
Shape and orbit of the Earth

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Question no.10/1: “Is the earth round or flat?”

Shaykh al-Albaanee (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ)¹ answers:

“It is round,² and the issue of the earth being round or flat is not an affair related to actions nor faith, such that it is obligatory for the Muslim to know the Islamically legislated ruling about it if it is related to actions in order to worship Allaah by it like the rest of the acts of worship, or for him to believe in it in the depth of his heart and soul if it is a belief that every Muslim is commanded to believe in. Rather, it is an issue that can be understood upon two (different) ways from the explanation of some aayaat in the noble Qur’aan. And no doubt – as is the case with most issues – one of the views will be correct and the other will be wrong. Thus, whoever makes ijtihaad³ while he is qualified to do so – and the first condition for this qualification is knowledge of the Arabic language – then whether he is right or wrong, as (the questioner) himself knows, whoever is right has two rewards and whoever errs has one reward.⁴

And these aayaat that have come with regard to the earth, about whether it is moving, round or whether it is stationary – there isn’t a decisive text that would support either of the two different views. Therefore, we said that this is not an affair related to belief about which there must be a united opinion as we believe to the case with the ‘Aqeedah (belief) of the Salaf (righteous predecessors). It could be understood from some of the aayaat from the noble Qur’aan related to this subject that the earth is stationary and flat, and it could be understood from some other (aayaat) that it is moving and orbiting. And this (latter) opinion is that which carries more weight in our view and agrees with the natural reality which every individual from the people perceives (to be true), whether he is a Muslim or a disbeliever.

And it is sufficient for us to know that there isn’t a decisive proof about this issue with those who insist on opposing that which is established scientifically today: that the earth moves and that it orbits around the sun. It is sufficient, for knowing that there isn’t a clear text contradicting this idea or this astronomical view, that many of the Muslim scholars whose knowledge and excellence all of the Muslims acknowledge – especially us Salafees⁵ who believe in the leadership of Shaykh ul-Islam ibn Taymeeyah in knowledge of the Book and the Sunnah, and Ibn Qayyim az-Jawziyyah, let alone other than them – used to believe the opposite of what is being spread now based on some apparent indications of the Qur’aan, such as the aayah [And the mountains He has fixed firmly]⁶ for example, [And after that He spread the earth]⁷ and similar aayaat. They did not understand (and deduce) this opposing rigid opinion from (these aayaat), firstly due to the apparent indications of

¹ (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) (rahimahullaah) May Allaah have mercy on him

² The words that follow were said by the Shaykh upon request from the questioner to explain more on the issue

³ Independent reasoning

⁴ Saheeh al-Bukhaaree no.7352

⁵ Those who follow the way of the Salaf

⁶ Soorah un-Naazi’aat [79:32]

⁷ Soorah un-Naazi’aat [79:30]

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other (Qur'aanic) texts, and secondly due to astronomical, scientific fact. And the like of the aayah that describes the mountains with respect to the earth to be like anchors with respect to ships does not necessitate linguistically that the earth does not move at all, but rather it negates a disordered movement.⁸ And similar to this aayah is the aayah: [And the mountains [We have made] as pegs],⁹ because we know by observation that the peg with respect to the animal does not prevent it from moving [i.e., when you tie the animal to the peg], but rather the peg prevents it from moving chaotically such that it would flee and go off however it wants – no, our Lord has arranged the orbiting of the earth like the circulating of the horse around the peg. Hence, Him making the mountains as pegs is contrary to what they claim; it (actually) confirms the movement of the earth, but it confirms a scientific movement that is well-known today to be organized and very precise throughout the year such that it does not change by a single second. Likewise, the anchors don't prevent the ship from moving.”

⁸ Also refer to the aayah: “And He has affixed into the earth mountains standing firm, lest it should shake with you...;” Soorah un-Nahl [16:15]

⁹ Soorah un-Naba [78:7]