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**See also:** ADOPTION; ALLIANCE AND TREATY; ANṢĀR; BEAUTIFUL NAMES OF ALLAH; BLOOD MONEY; BROTHERS AND BROTHERHOOD; CANONICAL READINGS; CHILDREN; DAY OF JUDGMENT; FREEDOM AND EMANCIPATION; FRIENDS AND FRIENDSHIP; FRIENDS OF ALLAH; GUARDIANSHIP; INHERITANCE AND PATRIMONY; JĀHILIYYA; MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE; MUḤĀJIRŪN; ORPHANS; ZAKĀT; ZAYD B. ḤĀRITHA.

GIBRIL FOUAD HADDAD

## CLOUDS

GHAMĀM, SAḤĀB, MUZN, ṢAYYIB, MU‘ŠIRĀT, ‘ĀRID

### Definitions and Usage

Clouds are mentioned in the Qur‘ān with six terms which variously emphasize their different aspects: four times as *ghamām* (Q 2:57, 210; 7:160; 25:25), highlighting their veiling of sunlight; nine times as *saḥāb* (Q 2:164; 7:57; 13:12; 24:40, 43; 27:88; 30:48; 35:9; 52:44), highlighting their being subjected to the Divine will; once each as *muzn* (Q 56:69), *ṣayyib* (Q 2:19), and *mu‘širāt* (Q 78:14), specifically referring to rain-bearing clouds; once as ‘*āriḍ* (Q 46:24, x2), a dark cloud, specifically when seen on the horizon, but signifying punishment and destruction. Clouds have the distinction of being among the natural phenomena explicitly identified as “Signs of Allah” (*q.v.*): Verily there are, in the creation of heavens and earth... and the control of winds, and the *saḥāb* subservient between heaven and earth, great signs for a people that reflect (Q 2:164). Clouds are thus presented as instruments of Divine mercy (*Muqātil*) (e.g. Q 2:57:

*And We outspread the cloud to overshadow you) and of Divine punishment; and as instruments subjugated and employed by Allah (e.g. Q 24:43: Do you not see that Allah propels the clouds, then makes them to coalesce, then piles them up? Then you see the rain issuing from their midst) (see APPORTIONMENT; CREATION).*

In his authoritative lexicon of the Qur‘ān, Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Rāghīb al-Aṣḥāhānī (d. ca. 502/1108) says “*ghamm* is the veiling of a thing (*ṣatr al-shay‘*), whence is derived *al-ghamām* (clouds), because of their being a veil over the light of the sun. The Most High said [*What do they look for*] but that Allah shall come to them in the cloud-shadows (fī ḡlalin min al-ghamām) (Q 2:210)” (*Mufradāt, sub gh-m-m*).

*Saḥāb*, from the root *s-ḥ-b* (*saḥb* means “draw or pull” and “drag along”), means clouds “either because of their being dragged along by the wind, or because they draw up the water, or because their floating motion is one of being swept along... clouds (*al-ghaym*), whether or not they carry water, which is why the term ‘dry cloud’ (*saḥāb jahām*) is used. ... Clouds may be mentioned where shade and darkness are intended, because of a simile being drawn, as in the words of the Most High *or like layers of darkness in a deep ocean, covered by wave upon wave, topped by clouds, darkness upon darkness*” (Q 24:40) (Rāghīb, *Mufradāt*).

The noun *muzn* (from the root *m-z-n*), the only word which appears in the Qur‘ān from this root, refers generically to clouds, and it is also said that it refers [specifically] to rain clouds ... Another opinion holds that a *muzn* is a white cloud” (Ibn Manḡūr, *bāb al-nūn, faṣl al-mīm*). Rāghīb says “*al-muzn* are luminous clouds (*al-saḥāb al-muḍī‘*)... The Most High said, *Is it you who sends it down from luminous clouds, or do We send it?* (Q 56:69). The crescent moon that appears between the clouds is called ‘born of a luminous cloud’ (*ibn muzna*)” (*Mufradāt, sub m-z-n*). “White clouds” in *Lisān* perhaps originate in Rāghīb’s “luminous” clouds. The Indo-Yemeni lexicography al-Sayyid Muḥammad Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (1145-1205/1732-1790) considers the gloss of “luminous” to be a weaker position (*sub m-z-n*), however, that of “white” is confirmed by the philologist Abū Manḡūr ‘Abd al-Malik b. Muḥammad b. Ism‘īl al-Tha‘ālabī (350-429/962-1039) (*Fiqh al-lughā* p. 302).

*Ṣayyib* (Q 2:19) denotes “a cloud that specifically pours forth [rain]” (*al-saḥāb al-mukhtaṣṣ bil-ṣawb*), that is, a raincloud, and it is derived from *ṣ-w-b*, a trilateral root variously denoting “to strike,” “to befall,” and “to pour down [torrentially]” (Rāghīb, *sub ṣ-w-b*). Abū Manḡūr al-Tha‘ālabī says a *ṣayyib* is accompanied