

because it is seen as similarly repulsive; they bear similar prohibitions (Suyūṭī, *Durr*). The same comparison occurs in a hadith, according to which two women no longer able to bear their fasting were brought to the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace. The Prophet asked them to vomit—and they regurgitated blood, pus, and meat. The Prophet said, “These two fasted from what Allah made permissible but broke their fast on what Allah forbade them. One sat next to the other and they began to eat people’s flesh (i.e. they backbited)” (Aḥmad, Ḥadīth ‘Ubayd Mawlā al-Nabī ṣallā-Llāh ‘alayh wa-sallam, no. 23653; see also Ibn Kathīr, *sub* Q 49:12). “To eat people’s flesh” means backbiting (al-Sindī, *Hāshiyā*, Ḥadīth ‘Ubayd, no. 10066).

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**See also:** ANIMALS; BACKBITING; CONSECRATION OF ANIMALS; DEATH AND THE DEAD; FOOD AND DRINK; JĀHILIYYA; LAWFUL AND UNLAWFUL.

RAMI KOUJAH

## CAVE

### KAHF, GHĀR, MAGHĀRA

#### Definitions and Usage

A cave is a hollow enclosure in a mountain or underground. The Qur’ān uses three nouns for cave (*kahf*, *ghār*, *maghāra*); Q 18 is called *Sūrat al-Kahf* (“The Cave”):

*Kahf*, from the root *k-h-f* (pl. *kuhūf*) is often explained by the lexicographers using the other two terms for cave. Thus, Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī (100-175/718-791), the author of the oldest Arabic lexicon, says *kahf* is “a *maghāra* in a mountain, except that it is more spacious; if it is smaller [than *maghāra*], it is called *ghār*” (*Ayn*, *sub* *k-h-f*).

Later linguists repeat his definition in different words (Jawharī; Fayyūmī, *sub* *gh-w-r*; Ibn Manẓūr; Ibn Fāris; Rāghib, *sub* *k-h-f*). *Kahf* is used six times (Q 18:9, 10, 11, 16, 17, 25) in the eponymous *Sūrat al-Kahf*, also called “*Sūrat aṣḥāb al-kahf*” (“The Companions of the Cave”; Suyūṭī, Type 17, 1:193), which includes the story (Q 18:9-31) of a group of believing young men—the *Companions of the Cave and Inscription* (Q 18:9, *aṣḥāb al-kahf wa-l-raqīm*; *q.v.*)—who had sought refuge in a cave to protect their religion (Ibn Abī Ḥātim; Suyūṭī, *Durr*, *sub* Q 18:9; Ṭabarī, *sub* Q 18:19).

The location of the Cave is variously and uncertainly mentioned in commentaries as being on top of a mountain between ‘Uṣfān and Ayla, in the southern region of Palestine (Ṭabarī; Suyūṭī. *Durr*), or in the region of *al-Rūm* (Byzantium), or in Syro-Palestine (al-Shām), or near Wādī Mūsā, where pilgrims stop on their way to Makka (Ibn al-‘Arabī, al-āyat al-rābi‘a qawluhu ta‘ālā *wa labūthū fī kahfihim*, Q 18:25); some exegetes say the name of the mountain is Banjulūs or Banājulūs (Ṭabarī; Māwardī, *sub* Q 18:9). *Raqīm*, from the root *r-q-m*, means “to write” (Ibn Fāris, *kital-rā’*, *bāb* al-rā’ wa-l-qāf; Ibn Manẓūr, *ḥarf* al-mīm, *faṣl* al-rā’, *r-q-m*); it is variously explained as the name of the village, valley, or mountain where the above-mentioned Cave was located (Ṭabarī; Makkī, *sub* Q 18:9). Other exegetes say *al-raqīm* means a book (*kitāb*) (Ṭabarī; Makkī); or an *inscribed book* (*kitābun marqūm*), as it appears elsewhere (Q 83:9, 20) in the Qur’ān. Sa‘īd b. Jubayr (d. 95/713) is quoted as saying that it is a stone tablet (*lawḥ hijāra*) on which they wrote the story of the Companions of the Cave and placed it at the entrance of the Cave (Ṭabarī; Makkī; Suyūṭī. *Durr*, *sub* Q 18:9).

The nouns *ghār* (pl. *ghārān*, *aghwār*) and *maghārāt*

(sing. *maghāra*), both from the root *gh-w-r*, appear once each—*ghār* (Q 9:40) in reference to the Prophet's Hijra (*q.v.*) journey from Makka (*q.v.*) to Madina (*q.v.*) and *maghārāt* (Q 9:57) in the characterization of the hypocrites (*q.v.*), who falsely swear by Allah that they are with the believers (*q.v.*), but who, *were they to find a refuge, or caves (maghārāt), or a burrow in earth would surely turn toward it with an obstinate haste*, “in order to hide” (Rāzī), “because they only reluctantly side with the Prophet, act unwillingly, and without love for him” (Qurṭubī; Ibn Kathīr, *sub* 9:57). They desire to take refuge in a cave, which is normally a place of protection, but it will not protect them from divine retribution because ultimately *their abode is Hell—a wretched destination* (Q 9:73).

The occasion of revelation of the Makkan Sūrat al-Kahf relates it to the three questions the Quraysh asked the Prophet on instructions from the Jewish Rabbis of Madina to whom they had turned to verify his prophethood. The Jewish rabbis advised them to ask the Prophet about the youth who had taken refuge in a cave, Dhūl-Qarnayn (*q.v.*), and about the spirit (*al-rūḥ*, *q.v.*). The Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, told them he would respond tomorrow, but he did not say *if Allah so wills* (Q 18:23-24) and did not receive revelation for fifteen (or forty; *cf.* Rāzī) days, which saddened him. Finally, Jibrīl, upon him peace, came with Sūrat al-Kahf (Ibn Kathīr, *sub* Q 18:5; *cf.* Ṭabarī, *sub* Q 17:85; Māturīdī, *sub* Q 18:9; Rāzī, *sub* Q 19:64).

The divine response begins with the question: *Do you reckon that the Companions of the Cave and the Inscription are a marvel among Our Signs* (Q 18:9)? Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (543-606/1148-1209) explains the unsaid in the verse: “Do not think so, for all of Our Signs are wonders (*kulluhā ‘ajaban*). The One Who has Power to create the heavens and the earth, and embellish them with treasures, vegetation, and animals, then turn it into a barren land (*ṣa‘īdan juzuran*; *cf.* Q 18:8) devoid of everything, how can you doubt His Power, Protection, and Mercy in the preservation of the group [of youth in the Cave] for over three hundred years?” (*Tafsīr*, *sub* Q 18:9).

Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭābī (d. 388/998) says they were a group of young people who did not want to remain among the people of falsehood (*ahl al-bāṭil*), thus they fled from the trial of disbelief and the worship of idols; this way Allah Most High turned away from them [people's] wickedness and saved them from their tyranny and preserved the memory of them among the righteous (*‘Uzla*, *bāb mā jā’a*

*fī-l-‘uzla*).

The opening verses of Q 18 are a protection against al-Dajjāl, as the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, said, “Whoever commits to memory (*man ḥafīza*) the first ten verses of the Sūrat al-Kahf will be protected (*‘uṣīma*) from the Dajjāl” (Muslim, Ṣaḥīḥ, *kitāb ṣalāt al-musāfirīn wa qaṣriḥā, bāb faḍl sūrat al-kahf*; Abū Dāwūd, Sunan, *awwal kitāb al-malāḥim, bāb khurūj al-dajjāl*). The Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, also said, “Whoever reads the Surat al-Kahf on Fridays, Allah will cast light upon him [for the period] between the two Fridays” (Ḥākim, *tafsīr sūrat al-kahf*).

### The Cave in Q 9:40

The cave mentioned in Q 9:40, using the noun *ghār*, is identified as the cave located about 10 km southwest of Makka, on the ancient road to Yemen, atop the steep and rocky Mount Thawr (Yāqūt, *sub th-w-r*; Bilādī, *Mu‘jam al-ma‘ālim, sub Thawr*). The Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, and his Companion Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (*q.v.*) had taken refuge in that cave for three nights at the beginning of their Hijra (*q.v.*) journey to Madina to avoid their pursuers who had been dispatched by the leaders of the Quraysh (Baghawī; Qurṭubī; Biqā‘ī; Māwardī; Ibn ‘Aṭīyya, *sub* Q 9:40; Ibn Hishām, *ḥadīth hijratihī ṣallā-l-Lāhu ‘alayhi wa sallama ilā-l-Madīna*). The verse, revealed nine years after the event, in the context of the expedition to Tabūk (Qurṭubī) encouraged the believers to take part in Jihad, reminding them that if they did not participate, Allah Most High would help His Prophet, as He helped him when there was no one with him except one person (Rāzī): *If you do not help him (the Prophet), yet Allah has already helped him when those who disbelieved had driven him out; the second of the two, the two were in the cave (al-ghār), when he said to his companion, “Grieve not; truly Allah is with us.” Then Allah sent down His Tranquility upon him, and supported him with hosts you see not. And He made the word of those who disbelieve to be the lowliest, and the Word of Allah is the highest. And Allah is Mighty, Wise.*

Their pursuers did reach the cave on the third day of their hiding. When they approached near, Abū Bakr, Allah be well-pleased with him, said to the Prophet, “If one of them looked [this way], he would find us.” The Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, consoled him, saying, “What is your opinion about the two whose third is Allah?” (*mā zannuka bi-thmayni Allāhu thālithuhumā*) (*cf.* *Tafsīrs* of Rāzī, Bayḍāwī, Ibn Kathīr; also see Baghawī, *Sharḥ al-Sunna*, wa