 4. The figure shows cloud motion on the surface of the sunshine recorder (Tuominen and Tuononen 2017) in small scale (left) and cloud motion winds from Meteosat IR images (Schmetz et al. 1993) in the large scale-northern hemisphere (right).

5. Clouds are the result of pushing up wet air, including mechanical factors such as roughness or dynamics such as air climbing on the fronts. Similar to this mechanism, mountain ranges arise because of being pushed upwards from a part of the crust that is under pressure between two plates. The Himalayas are an example of these mountain ranges at the site of the collision between the two plates of Eurasia and India (Bouilhol et al. 2013) and Zagros, another example of which is between the two plates of Iran and Hijaz (Arabic). The Hijaz plate goes under Iran's plate at a speed of 3 cm per year (Talebian and Jackson 2004).

The result of high driven wet air under the condensation process is the formation of droplets and then droplets, as well as the crystallization of ice and growth, and then the precipitation of crystalline grains and regular snow. These rains cause the development of lands and the result of pushing the edge of a plate over another can be the rise of lava that generally contains heavy metallic minerals. Release of molten rocks from the pressure and heat of the depths causes them to crystallize and form streaks of mines that are important for human exploitation (Figure 5).

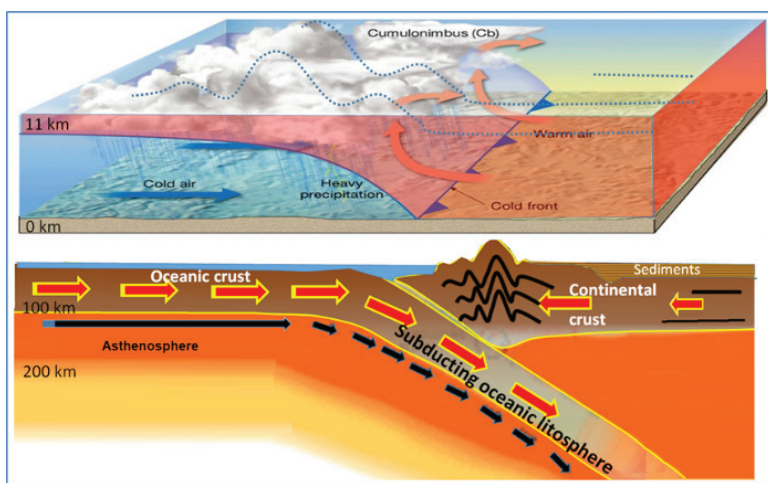


Figure 5. Similarity of motion and the emergence of mountains and clouds (Lutgens and Tarbuck 1989 (above) and Earle 2015 (below)).

6. The Earth's rotation and circulation. This difference is also observed between the direction and the speed of movement of the Earth's plates with the direction and the speed of the Earth's rotation and circulation.
7. The westerlies system exists in both the northern and southern hemispheres. In the context of the waves of this system, airflows are always rising and descending. In the ascending part (usually the western part) of these winds, cloud zones emerge and strengthen and move, and in the descending part (usually the eastern part) of these clouds gradually disperse or disappear. On the Earth's surface, it can also be seen that the oceanic plate is driven underneath it by the resistance of the continental plate.

With this resistance, deposits in the sedimentary basin on the active edge of the continental plate begin to fold, exit the water, and gradually take altitude (Mohajjal 2011). In these circumstances, the subduction plate gradually disappears under the plate, fading into the mantle.

Therefore, it can be said that the simile of the movement of mountains to clouds in this verse is not a random and blind simile, but includes various components of movement such as direction, speed, and even substrates and their consequences (Table 1).

Table 1. Feature of motion in the clouds and mountains.

| | Feature of Motion in the Clouds | Feature of Motion in the Mountains |
|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Air masses and therefore clouds have movements on different directions. | The plates of the earth, and therefore the mountains, have movements on different directions. |
| 2 | The ground observer sees the movement of clouds slowly. | The geologist also sees the movement of mountains slowly. |
| 3 | Cloud formation follows the upside of wet air, even with a gentle slope. | The formation of mountains is the result of folding and rising materials and sediments ahead and above the plates. |
| 4 | The clouds are moving continuously. | Plates are constantly moving at different speeds. |
| 5 | The movement and collision of the air masses leads to the formation of clouds. | The movement and collision of the Earth's plates lead to the formation of mountains. |
| 6 | The movement of clouds is independent of the Earth's rotation and revolution movements. | The movement of plates is independent of the Earth's rotation and revolution movements. |

4.4. Other Similarities

Although the subject of the discussed verse is about the movement of mountains and clouds, in many cases the similarity of the movement of an object with another is influenced by other similarities such as their shapes and components as well as whether they are plural or singular.

1. The word *jabal* (mountain) was mentioned in the Qur'an 38 times (Safarpoor et al. 2019) as both singular and plural (Mohajjal 2012). As mountains on Earth can be seen both individually and in the form of mountain ranges, clouds are also seen in the sky as both individual and ranks, in the form of warm and cold front clouds system.
2. From the geological point of view, the Earth's plates have length, width, and thickness that are observed side by side on Earth. From the viewpoint of meteorological knowledge, air masses are surfaces with specified length, width, and thickness that are homogeneous in

terms of humidity and especially temperature. Continental plates with a thickness of 40 km and an oceanic one with a thickness of 7 km (Humbelt 2015) have swept the Earth's surface, and the mountains *usually*, before and after them, and indeed their collision zone, constitute the highest part of them. Why *usually*?

It is because we do not always have the growth of cloud systems at the adjacent location of the air masses just as we do not always have mountain ranges in the place of proximity to the air masses. Growth is in line with the collision of air masses depending on the humidity of the air and the intensity of the air climb. Clouds also grow before and after the air masses and in the same collision zone as their highest part.

3. The high mountains even on the equator are composed of three parts: liquid (streams and springs), liquid and solid (scattered surfaces of melting snow and ice) and solid (permanent ice and snow) respectively. The tallest clouds such as cumulonimbus, also have a triple temperature profile from the bottom of the floor composed of liquid droplets, the middle floor consists of liquid droplets and icy needles, and the upper floor consists of ice needles (Figure 6) (Barati and Paymard 2022).

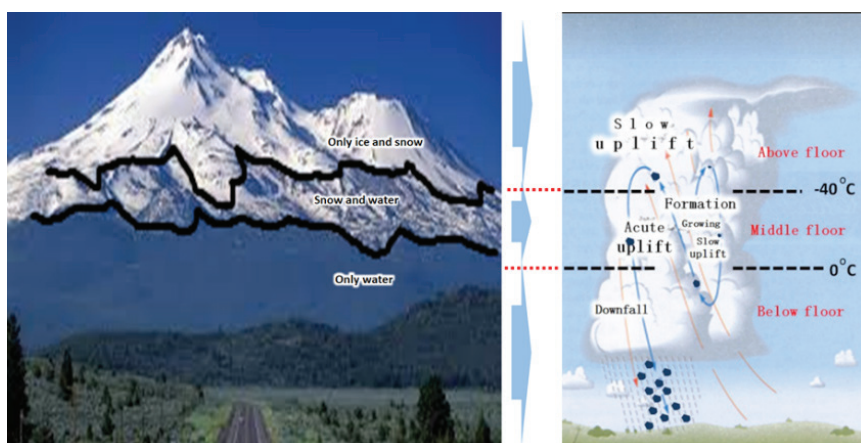


Figure 6. Three-storey thermal similarity model in mountains and clouds (Barati and Paymard 2022).

5. Conclusion

In verse 88 of *Sūrah al-Naml*, God says that while you think the mountains are fixed, they are moving, and their movement is like the movement of clouds. This simile has led some scholars to consider it to be metaphorical for centuries. Some said that the movement of mountains means their inherent movement in the sense that is discussed in philosophy. Others considered it a real phenomenon but did not regard it related to the present time; that is, the current state of the mountains. They considered the mentioned movement to be related to the future; that is, the time of Resurrection and when the pillars of the earth will break apart. However, the new scientific findings showed that this simile could be completely real and related to the current state of the mountains.

In this study, different aspects of likening the movement of mountains to clouds were investigated and we showed that it is not a random and blind simile, but also includes different components of movement including direction, speed and even substrates and its consequences (Table 1).

Considering the plurality and significant differences seen in the Earth's system of solid (cryosphere), then liquid (hydrosphere), and finally the gas (atmosphere), it is not easy to find similarities. In order to invite scholars to research and think about creation, the Qur'an likens two seemingly far apart phenomena, mountains and clouds, to each other.

The Qur'an has expressed this similarity in a manner that is far from the minds, i.e., movement. In other words, if the Qur'an had likened the mountains and clouds in height or shape instead of the movement feature, the scientific significance of this simile would have been much less. Therefore, paying attention to the mentioned similarity can be a clue to the discovery of numerous similarities in the components of creation.

These similarities can indicate the existence of a common language between the tiny and huge components of the universe, from the elementary particles to the galaxies, and their order and communication.

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