# 267450 - Commentary on the verse {The sun cannot catch up with the moon} [Ya-Sin 36:40] and its connection to solar and lunar eclipses

## the question

Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): {The sun cannot catch up with the moon, nor can the night outstrip the day. Each floats in its own orbit} [Ya-Sin 36:40]. I read that someone on the Internet says that this is a contradiction – I ask Allah for forgiveness – because in the case of a solar eclipse, the sun has caught up with the moon and the night has come during the day. I know that this is not true, so I hope that you can give me a response to put a stop to this specious argument.

## Summary of answer

What the verse means is that the sun cannot rise at night, because the night is the time for the moon to rise, and the moon cannot rise during the day, because that is the time for the sun to rise. Solar and lunar eclipses do not come under the heading of the catching up that is referred to in the verse.

## Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

You should understand that Allah, may He be exalted, is the One Who created and fashioned in due proportion, and made all things according to a measure and guided them, and everything in the universe testifies to the greatness and might of Allah, may He be exalted.

He has told us about His creation, and the Maker knows best about what He has made, so Allah, may He be exalted, knows best about His creation: {How could He Who created not know His own

creation, when He is the Knower of subtleties, the All-Aware?} [Al-Mulk 67:14].

Moreover, you should understand that the [pagan] Arabs heard these verses, and they were the keenest of people to find fault with the Qur'an. Solar and lunar eclipses occurred at the time of the [pagan] Arabs, yet there is no report to indicate that any of them objected to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) by saying that "the sun had caught up with the moon, so how could the Qur'an claim that the sun cannot catch up with the moon?"

Indeed, not a single one of them presented this argument, which indicates that it is not as this person said; rather this stems from a misunderstanding of the verses and a misunderstanding of natural phenomena too.

Secondly:

What the verse means is that the sun cannot rise at night, because the night is the time for the moon to rise, and the moon cannot rise during the day, because that is the time for the sun to rise.

Imam Ibn Jarir (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

It is not appropriate for the sun to catch up with the moon, because that would lead to the light of the sun covering the light of the moon, so it would be day all the time, with no night. {Nor can the night outstrip the day} [Ya-Sin 36:40]. Here Allah, may He be exalted is saying that the night should not overwhelm the day, because that would lead to its darkness cancelling out the light of day, so it would be night all the time. Al-Tabari (19/438).

Ibn Kathir (may Allah have mercy on him) said: And He says (interpretation of the meaning):

{It is He Who made the sun a radiant light and the moon a reflected light, and ordained its phases, so that you may know how to count the years and measure time} [Yunus 10:5]

{We have made the night and the day as two [of Our] signs. We obscured the sign of the night with darkness and gave light to the sign of the day, so that you might seek the bounty of your Lord and know the number of the years and the reckoning of time. And We have explained all things in

detail} [al-Isra’ 17:12].

Allah has given the sun its own radiant light and has given the moon its own reflected light, and He has made a difference between the orbits of both of them. Hence the sun rises every day and sets at the end of the day, and its light is always the same, but the point of its rising and setting varies between the summer and the winter, as a result of which days become longer and nights become shorter, then nights become longer and days become shorter. And He has caused it to be dominant during the day, so it is a diurnal heavenly body.

As for the moon, He has ordained phases for it. On the first night of the month, it appears small, with little light, then its light increases on the second night and it rises higher, and the higher it rises the more light it has, even though its light is a reflection of the sun’s light, until its light becomes complete on the fourteenth night. Then it starts to decrease in size until the end of the month, until it becomes like an old date-stalk, dried-up and curved.

Regarding the words, {The sun cannot catch up with the moon}, Mujahid said: Each of them has a limit or orbit that it cannot go beyond, and it cannot fall short of that. When one is dominant, the other disappears, and when the dominant one disappears, the other one dominates. *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* (6/578).

Al-Tahir Ibn ‘Ashur (may Allah have mercy on him) said: What is meant is an affirmation that they cannot collide, so the sun cannot collide with the moon, and vice versa.

He said: What is meant is that the sun cannot collide with the moon, contrary to the way they appear, for they seem to be close. *Al-Tahrir wa’l-Tanwir* (23/24).

Whatever meaning we choose from the above, there is no contradiction between this verse and the occurrence of solar and lunar eclipses, because that is not the kind of catching up that is referred to in this verse.

And Allah knows best.