It is narrated from ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Abbās—may God be pleased with them [sic]—who said:

When the Prophet was sent forth and the command was given for him to write to the kings of the infidels and to summon them to worship the Almighty King, he wrote a letter to the Jews of Khaybar, where the infidels nearest to him resided. The Prophet said, “Gabriel, what should I write to them?” Thus did Gabriel dictate it to him, saying, “Write:

‘In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate. From Muhammad the Messenger of God to the Jews of Khaybar. Now to the heart of the matter, the earth is God’s alone and he bequeaths it to whom He wishes of His servants,’ and to God belong the saving religion and to the fear of Him belongs the final outcome. Peace be upon those who follow guidance and obey the Most Exalted King, and there is no might and no power save with God, the Mighty and Exalted.’"

Then the Prophet issued the command, and so it was written. He placed his seal on the letter and sent it off to the Jews of Khaybar. When it reached them, they brought it to ‘Abdallāh ibn Salām—who was known as Ishmael prior to becoming Muslim—for he was their sheikh, their leader, their rabbi, and their scholar. They said, “Ibn Salām, this letter from Muhammad came to us. Read it to us!”

He then read it to them, whereupon he said to them, “What do you all think? You well know that in the Torah are signs you know well and proofs you do not deny made manifest by the actions of Muhammad, whom Moses son Emram foretold. [392] If this be so, then would ought to obey him.”

“But then he will abrogate our scripture and declare forbidden what has hitherto been licit for us!” they objected.

“Listen, my people,” Ibn Salām replied, “it is as though you treasure this life over the next, and torment over mercy!” Then he continued, saying, “Muhammad is an illiterate man. He can neither read nor write all the while you have the Torah in your midst and are able to read and write. I will take 1,400 questions from the Torah and four of its mysteries and present them to him. If he recognizes them and answers them removing their ambiguity, then he is indeed the one whom Moses son of Emran foretold, [392] and we shall believe in him with sincere faith. But if he wavers and cannot answer them, then we will not turn our backs on our religion nor shall we follow him even for a moment’s time!”

The Jews consented to what Ibn Salām said and brought forth from the Torah all the mysteries of the Torah that surpassed their understanding that they could muster. Thus did they prepare those questions for the Prophet.

§1 Once Ibn Salām arrived in Medina and had gone through the gate of the mosque, he saw the light of the Prophet and his Companions, and his heart yearned for Islam. He then spoke, “Peace be upon you, Muhammad! I am Ishmael ibn Salām. Peace be upon your renowned Companions, as well.”

1 Cf. Q. Anbiyāʾ 21: 105.
2 In the case of Jewish law, one would expect the opposite reaction—i.e., that the Jews would fear that things once regarded as illicit will become licit—especially given the common trope of Muslim anti-Judaic polemics that Islamic law lifted the punitive stringency of Jewish law.
“And may peace, God’s mercy, and His endless blessings be upon those who follow guidance,” they replied.

The Prophet then commanded them all to be seated, and when he sat, he said, “What do you seek, Ibn Salām?”

“O Muḥammad,” he replied, “I am a scholar of the children of Israel and counted among those who read, understand, and know the Torah. I am the Jews’ envoy sent to you with questions concerning matters we do not fully understand. They ask you to clarify these questions for them, since you are goodly towards all.”

“Ask whatever questions occur to you to ask, Ibn Salām,” replied the Prophet, “for Gabriel shall inform me from the All-Knowing King. If you wish, I may even tell you the answer before the questions even leave your mouth!”

“O Muḥammad,” he replied, “impart this knowledge to me to increase my certainty!”

“O Ibn Salām,” he answered, “you have brought me 1,404 questions brought forth from the Torah, and you copied them down by your own hand”

§2 ‘Abdallāh ibn Salām bowed his head and cried, saying, “You speak the truth, Muḥammad! You are indeed the Trustworthy Speaker of Truth. O Muḥammad, are you a prophet or an emissary of God?”

Muḥammad replied, “The Almighty God sent me to be a prophet, an emissary, and the Seal of the Prophets. Have you not read in the Torah: Muḥammad the Emissary of God and those with him are harsh against the infidels [and] merciful towards one another; you shall see them bowing and prostrating seeking God’s favor and good pleasure.”

§3 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but is [the message] conveyed (mukallam) or revealed (mūḥā) to you?”

“O Ibn Salām,” he answered, “It is naught but a revelation revealed brought down by Gabriel the Trustworthy from the Lord of Creation.”

§ 4 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but how many prophets did God create?”

“One hundred and twenty-four thousand,” he answered.

§5 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but how many emissaries among them?”

“Three hundred and thirty,” he answered.

§6 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but who was the first prophet?”

“Adam,” he answered.

§7 “And the first emissary, who was he?” asked Ibn Salām.”

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3 Reading masāʾil instead of rasāʾil.
4 Ar. wa-anta min al-muḥsinin; cf. Q Yūsuf 12: 36.
5 Q Najm 53:4.
“Adam also,” he replied, “for he was a prophet and an emissary.”

§8 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about the emissaries of the Arabs. How many were they?”

“Seven,” he answered, “Abraham, Ishmael, Lot, [Hūd,] Ṣāliḥ, Shu‘ayb, and Muḥammad.”

§9 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “so tell me: how many prophets arose between Moses and Jesus?”

“One thousand,” he answered.

§10 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but which religion (dīn) did they follow?”

“God’s Pure Religion, the religion of His angels, the religion of submission (dīn al-islām),” he answered.

§11 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but what is Islam and what is faith (al-īmān)?”

“Islam,” he answered, “is to bear witness that there is no god but God and that Muḥammad is His servant and Emissary, to perform the ritual prayers, to give alms, to fast the month of Ramadān, and for those who have means to undertake the pilgrimage to God’s Sacred House. Faith is to believe in God, His angels, His scriptures, His emissaries, the Last Day, and the Eternal Decree (al-qadar), its good and its bad, its sweet and its bitter.”

§12 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “how many religions belong to Almighty God?”

“O Ibn Salām,” he answered, “one religion, and it is Islam.”

§13 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “how many laws (sharāʾiʿ) have there been?”

“They are different among the communities of the past,” he replied.

§14 “O Muhammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but will the inhabitants of Heaven enter Heaven by Islam or by faith or by their good works?”

“Ibn Salām,” he replied, “they merit Heaven by faith and enter it by God’s mercy; they apportioned their share of it according to their good works.”

§15 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me how many scriptures Almighty God has revealed.”

“Ibn Salām,” he replied, “God revealed a hundred and four scriptures.”

§16 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but to whom did he send down these scriptures?”

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6 The difference here rests on the distinction early Muslim scholars made between prophets (anbiyāʾ; sg. nabī) and emissaries (rasul; sg. rasūl).

7 Oddly, this list excludes the Quranic prophet Hūd sent to ʿĀd mentioned in Sūrah 7, that bears his name and in Q Shuʿarāʾ 26:124, given that Muhammad says there are seven such prophet yet only lists six, I assume an error.

8 Q. Āl ʿImrān 3:19.
“Almighty God sent down to Adam’s son Seth fifty scrolls (ṣāḥīfah), to [394] Idrīs thirty scrolls, and to Abraham twenty scrolls. To David, He sent down the Psalms, to Moses the Torah, to Jesus the Gospel, and to Muḥammad the Furqān.”

§17 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but why is the Furqān called as such?”

“Because its verses and chapters,” he replied, “are separated (mufarraqah) unlike the scrolls, the Torah, and the Gospel.

§18 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but does the Qur’ān contain anything from the scrolls of old?”

“Yes,” he answered.

§19 “And what is that, O Muḥammad?”

Then the Prophet began to recite, «Whoever becomes pure succeeds, as shall he who recalls his Lord’s name and prays. Rather you favor worldly life, though the Hereafter shall be better and endure. Verily this is in scrolls of old, the scrolls of Abraham and Moses » (Q. A’lā 87:14-19).

§20 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell what starts the Qur’ān and what concludes it?”

“It begins with, ‘In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate’, and conclude with, ‘Almighty God has spoken truly’,” he answered.”

§21 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me of five things God created with His hand.”

He answered, “The Garden of Eden He created with His own hand, and Tree of Ṭūbā he planted with his own hand. Adam He fashioned with His hand. He built the sky with His hand, and He wrote the tablets of Moses with His hand.”

§22 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me who told you what you have said?”

“Gabriel told me,” he answered.

§23 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but from whom?”

“From Michael,” he answered.

§24 “Then from whom?”

[396] “From Israfil,” he answered.

§25 “Then from whom?”


10 Viz., this is how one begins the recitation of the Qur’ān, beginning with the basmalah and ending with the taṣdīq.

11 Ṭūbā meaning ‘blessed’; cf. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Musnad, no. 17917
“From the Tablet Preserved,” he answered.\textsuperscript{12}

§26 “Them from whom?”

“From the Pen,” he answered.\textsuperscript{13}

§27 “Then from whom?”

“From the Lord of All,” he answered.

§28 “But how is this so?”

“God issues the command,” he answered, “and it is written on the Tablet. The Tablet is sent down to Israfil, and then it reaches Michael [and] Gabriel.”

§29 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about Gabriel. Does he appear in a male or female form?”

“In the male form,” he answered.

§30 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me: What does he eat and drink?”

“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “his food is to glorify his Lord (al-tasbīḥ) and his drink is to declare the oneness of God (al-tahlīl).”

§31 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “tell me: What is his height and width? How does he look, and what does he wear?”

“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “angels cannot be described as having length or width because they are luminous spirits and lack corporeal bodies. His light is like the light of the breaking day in the midst of darkness of light. He has fourteen green wings bedecked with pearls and rubies and sealed with all types of pearl. He wears a coat lined with brocade that takes ahold of your gaze. His purity is dignity, and his belt is nobility. His face is like saffron. He neither eats nor drinks. He neither bores no becomes absent-minded, nor does he sleep. He continually obeys the command of Almighty God’s revelation until the Day of Resurrection.”

§32 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about the genesis of the creation of the world and tell me about the creation of Adam!”

“Yes,” he answered, “God—may He be glorified and exalted, holy are His names and resplendent is His praise, there is no god other than He—created Adam from clay with His hand and created the clay from froth, and created the froth from the wave, and created the wave from the waters.

§33 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “tell me: Why was Adam called Adam?”

“Because he was created from the clay of the earth and its soil,” he answered.

\textsuperscript{12} Ar. al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ; cf. Q. Burūj 85:22.

\textsuperscript{13} Ar. al-qalam; cf. Q. Qalam 68:1,ʿAlaq 96:4
§34 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but was Adam created from one type of clay or from all types of clay?”

“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “he was created from all types of clay. Were he created from a single type of clay, then humans would not recognize one from another and would all look the same.”

§35 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but [397] is there something akin to this in this world?”

“Yes,” he answered, “have you not examined this world and found it full of dirt that is white, red, yellow, dust-colored, black, and blue? Wherein there is sweetness, saltiness, supleness, harshness, variance, and decay? So it is with the sons of Adam.

§36 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me, when God created Adam, where did his spirit enter him?”

“It entered through his mouth,” he answered.

§37 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “did it enter willingly or unwillingly?”

“God forces it to enter, and He forces it to leave.”

§38 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me: What did God say to Adam?”

“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “God said to Adam, «Reside, you and your spouse, in the Garden and eat from it in plenty wherever you wish, but do not approach this tree, lest you join the transgressors» (Q Baqarah 2:35).

§39 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “how many grains did he eat from the tree?”

“Two,” he answered.

§40 “How many did Eve eat?”

“Two,” he answered.

§41 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me: What did the tree look like, and how many branches did it have? How tall were it shoots (sunbulah)?

The Emissary of God said, “The tree had three branches, and its shoots were three spans long.”

§42 “And how many grains per shoot?”

“Five grains,” he answered.
§43 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but how many shoots did he rub?”
“He touch only one,” he answered.

§44 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me how the grain looked.”
“İbn Salām,” he answered, “it was like a giant egg.”

§45 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about the graised that remained with Adam—what happened to it?”
“It fell from the Garden to earth with Adam,” he answered, “and he sowed it in the earth. Grains from that single grain propagated in the earth and were blessed in it.”\[[4\]

§46 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell about Adam—where did he was he cast down to earth?”
“He was cast down to India,” he answered.

§47 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “and where was Eve cast down?”
“To Jeddah,” he answered.

§48 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “where was the grain cast down?”
“To Isfahan,” he answered.

§49 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but where was Iblis cast down?”
“To Bet Shean,” he answered.

§50 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “How vast is your knowledge, and how truthful is your tongue! But tell me, what was Adam wearing when he was cast down from the Garden?”
[398] “Three leaves from the leaves of the Garden,” he answered, “one for his shirt, the other for his loincloth, and the third for his turban.”

§51 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—where did he and his spouse rejoine with one another?”
“At ’Arafāt,” he answered.

§52 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—what was the first temple (bayt) established for humankind?”
“God’s Sacred House,” he answered.\[[5\]

§53 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “tell me about Adam—was he created from Eve or was Eve created from Adam?”

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\[[4\] Cf. Q. Baqarah 2:261.
\[[5\] I.e., the primordial Ka’bah in Mecca.
“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “rather Eve was created from Adam. Were Adam created from Eve, then divorce (al-ṭalāq) would reside in the hands of women.”

“O Muḥammad, you speak the truth!” Ibn Salām declared.

§54 Ibn Salām then said, “Was she created from his whole body or merely a part of it?”

“She was created from only part of him,” he answered. “Were she created from his whole body, then women would have been entrusted with judicial office (al-qaḍā‘) rather than men.”

§55 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but was she created from his abdomen or his back?”

“From his abdomen,” he answered. “Were she created from his back, then women would reveal their faces in public as men do and would not veil.”

§56 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but was she created from his right side or his left?”

“From his left,” he answered. “Were she created from his right side, then the heritable allotment (ḥaḍḍ) accorded to women would be equal with that of men, and her testimony would be equal to his testimony.”

§57 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—out of which part was she created from him?”

“His left rib,” he answered.

§58 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—who inhabited the earth before Adam?”

“The Jinn,” he answered.

§59 “And after the Jinn?”

“The Angels,” he answered.

§60 “And after the Angels?”

“Adam and his offspring,” he answered.

§61 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “and how long between the Jinn and Angels?”

“Seven thousand years,” he answered.

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* A reference to inequalities in the quranic laws regarding women’s inheritance and testimony; see Q Baqarah 2:282, Nisā’ 4:11-12.
§62 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “and did Adam undertake a pilgrimage to God’s Sacred House?”

“Yes,” he answered.

§63 “O Muḥammad, who wrapped the turban around Adam’s head?”

“Gabriel did,” he answered.

§64 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “and was Adam circumcised?”

“Yes,” he answered, “Adam circumcised himself with his own hand.”

§65 “Tell me, O Muḥammad,” Ibn Salām replied, “Why is the earthly world (al-dunyā) called as such?”

“Because it was created below (dūna) the Hereafter,” he answered, “and were it created alongside the Hereafter, it would never expire as the Hereafter never expires.”

§66 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about the Resurrection (al-qiyāmah)—why is called as such?”

“Because on the day is the resurrection (qiyām) of all creation for the Reckoning,” he answered.

§67 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but why is the Hereafter (al-ākhirah) called as such?”

“Because it comes later after the earthly world,” he answered, “and its ages defy description, its days defy counting, and its time will never end.”

§68 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about the first day God initiated the creation of the earthly world.”

“Sunday (yawm al-aḥad),” he answered.

§69 “And why is it called ‘Aḥad’?”

“Because he created the first day (al-wāḥid) as al-Aḥad and the first of the days,” he answered.

§70 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “and why is Monday (al-ithnayn) called as such?”
“Because it was the second day (thānī yawn) of the days of the early world,” he answered, “and likewise Tuesday (al-thulathā’), Wednesday (al-arbiʿā’), and Thursday (khamis).”

§71 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but why is the Day of Congregation (al-jumuʿah; viz., Friday) call as such?”

“Because it is the day the people are gathered together (majmūʿ),” he answered, “and it is the sixth day of the days of the earthly world.”

§72 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “and the Sabbath—why is it called as such?”

“It’s the day two angels at the right and left hand of every creature are charged to write down the good and evil deeds,” he answered. “The angel on the right writes the good deeds, and the one of the left writes the evil deeds.”

§73 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—where are the angels seated next to God’s servant? What is their pen and inkpot, and what is their tablet and ink?”

“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “They are seated between his shoulder blades. Their pen is his tongue, their inkpot his saliva, and their tablet his heart. They write his works until the day he dies.”

§74 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me how long is the Pen and how wide is it? How many nibs does it have and what is its ink and what is the course of its tracing?”

“The length of the pen is five hundred years,” he answered, “and its nibs from which its ink flows number eighty and traces across the Tablet Preserved what shall be until the Day of Resurrection by Almighty God’s command.”

§75 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—how many times does God behold His creation each day and night?”

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7 The Islamic world, much like the Eastern Christian world in contrast to the Latin West, used numerical names for the days of the week rather than planetary names—Sunday through Saturday were named after the seven ‘planets’ (Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn). Only with an edict of Constantine in 321 CE did Sunday come to be widely viewed as the first day of the week.

8 A reference to the Pen of Q. Qalam 68:1.

9 Q. Burūj 85:22.
“Three hundred and sixty times,” he answered, “and each time He grants life and causes to die, brings about existence and dispatches to oblivion, exalts and humbles, brings fortune and woe, debases and vanquishes, and makes rich and poor.”

§76 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—what did God create after that?”

“He created the seventh heaven that borders the Throne,” he answered, “and He command it to be raised to its station. Thus did was it raised. Then he created the sixth, then the fifth, fourth, third, second, and finally the heaven [or: sky] of the earthly world [400] likewise. He issued the command for each and thus were they established each in their station below the other.”

§77 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but why is the heaven of the sky of the earthly world blue?”

“It’s colored blue due to the color of Mount Qāf,” he answered.

§78 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “and from what was the sky formed?”

“It was created from a restrained wave (mawj makfūf),” he answered.

§79 “O Muḥammad,” Ibn Salām replied, “and what is the restrained wave?”

“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “water standing without turmoil.”

§80 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but why is it called a sky (samāʾ)?”

“Because it was created from smoke (dukhān),” he answered.

§81 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about the heavens—do they have doors?”

“Yes,” he answered, “they are locked shut, but they have keys that are stored away.”

§82 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about the doors of heaven—what are they?”

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20 Literally, “Why is the sky of the earthly world green (akhḍar)?” The clear distinction between green and blue in modern Arabic (and English as well as other European languages) is not so clear in medieval Arabic. See Kristina Richardson, “Blue and Green Eyes in the Islamicate Middle Ages,” Annales Islamologiques 48 (2014): 13-30.

21 The cosmic mountain referenced in oath formula at the beginning of Q. Qāf 50 similar to the cosmic mountain found in the Christian Topography of the 6th-century Byzantine geographer Cosmos Indicopleustes and Mount Meru of in the cosmologies of the Subcontinent; e.g., see Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Tha’labī, ‘Arāʾīs al-majālis fī qiṣṣas al-anbiyāʾ, or ‘Lives of the Prophets’, tr. William M. Brinner (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 9
“They are gold,” he answered.

§83 “What are their locks?”

“They are light,” he answered.

§84 “What are their keys?”

“The greatest name of God,” he answered.

§85 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about the length of each heaven and their breadth, their thickness and height, and who its inhabitants are.”

“The length of each heaven is five hundred years,” he answered, “and their breadth, thickness, and height are likewise as is the space between each heaven. The inhabitants of each heaven are an army and ranks of angels whose number are known to none but Almighty God.”

§86 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about the second heaven above the earthly world—out of what was it created?”

“It was created from clouds,” he answered.

§87 “And the third—out what was it created?”

“Out of green peridot (zabarjadah),” he answered.

§88 “And the fourth?”

“From red gold,” he answered.

§89 “And the fifth?”

“From red ruby,” he answered.

§90 “And the sixth?”

“From pure silver,” he answered.

§91 “And the seventh?”

“From resplendent light,” he answered.

§92 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but what is above the seventh heaven?”

“The sea of living creatures,” he answered.
§93 “And above it?”
“The sea of darkness,” he answered.

§94 “And above it?”
“The sea of light,” he answered.

§95 “And what is above that, O Muḥammad?”
“Above it are the veils,” he answered.

§96 “And what is above the veils?”
“The lote tree of the boundary,” he answered.

§97 “And what is above the lote tree of the boundary?”
“The garden of refuge,” he answered.

§98 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “and what is above the garden of refuge?”
“The veil of splendor,” he answered.

§99 “And what is above the veil of splendor?”
“The veil of power,” he answered.

§100 “And what is above the veil of power?”
“The veil of glory,” he answered.

§101 “And what is above the veil of glory?”
“The veil of exaltedness,” he answered.

§102 “And what is above the veil of exaltedness?”
“The veil of greatness,” he answered.

§103 “And what is above the veil of greatness?”

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23 Q. 53:15, Nāziʿāt 79:41.
“The footstool (kursī),” he answered.

§104 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied. “You have been granted the knowledge of the ancients as well as the last of men. Verily, you speak the manifest truth, but tell me—what is above the seat (kursī)?”

“The awesome Throne (al-ʿarsh al-ʿaẓīm),” he answered.

§105 “And what is above the Throne?”

“Glory be to God in the highest!” he answered. “His command (amruh) is above the Throne; and his knowledge (ʿilmuh) is under the Throne.”

§106 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but does any created thing sit on the Throne?”

“God forbid! Manners, Ibn Salām, manners!” he answered.

§107 “You speak truly and rightly,” Ibn Salām replied. “Tell me about the Sun and Moon—are they believers or disbelievers?”

“They are obedient believers,” he answered, “subservient to His overwhelming will.”

§108 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but why are not the Sun and Moon equals with regards to the light they shine?”

“Because Almighty God blots out the sign of light and cause the sign of day to be visible out of His grace and good pleasure. Were it not so, then nighttime would be indistinguishable from daytime.”

§108 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about the night—why is it called as such?”

“Because it’s what men attained from women; thus, God made it a source of harmony, rest, and protection (libās; lit., clothing).”

§109 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but why is daytime called as such?”

“Because it where the creatures seeks their livelihood and the time of their striving and acquiring.”

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“O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about the stars—how many parts are they?”

“Three parts,” he answered. “A part at pillars of the Throne, the light of which reaches the seventh heaven. Another part is in the sky of the earthly world like dangling candelabra spreading light to its inhabitants and shooting demons with their sparks lest they ascend to listen. And the third part hangs in the air casting light upon the seas and what is in them.

“O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but why do some stars appear small and others large?”

“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “because between the stars and the sky are seas whose waves the wind strikes and cause them to billow; thus do they appear small and large though the measure of the stars are all the same.”

“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “there are three: the Barren Wind sent against the people of ‘Ād, a wind of darkest black by which God chastises whom He wills of the denizens of Hell; the Red Wind by which God chastises the infidels on the Day of Resurrection; and the wind of the inhabitants of earth that surrounds them on all sides. Were it not for that wind, the earth and mountains would burn up from the heat of the Sun.”

“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “but tell me about the carriers of the Throne—how many rows of them are there?”

“Eighty rows,” he answered, “each of these rows is a million miles (farsakh) long and five hundred years wide. Their heads are beneath the throne and their feet beneath the seventh earth. Were a bird to fly from the right to left ear of one them for a thousand earthly years, it would not cross the expanse. Their clothes are woven from pearl and ruby. Their hair is like saffron. Their food is to declare God’s oneness, and their drink to declare His glory. One of their rows is half fire and half ice, another half thunder and half lightning, another half water and half clay, and another half water and half wind.”

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26 Q. Qāf 51:41.
§114 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Ṣalām replied, “but tell me about a flying thing (ṭāʾîr) with neither a perch in the sky above nor a refuge on the earth below—what is it?”

The Messenger of God answered, “Snakes with manes as white as a horse’s—they are born in the wind upon their tales (?tabīṭu ʿalā l-jaww ʿalā aḏnābihā) and reared to live in the air until the Day of Resurrection.”

§115 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Ṣalām replied, “but tell me of some born stronger than its father!”

“Ibn Ṣalām,” he answered, “that is iron, for it is born of rock though it is stronger than rock.”

§116 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Ṣalām replied, “but tell me—what track of earth has the Sun’s rays touched only once but will do so never again until the Day of Resurrection?”

“That place,” he answered, is where God drowned Pharaoh when He split the sea and it crashed on top of Pharaoh.”

§117 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Ṣalām replied, “but can you tell me about a house with twelve doors from which flow twelve springs for twelve tribes?”

The Prophet answered, “Once my brother Moses, on whom peace, had helped the children of Israel cross the sea and brought them to dry land, they complained of thirst. When Moses passed by a square rock, God revealed to him that he should hit the rock with his staff. Thus Moses hit the rock and there burst forth from it twelve springs for the twelve tribes of Israel.”

§118 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Ṣalām replied, “but can you tell me of something that is neither of man nor jinn, neither of beast nor foul, but that warned its people of danger?”

“Ibn Ṣalām,” he answered, “the ant warned her people of danger when she cried, «Listen fellow ants! Enter your dwellings lest you might be crushed by Solomon and his armies marching unawares» (Q. Naml 27:38).”

§119 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Ṣalām replied, “but tell me—to which part of the earth did God give His revelation?”

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77 Cf. Isaiah 14:29, 30:6 Legends of flying serpents predate even Herodotus; see J.H. Charlesworth, *The Good and Evil Serpent* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2010), 170, 229 et passim.
78 Although Q. Banū Isrāʾīl 17:103 clearly states Pharaoh drowned, Q. Yūnus 10:92 states that he survived the ordeal.
“God revealed to Mt. Sinai the command to raise Moses towards heaven to receive the tablets sent down to him,” he answered.

§120 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—what created thing began as a piece but became a living thing?”

“That is the staff of Moses son of Amram, on whom peace,” he answered. “God commanded him cast it down in Jerusalem (bayt al-maqdis; sic), and when he cast it down, it became a slithering snake.”

§121 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about three males not born of a stallion.”

“They are Adam, Jesus son Mary, and Ishmael’s ram,” he answered.

§122 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—where is the navel of the earth located?”

“Jerusalem,” he answered.

§123 “How so?”

“It is the location of the final assembly (al-ḥashr), the bridge over Hell (al-ṣirāṭ), and the balance (al-mīzān) [i.e., on the Day of Judgment].”

§124 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but can you tell me about the heavy-laden Ark?”

“Vessels constructed,” he answered, “have you not read in the Torah [sic], «We bore him on planks and dowels»” (Q. Qamar 54:13).

§125 “And what are the planks?”

“The trees,” he answered, “that were split longwise; they are [404] the planks. And the dowels are nails and iron crossbeams.”

§126 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—how long was Noah’s ark, and what was its width and heighth?”

32 Ar. al-falak al-mashhūn, the quranic term used to refer to both Noah’s Ark (Q. Shu‘arā’ 26:119, YāSin 36:41) and the boat of Jonah (Ṣāffāt 37:14).
“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “its length was 300 cubits, its breadth 150 cubits, and its height 200 cubits.”

§127 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but where did Noah board the Ark?”

“In Iraq,” he answered.

§128 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “and how far did it travel?”

“For a week it circled the Ancient House” and for another week it circled Jerusalem until it came to rest atop Mt. Jūdī.”

§129 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell about the Oft-Visited House (al-bayt al-maʿmūr)—where was it when God flooded the world?”

“When God flooded the world,” he answered, “He raised up the Sacred House from the earth to the seventh heaven. Thereafter it was called al-Bayt al-Maʿmūr.”

§130 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—where was the Rock and Jerusalem Temple during the Flood?”

“God Almighty placed them in the center of Mt. Abū Qubays,” he answered.

§131 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but can you tell me about the case of one born who doesn’t resemble his father but perhaps more closely resembles his paternal or maternal uncle?”

He answered, “When a man lies with his wife, if the intensity of the man’s orgasm exceeds that of his wife, the child born will most resemble the father. But if the intensity of the wife’s orgasm exceeds the man’s, the child born will most resemble the mother. If equal, however, the child born will resemble both equally. If the man’s orgasm comes first, the child born most resembles his paternal uncle. If the wife’s orgasm comes first, the child born would most resemble his maternal uncle.”

§132 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied. “Does God chastise his creatures without proof?”

31 Cf. Genesis 6:15.
32 I.e., the primordial Kaʿbah.
33 Cf. Q. Hūd 11: 44. On theories regarding the origins of the quranic name for the biblical Mt. Ararat, see G.S. Reynolds, “A Reflection on Two Qurʾānic Words (Iblīs and Jūdī), with Attention to the Theories of A. Mingana,” JAOS 124 (2004): 683-88.
34 Cf. Q. Ṭūr 52:4.
35 A mountain near Mecca towards which the Black Stone of the Kaʿbah points.
“God forbid!” he answered, “God, blessed and exalted be He, is a just king—there is no injustice in His decree.”

§133 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about the children of polytheists. Where shall they be—in Paradise or Hell?”

“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “God has the most rights to them. On the Day of Judgment when God has gathered His creatures to make His judgment, God Most High will call for the children of the polytheists, and once they are brought forth, He shall say to them, ‘My servants and the children of my servants! Who is your Lord and what is your religion and what are your deeds?’

Then they shall say, ‘O Lord, you are our Lord and our Creator. We were nothing and you created us. We neither tongues to speak, nor minds to reason, nor strength in our limbs to worship. We knew nothing that you did not teach us.’

‘But now,’ He shall say to them, ‘you have tongues, minds, and the strength to move your limbs. If I were to command to do something, my servant, would you do it?’

“Our blessed and exalted God,” they shall say, “we hear and obey! Command as You will!”

Then God will command an angel to incite Gahanna until it boils over and will order for the polytheists’ children to cast themselves into its fires. Whosoever among them God knew would attain felicity beforehand will throw himself in without delay, but for him the fires will be as cool and harmless as they were for Abraham.66 Whosoever among them God knew beforehand would be damned will be prevented from throwing himself into the Fire, for these follow their forefathers. The first group will be removed and taken to Paradise to be with the believers.

§134 “O Muḥammad, you have spoken truly and honestly and have clarified and removed all doubt,” Ibn Salām replied, “but increase my certainty. Tell me about the earth—why is it called earth?”

“Because it is the earth that is tread upon,” he answered.

§135 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “from what was it created?”

“From the foam (al-zabad),” he answered.37

66 Cf. Q. Anbiyāʾ 21:69
37 The term zabad, here translated as foam, can also mean butter, and the process leading to the formation of the earth to follow closely resembles the process of churning milk into butter. Cf. Q. Raʾd 13:17.
§136 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but the foam—from what was it created?”

“From the waves,” he answered.

§137 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “and the waves—from what were they created?”

“From the sea,” he answered.

§138 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but how’s that?”

“When God created the Sea,” the Messenger of God answered, “he commanded the wind to strike the waves against one another, and the waves churned until foam arose. He command it to gather, so it did. Next He commanded it to settled, and so it did. Next he ordered it to become level, and so it did. Next he ordered it to spread out, and so it did. He made it smooth and expansive as earth.”

§139 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—how did He seize it?”

“By Mt. Qāf that encompasses the world,” he answered, “which is the source of the pegs of the earth upon which we stand.”

§140 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—what is under this earth?”

“Under it is a bull, and the bull stand upon a rock,” he answered.

§141 “And how can one describe that bull?”

“It has four legs,” he answered, “and forty horns and forty humps. His head is the East and his tale in the West. Between two of his horns is a journey of fifty-thousand years.”

§142 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—what is under the rock on which the bull stands?”

“Under the rock is a mountain called Ṣaʿūd.”

§143 “For whom has that mountain been prepared on the Day of Resurrection?”

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“For the denizens of Hell,” he answered, “for the polytheists ascend through Hell for fifty-thousand years until, once they have reached the top, the mountain quakes and causes them to fall back down to its base dragged down by their faces.”

§144 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—what’s under that mountain?”

“Land,” he answered.

§145 “What is its name?”

“Hāwiyah (‘the abyss’),” he answered.

§146 “And what’s under it?

“A sea,” he answered.

§147 “What is its name?”

“Suhayl,” he answered.

§148 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but what’s underneath that sea?”

“Land,” he answered.

§149 “What is its name?”

“Nā‘imah,” he answered.

§150 “What is underneath it?”

“A sea,” he answered.

§151 “And what is its name?”

“Zākhīr,” he answered.

§152 “And what is underneath it?”

“Land,” he answered.

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41 Cf. Q. Qamr 54:48.
42 Q. Qāriʿah 101: 9.
§153 “And what's its name?”

“Fasīḥah,” he answered.

§154 “Described this land to me, Muḥammad!”

“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “it is a land white as the Sun, its wind like musk, its light like the moon, and its herbage like saffron. There those who fear God will gather on the Day of Resurrection.”

§155 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—where is this land upon which we will be gathered today?”

“It’s replaced by another land,” he answered.

§156 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—what’s under that land?”

“A sea,” he answered.

§157 “And what's its name?”

“Qamqām,” he answered.

§158 “What's in it?”

“The fish,” he answered.

§159 “What is the fish?”

“The whale,” he answered.

§160 “What is its name?”

“Behemoth,” he answered.

§161 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but describe the whale to me.”

“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “his head is in the East and its tale in the West.”

§162 “What’s on his back?”

“Lands and seas, darkness and mountains.”

§163 “What is between his eyes?”

“Between his eyes are seven seas, and in each sea are seven thousand cities with seven thousand angels.”

§164 “What do they say?”

“They say, ‘There is no god but God alone. He has no partners. To Him alone belong dominion and praise. He has power over all things.’”

§165 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—what’s underneath the whale?”

“A wind that carries the whale by the permission of God Almighty,” he answered.

§166 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—what’s underneath the wind?”

“Darkness,” he answered.

§167 “What is underneath the darkness?”

“Moist ground,” he answered.

§168 “And what’s underneath the moist ground?”

“None know [407] that but God, blessed and exalted be He,” he answered.

§169 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about three gardens of this world that are also three garden of Paradise.”

“The first of them,” he answered, “is Mecca. The second is Jerusalem. The third is this city of Yathrib.”

“O Muḥammad, you speak the truth!”

§170 Next ‘Abdallāh ibn Salām asked, “O Muḥammad, tell me about four cities of Paradise that are found in this world?”

“The first of these is Iram of the Pillars,”⁴⁵ he answered, “the second is Manṣūrah in India, the third is al-Sāriyah

⁴⁵ Cf. Q. Fajr 89:7.
on the shore of Mediterranean Sea (baḥr al-shām), and the fourth is al-Balqāʾ (?) in the land of Armenia (arminiyah).”

§171 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about four pulpits of Paradise in this world?”

“The first of them is in al-Qayrawān, which is Ifriqiyyah in the West,” he answered, “the second is Bāb al-Abwāb in Armenia, the third is ‘Abādān in the land of Iraq, and the fourth is Khurasan of beyond the Amu Darya River.”

§172 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about four cities of Hell that are found in this world?”

“The first of these is the city of Pharaoh in the land of Egypt,” he answered, “the second Antioch in the land of Syria, the third is in the land of Sayḥān in Armenia, and the fourth is al-Madā’in in Iraq.”

§173 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about four rivers of this world found in Paradise.”

“The first of them is the Euphrates on the borders of Syria,” the Prophet answered, “the second is the Nile in the land of Egypt, the third is the Sayḥān river in India [sic], and the Jayḥān river in the land of Balkh [sic].”

§174 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about a thing that is nothing, a thing that is only partly a thing, and a thing that is imperishable.”

“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “as for the thing that is nothing, it is this earthly life. Its comforts are fleeting, its inhabitants die, and its light is extinguished. As for the thing that is only partly a thing, it’s the standing of all creation on an equal footing to be held to account. As for the thing of which nothing perishes, that is Paradise, for its comforts never end just as the torments of Hell never end.”

§175 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell about Mt. Qāf—what is beyond it and what is before it?.

“Behind it are seventy lands of gold,” he answered, “and seventy lands of silver and seven lands of musk.”

§176 “What are the inhabitants of these lands?”

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44 The Sayḥān and Jayḥān rivers are actually twin rivers in southeast Anatolia in modern Turkey.
“Angels,” he answered.

§177 “What’s the length of each land and its width?”

“Each land,” he answered, “is ten-thousand years long as is its width.”

§178 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me what [408] is behind it?”

“A veil of wind,” he answered.

§179 “And what is behind that?”

“The canopy that surrounds the entirety of the world,” he answered.

§180 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about the inhabitants of Paradise—do they eat and drink? And how is it that they neither urinate nor defecate? What is its likeness in this world?”

“Its likeness in this world,” he answered, “is the fetus in its mother’s womb, which eats what she eats and drinks was she drink but does neither urinates nor defecates; for were it to urinate or poop, then the mother’s womb would burst and she would perish from rise of those noxious vapors.”

§181 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about the rivers of Paradise—what are they?”

“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “rivers of milk that never sours, of wine, of water, and of honey pure.”45

§182 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—are they stagnant or flowing?”

“Rather, they’re flowing,” he answered, “between trees, fruits, and gardens.”

§183 “Do these rivers lessen or increase?”

“They neither lessen nor increase,” he answered.

§184 “Do they have a likeness in this world?”

“Yes,” he answered, “have you never beheld the seas and how the rains falls upon them and how the rivers empty into them since they were created until now, yet they show no trace of either increasing or decreas[ing].”

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45 Q. Muḥammad 47:15.
§185 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me more about the names of the rivers of Paradise and their description.”

The Prophet answered, “In Paradise there is a river called Kawthar. Its scent is sweeter than pungent musk and ambergris and full of pebbles of pearls, jewels, and red rubies, and over it is a canopy of white pearl. It is the dwelling of those who have drawn near to (awliyā’) Almighty God.”

§186 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but describe the trees of Paradise to me.”

“Ibn Salām,” the Prophet answered, “in Paradise is a tree called Ṭūbā, whose trunk is pearl and whose branches are peridot and whose fruits are gems. In Paradise there is no room, nor chamber, nor palace, nor tent that does not overlook it.”

§187 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but does there exist its like in this world?”

“Yes,” he answered, “the setting Sun. It sets on the expanse of the world and its rays fall upon every spot.”

§188 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but is there wind in Paradise?”

“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “a single wind created from light and upon which is written: life and delight for the inhabitants of Paradise. It’s called al-Bahā’. If the inhabitants of Paradise long to visit their Lord in Paradise, this wind rushes to them and blows light, beauty, and joy into their face. The wind delights their hearts, adds light upon their light, and strikes against the doors of the gardens of Paradise and rings upon the doors. As the rivers ripple, the birds sing, and the branches rustle they glorify God. Were those in the heavens and earth stand to listen to this rapturous sound, then they would perish altogether from its sweetness longing to witness it. Angels visit them entering form every door saying, ‘Peace be upon you for your patience. How wondrous is the threshold of the Abode of Merit.’”

§189 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about the land of Paradise—what is it?”

“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “its land is gold and its soil musk and ambergris; its gardens are pearls, rubies, and saffron; and its roof is the Throne of the Merciful.”

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46 Q. Kawthar 1381.
47 Q. Ra’d 1329.
§190 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about what the inhabitants of Paradise eat when they enter.”

“They eat from liver of the whale carries the world and all lands and mountains and whose name is Behemoth.”

§191 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about the inhabitants of Paradise—how do they digest the fruits and the foul that they eat?”

“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “nothing they digest comes from their insides but rather they expel it by sweat droplets that smell sweeter than musk and finer than ambergris. Were a man from the inhabitants of Paradise to sweat and his to sweat to intermingle with the seas, the all that is between earth and sky would be perfumed with his delightful scent.”

§192 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about the Banner of Praise—what does it look like, how long is it, and what is its height?”

“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “its length is a thousand years, its points are fashioned of red and green ruby, its poles of white silver with tassels of light—a tassel in the East, a tassel in the West, and a tassel in the middle of the this earthly world.”

§193 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about the written lines⁴—how many are there?”

“Three lines,” he answered. “The first is, ‘In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate’; the second is, ‘Praise be to God, Lord of All Creation’; and the third is, ‘There is no god but God [312] and Muḥammad is the Messenger of God.”

§194 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about Paradise and Hell—which one was created first?”

“Paradise was created before Hell,” the Messenger of God answered, “for if Hell had been created before Paradise, then chastisement would come before mercy.”

§195 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me more about Paradise—where is it?”

⁴ Cf. Q. Qalam 68:1; the ‘written lines (al-asṭur al-maktūbah)’ here refers to the lines of the celestial pen mention in this verse: nūn wa-l-qalami wa-mā yastūrūn.
“In the seventh heaven,” he answered, “and Hell is in the bowels of the lowest earth.”

§196 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—how many doors does Paradise have, and how many does Hell have?”

“Paradise has eight doors,” he answered, “but Hell has seven.”

§197 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—how far is it between the doors of Paradise?”

“A thousand years,” he answered.

§198 “And their height?”

“Five-hundred years,” he answered. “Atop their balconies are golden canopies with emerald lining. Upon each door is a host of angels whose numbers none know save God Most High.”

§199 “What do these angels say?”

He answered, “They say, ‘Blessed are the inhabitants of Paradise and the joy they obtain and munificence of God Most High!’”

§200 “With what ages and qualities do the inhabitants of Paradise enter Paradise?”

“They enter therein aged thirty-three with beauty of Joseph, the height of Adam, and character of Muḥammad.”

§201 “Tell about some of the comforts of the inhabitants of Paradise.”

He answered, “The lowliest of what will found in Paradise—there is not to be found in Paradise a single lowly thing—were all of the creatures of the earth from all creation to dwell therein, it would easily provide for them food and drink as well as fruit and repast. Not a single thing would diminish therein. Were a man from the inhabitants of Paradise merely to spit in the salty seas, they would turn sweet. And were a lock of his hair to fall from the sky to earth, its light would outshine the light of the Sun and Moon.”

§202 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but describe the houris to me!”

“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “the houris are as white as pearls with lips as red as rubies.”

§203 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but describe Hell to me!”
“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “the fires Hell are stoked for a thousand years until they burn red hot, and then a thousand more years until they burn white hot, and then a thousand more years until they turn black. It is a pitch-dark blackness mixed God’s fury. Its flame never abates, and its coals never extinguish. O Ibn Salām, were a single one of its coals be cast into this earthly world, all that is between East and West would catch fire from its and the terror of its form. It is seven levels: the first is for the hypocrites, the second for the Magians, the third for the Christians, and the fourth for the Jews. The fifth is Saqar (‘intense heat’), and the sixth is al-Sa’ir (‘the blaze’). The Prophet stopped short of mentioning the seventh and wept until tears ran down his noble beard. Then he said, “As for the seventh, it is the most terrible by far—it is for those of my community who commit the heinous sins.”

§204 “O Muḥammad, you speak truly and rightly,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell about the Day of Resurrection—how shall creatures be resurrected?”

“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “On the Day of Resurrection, the Sun will be rolled up and blotted out; the stars will be effaced, extinguished, and cast down; the mountains will be removed; pregnant camels shall abandoned; the earth will be exchanged for another earth.”

§205 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—how shall the creatures be resurrected?”

“God shall resurrect His creatures to determine the judgment,” the Messenger of God answered, “and extend the Straight Path (al-ṣirāṭ). He will erect the Scale and spread out the Registers (al-dawāwīn). The Lord will then manifest to judge his creatures.”

§206 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but will He cause His creatures to die once the Hour arrives?”

“He will issue a command to the Angel of Death,” he answered, “who will stand on the Rock in Jerusalem and, placing his right hand on the sky and the left hand on the ground, he shall cry out to them with a mighty cry. The trumpeter will blow his trumpet. Then neither archangel, nor prophet, nor messenger, nor man, nor jinni,}

40 Cf. Q. Qamar 54:48; Muddaththir 74:26-27, 74
50 Cf. Q. Nisāʾ 4:10, 55.
51 Cf. Q. Takwīr 81: 2-4.
52 Ar. ṣakhrat bayt al-maqdis; lit. ‘the Rock of the Holy Temple’.
53 Cf. Q. Kahf 18:99.
nor bird, nor beast will remain that does not collapse dead as though the death of a single man. The heavens will be empty of its inhabitants and the earth bereft of its residents. So the pregnant camels shall be abandoned, the seas placid, the mountains demolished, the Sun eclipsed, and the stars extinguished.

§ 207 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about the Angel of Death—does he taste death or not?”

“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “when God causes His creatures to die, then nothing with a spirit remains. God will say to the Angel of Death, ‘Who of My creation remains?’

And the Angel of Death will say, ‘Lord, You know best. None remain but Your feeble servant, the Angel of Death.’

‘Angel of Death!’ God will reply, ‘My messenger, my prophets, my saints, and my servants have all tasted death, which I in My ageless knowledge have always known. I know the unseen—all things perish save My face. And now it’s your turn.’

‘My God!’ the angel will say, ‘have mercy on Your servant, the Angel of Death, for he is feeble and you are gentle towards him.’

Then God, may He be exalted, shall say, ‘Place your right hand under you right cheek and lie down between Paradise and Hell and die.’”

§ 208 “My father and mother’s lives for yours, Muḥammad!” said ‘Abdallāh ibn Salām. “What is the distance between Paradise and Hell?”

“A journey of three-thousand earthly years,” he answered. “So the Angel of Death will lie down on his right side and place his right hand underneath his right cheek and left on his face and belt out a cry. Were the inhabitants of the heavens and earth alive, they would die from the severity of his cry.”

§ 209 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but what will God do will the heavens once its inhabitants have died?”

“He will fold them up with His right hand as one seals a book,” he answered. “The He, may He be glorified, shall say—holy be His names, for there is no god other than He, nor one worthy of worship save He: ‘Where is one

54 Q. Qaṣaṣ 28:88.
who shall lay claim to dominion and power?” But none shall answer. Then He shall say, «Who possesses dominion today?» But none shall answer, so He, may He be exalted, shall reply to Himself «God Alone the Victor. Today each soul will received what is has earned. Today there shall be no wrongs. Verily God is swift to hold accountable.»

§210 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—how will God’s creatures be gathered after their death?”

“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “God will resurrect Isrāfīl, first of the archangels to be resurrected. He is the trumpeter. God will command him to blow into his trump the announcement of the resurrection (nafkhat al- baʿth).

§211 “What will Isrāfīl say into the trumpet?” Ibn Salām asked.

He answered, “He will say, ‘O you dry, decayed bones! O you severed, scattered limbs! Come to face God! Come to the Master of the heavens and the earth!’ Then he shall blow into it another time and, lo, they shall be standing, waiting.”

§212 “How long shall each blast of the trumpet be?”

“Forty years,” he answered.

§213 “And how many words will Isrāfīl speak into the trumpet at the time of the blast?”

“Six words,” he answered, “the first, ‘people are clay’; the second, ‘they are forms’; the third, ‘the bodies are formed’; the fourth, ‘blood runs through their veins’; the fifth, ‘hair sprouts’; and the fifth, ‘Stand!’ And, lo, they shall be standing, waiting.”

§214 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but how do the creatures rise on the Day of Resurrection?”

“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “they will rise barefoot and naked with their tongues [413] dry, their bellies dark, and their gaze fearful.”

§215 “The men will look at the women, and the women at the men?” Ibn Salām asked.

55 Q. Ghāfir 40: 16-17,
“By no means, Ibn Salām!” he answered. “«Each man will have enough cares that day»[^5] due to the extreme terror of the Day of Resurrection.”

§216 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, but then he held back from speaking.

So the Prophet continued, “Ask whatever you wish, and fear not.”

“Praise be to God who allowed me to look upon your face, O Muḥammad, and who made it possible for me speak with you!” Ibn Salām replied. “Tell me—where will God’s creatures be gathered on the Day of Resurrection?”

“They shall be gathered in Jerusalem,” he answered.

§217 “How so?”

“God Almighty will issue a command for fire the envelope the earth,” he answered, “and strike the faces of all creatures with, who will flee and travel on their faces to gather in Jerusalem.”

§218 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but how will God treat the small child and elderly man?”

“Whosoever was a believer,” he answered, “angels will convey him and fire will fall from his face, but whosoever was an infidel, fire will burn his face until he is brought to Jerusalem.”

§219 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—in how many rows will humanity be arrayed on that day?”

“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “one hundred and twenty rows.”

§220 “And how long and wide will each row be?”

“Each will be as long as a journey of forty-thousand years and as wide as twenty-thousand-year journey.”

§221 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “and how many rows of believers and how many rows of infidels?”

“The believers are three rows,” he answered, “and infidels are one hundred and seventeen rows.”

[^5]: Q. ʿAbasa 80:37
“O Muḥammad,” Ibn Salām replied, “how can one describe the believers and infidels?”

“As for the believers,” he answered, “they burn bright with the marks of ablution and prostration in prayer; as for the infidels, they have blackened faces. They come to the Širāṭ.”

“How long is the Širāṭ?”

“A journey of thirty-thousand years.”

“O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—how does humanity cross over the Širāṭ?”

“God will cover humanity with light,” he answered. “As for the light of the Muslims, the believers, and those who confess God’s oneness, it comes from the Throne (ʿarsh) as the light of the angels comes from the light of the Footstool (kursī). Their light will ever be extinguished. As for the infidels, their light will come from the light of the earth and the mountains.”

“O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me about the first group to cross the Širāṭ— who are they?”

“The believers,” he answered.

“Ibn Salām,” he answered, “among the believers are those who cross the Širāṭ in twenty years. When the first of them reaches Paradise, the infidels will be lowered onto the Širāṭ, and when they have reached the middle, God will extinguish their light and they remain without light. Then shall they call to the believers: «Wait for us! Let us have some of your light!» Don’t you have fathers, brothers, and friends among you? «Were we not with you» in the worldly life? «The believers will reply: Yes, but you allowed yourselves to be tempted, you hesitated, doubted, and allowed false hopes to deceive you until the God’s command came—the Deceiver deceived you about God. Today no ransom will be accepted from you or from those who disbelieved; your home is Hellfire—that is where you belong, a miserable end!» And it will be said to them: «‘Go back and search for light,’ and a wall will be erected between him.» God will command Hell to cry out to them from

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57 Q. Ḥadīd 57:13
58 Q. 57:14
60 Q. 57:13.
below, and they will fall upon their faces and heads into the fire of Hell distraught and full of regret. The mass of believers will be saved by the blessing and grace of God.

§227 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied, “but tell me—what will God do with death at that time?”

“Once the inhabitants of Paradise have entered Paradise and the denizens of Hell have entered Hell,” he answered, “death shall be brought forth like a spotless ram (kabsh amlah) and stand between Paradise and Hell. It will be said to the inhabitants of Paradise, ‘Friends (awliyāʾ) of God, this is death—do you recognize him?’ Then they will say, ‘O angels of our Lord, we recognize him! Slaughter him so that death shall be no more!’ And to the denizens of Hell they will say, ‘O enemies of God, do you recognize this death?’ ‘We recognize him,’ they said. ‘Shall we slay him?’ the angels shall ask. ‘O angels of our Lord, do not slay him! Leave him that perhaps God will sentence us to die and we will find rest.’

The Messenger of God continued, “Thus will death be slain between Paradise and Hell, and the denizens of Hell will despair of ever leaving therefrom and the inhabitants of Paradise will be comforted with eternal life therein.

§228 “O Muḥammad, you speak the truth,” Ibn Salām replied and rose up to stand on his feet. “Extend your noble hand so that you may give me your blessing. I bear witness that there is no god but God, and I bear witness that you, Muḥammad, are the Messenger of God. I bear witness that Paradise is true and Hell is true and that the reckoning is true and the rewards are true. I bear witness that what you have told me is true and that the Hour is coming. There is no doubt concerning it. God will resurrect those who are in the grave.”

At that moment the Prophet’s Companions glorified God. The Prophet named him ‘Abdallāh ibn Salām, and he became one of the greatest Companions and a fitting punishment (al-naqmah) for the Jews.