

SPREAD KNOWLEDGE

THE  
HOLY QURAN

ENGLISH TAFSEER

CHAPTER 74

SURAH AL-  
MUDDATHHIR  
COMMENTARY & EXPLANATORY

By

ABDULLAH YUSUF ALI

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**HOLY QURAN**

**CHAPTER**

**074**

**SURAH AL-MUDDATHHIR**

*ABDULLAH YUSUF ALI*

**Introduction and Summary**

This Surah from about the same time as the last one. Its subject matter is also similar: Prayer and Praise, and the need of patience in a period of great spiritual screw: the unjust who cause sorrow and suffering now will themselves experience agony in the Hereafter.

**C.254 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)**

*The Seer, by devotion and contemplation,  
Prepares himself for the duties of Guide*

And Leader to mankind: but when there comes  
 The clear Call, he must stand forth  
 And proclaim the Message---in purity,  
 Unselfish devotion, and patience long-suffering---  
 To save men from the Distress of the Final Day.  
 For many there be who glory in a life  
 Of ease and plenty, arrogant splendour,  
 And the applause of men, who scorn Allah's Truth  
 And reject the divine. How will they fare  
 When the Judgement comes, and the Penalty?  
 Every Fact of Life's grand Pageant  
 Is but a Portent for the Future,  
 Every soul is in pledge and must  
 Redeem itself by Faith and Prayer.  
 By Charity and earnest care for the Realities  
 Of Life. Bring but the will, and Allah  
 Will guide---the Lord of Righteousness,  
 The Lord of Mercy and Forgiveness!

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَدَنِيُّ (١)

1. O thou **wrapped up** (in a mantle)!

**C5778.** In these wonderful early verses there is a double thread of thought:

- A particular occasion or person is referred to;
- a general spiritual lesson is taught.

As to first, the Prophet was now past the stage of personal contemplation, lying down or sitting in his mantle; he was now to go forth boldly to deliver his Message and publicly proclaim the Lord: his heart had always been purified, but now all his outward doings



must be dedicated to Allah, and conventional respect for ancestral customs or worship must be thrown aside; his work as a Messenger was the most generous gift that could flow from his personality, but no reward or appreciation was to be expected from his people, but quite the contrary; there would be much call on his patience, but his contentment would arise from the good pleasure of Allah.

As to second, similar stages arise in a minor degree in the life of every good man, for which the Prophet's life is to be a universal pattern. (R).

فَمُفَأَنْذِرُ (٢)

2. Arise and deliver thy warning!

وَرَبَّكَ فَكَبِّرُ (٣)

3. And thy Lord do thou magnify!

وَتِيَابَكَ فَطَهِّرُ (٤)

4. And thy **garments** keep free from stain!

**C5779.** Possibly, in its immediate application, there is a reference to the dirt and filth which the Pagans used to throw at the Prophet to insult and persecute him.

وَالرُّجْزَ فَاهْجُرُ (٥)

5. And all abomination shun!

**C5780. Rujz or Rijz.** abomination:

usually understood to refer to idolatry. It is even possible that there was an idol called **Rujz**. But it has a wider signification, as including a mental state opposed to true worship, a state of doubt or indecision.

وَلَا تَمُنْ بِمَا تُسْتَكَرُّ (٦)

6. Nor expect, in giving, any increase (for thyself)!

**C5781.** The legal and commercial formula is that you give in order to receive. And usually you expect to receive what is worth to you a little more than you give. The spiritual consideration is that you give, but expect

nothing from the receiver. You serve Allah and Allah's creatures.

وَلِرَبِّكَ فَاصْبِرْ (٧)

7. **But, for thy Lord's (Cause), be patient and constant!**

**C5782.** Our zeal for Allah's Cause itself requires that we should not be impatient, and that we should show constancy in our efforts for His Cause. For we have faith, and we know that He is All-Good, All-Wise, and All-Powerful, and everything will ultimately be right.

فَإِذَا نُقِرَ فِي النَّاقُورِ (٨)

8. **Finally when the Trumpet is sounded,**

فَذَلِكَ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَوْمٌ عَسِيرٌ (٩)

9. **That will be -- that Day -- a Day of Distress --**

**C5783.** The Sinner's course is now shown in contrast to the Seeker's. The Sinner may be self-complacent now: but what will be his position when the Reckoning comes? Not easy, indeed a Day of Distress!

عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ غَيْرُ يَسِيرٍ (١٠)

10. **Far from easy for those without Faith.**

دُرْنِي ...

11. **Leave Me alone, (to deal) ...**

**C5784.** The question of Justice and Punishment to men is for Allah alone. For man at his best can see only one side of truth, and only Allah is All-Knowing. He alone can judge the limits of Justice and Mercy.

... وَمَنْ خَلَقْتُ وَحِيدًا (١١)

... with the (creature) **whom I created (bare and) alone! --**

**C5785.** Man's adventitious advantages-wealth, power, position, talents-are not due to his own merits. They are gifts from Allah, Who created him. In himself he came bare and alone.

وَجَعَلْتُ لَهُ مَالًا مَمْدُودًا (١٢)

12. To whom I granted resources in abundance,

وَبَنِينَ شُهُودًا (١٣)

13. And sons to be by his side! --

**C5786.** The great ones of the earth may have wealth, a large following, sons by their side to defend them and do their bidding and man-power to help them in their battles. Life may be smooth and agreeable to them. But their responsibility is to Allah.

وَمَهَّدْتُ لَهُ تَمْهِيدًا (١٤)

14. To whom I made (life) smooth and comfortable!

ثُمَّ يَطْمَعُ أَنْ أَزِيدَ (١٥)

15. Yet is he greedy -- that I should add (yet more) --

**C5787.** The Sinner takes Allah's gifts as if they were his right. The more he gets, the more is he greedy. Yet to Allah's Signs and revelations he is willfully deaf or even openly rebellious. But he is only preparing the way for his own undoing.

كَلَّا إِنَّهُ كَانَ لِآيَاتِنَا عَنِيدًا (١٦)

16. By no means!

For to Our Signs he has been refractory!

سَأُرْهِقُهُ صَعُودًا (١٧)

17. Soon will I visit him with a mount of calamities!

**C5788. "A mount of calamities"** or disasters: may be understood as a phrase for cumulative disasters.

إِنَّهُ فَكَّرَ وَقَدَّرَ (١٨)

18. For he thought and he plotted --

فَقَتَلَ كَيْفَ كَانَ قَدَرَ (١٩)

19. And woe to him! how he plotted! --

**C5789.** Cf. 51:10: "Woe to the falsehood-mongers!" (R).

ثُمَّ قَتَلَ كَيْفَ قَتَرَ (٢٠)

20. Yea, woe to him! how he plotted! --

ثُمَّ نَظَرَ (٢١)

21. Then he looked round;

ثُمَّ عَبَسَ وَبَسَرَ (٢٢)

22. Then he frowned and he scowled;

ثُمَّ أَدْبَرَ وَاسْتَكْبَرَ (٢٣)

23. Then he turned back and was haughty;

فَقَالَ إِنَّ هَذَا إِذَا سِحْرٌ يُؤْتَرُ (٢٤)

24. Then said he:

"This is nothing but magic derived from of old;"

**C5790.** The Commentators understand the reference to be to Walid ibn Mugaira, who was a wealthy Sybarite, Pagan to the core, and an inveterate enemy to the holy Prophet. He and Abu Jahl did all they could, from the beginning of the preaching of Islam, to abuse and persecute the Preacher, to run down his doctrine, and to injure those who believed in it.

But the meaning for us is much wider. There are Walids in all ages. They cannot understand divine inspiration, and seek to explain its winterfed influence over the lives of men by some such unmeaning formula as "magic". The eternal Hope is to them mere human delusion!

إِنَّ هَذَا إِذَا قَوْلُ الْبَشَرِ (٢٥)

25. "This is nothing but the word of a mortal!"

سَأُصَلِّيهِ سَقَرَ (٢٦)

26. Soon will cast him into Hell-Fire!

**C5791.** The Sinner's perversity can only end in the Fire of Punishment. It enters his very being.

See next note.



وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا سَقَرُ (٢٧)

27. And what will explain to thee what Hell-fire is?

لَا تُبْقِي وَلَا تَذَرُ (٢٨)

28. Naught doth it permit to endure, **and naught** doth it leave alone! --

**C5792.** He is in a state in which he neither lives nor dies (87:13). Looked at in another way, the things that in a good man are meant to last and grow, are for the sinner destroyed, and no part of his nature is left untouched. The brightness of his very manhood is darkened and extinguished by sin.

لَوَاحِةٌ لِلْبَشَرِ (٢٩)

29. Darkening and changing the color of man!

عَلَيْهَا تِسْعَةَ عَشَرَ (٣٠)

30. Over it are Nineteen.

**C5793.** The figure nineteen refers to angels appointed to guard Hell.

See verse 31 below and the corresponding note. [Eds.]

وَمَا جَعَلْنَا أَصْحَابَ النَّارِ إِلَّا مَلَائِكَةً ...

31. And We have **set none** but angels as guardians of the Fire;

**C5794.** Cf. 66:6, and n. 5540.

There was a great volume of angelology in the religious literature of the People of the Book (i.e., the Jews and Christians) to whom (among others) an appeal is made in this verse. The Essenes, a Jewish brotherhood with highly spiritual ideas; to which perhaps the prophet Jesus himself belonged, had an extensive literature of angelology, In the Midrash also, which was a Jewish school of exegesis and mystical interpretation, there was much said about angels.

The Eastern Christian sects contemporary with the birth of Islam had borrowed and developed many of these ideas, and their mystics owed much to the Gnostics and the Persian apocalyptic systems.



In the New Testament the relation of the angels with Fire is referred to more than once. In Rev. 9:11 we have "the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon".

In Rev. 14:18 there is an "angel which had power over fire", and in Rev. 16:8 an angel has "power ... given unto him to scorch men with fire".

In the Old Testament (Daniel 7:9-10) the essence of all angels is fire: thousand thousands of them issued as a fiery strewn from before the Ancient of Days, whose "throne was like the fiery flame, and His wheels as burning fire".

... وَمَا جَعَلْنَا عِدَّتَهُمْ إِلَّا فِتْنَةً لِّلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا ...

and We have fixed their number only as a trial for Unbelievers --

**C5795.** The mystic significance of numbers is a favourite theme with some writers, but I lay no stress on it.

In Christian theology the number of the Beast, 666, in Rev. 13:18 has given rise to much controversy, and may refer only to the numerical value of the letters in the name of the Roman Emperor Nero.

In our own literature I think that we ought to avoid too much insistence on speculative conjectures. (R).

... لِّيَسْتَيْقِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ وَيَزِدَّادَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِيمَانًا...

in order that the People of the Book may arrive at certainty, and the Believers may increase in Faith --

...وَلَا يَرْتَابَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ...

and that no doubts may be left for the People of the Book and the Believers,

...وَلِيَقُولَ الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٌ وَالْكَافِرُونَ مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهَذَا

مَثَلًا...

and that those in whose hearts is a disease and the Unbelievers may say, "What symbol doth Allah intend by this?"

**C5796.** There are four classes of people mentioned here.

1. The Muslims will have their faith increased, because they believe that all revelation is from Allah Most Merciful, and all His forces will work in their favour.
2. The People of the Book, those who had received previous revelations of an analogous character, the Jews and Christians, had numerous sects disputing with each other on minute points of doctrine; but they will now, if they believe, find rest from controversies in a broad understanding of scripture.
3. Those in whose hearts is a disease (see 2:8-10, notes 33-34), the insincere ones, the hypocrites, will only be mystified, because they believe nothing and have rejected the grace and mercy of Allah.
4. The Unbelievers have frankly done the same and must suffer similar consequences. (R).

...كَذَلِكَ يُضِلُّ اللَّهُ مَن يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَن يَشَاءُ...

Thus doth Allah leave to stray whom He pleaseth, and guide whom He pleaseth;

...وَمَا يَعْلَمُ جُنُودَ رَبِّكَ إِلَّا هُوَ...

and none can know the forces of the Lord, **except He,**

**C5797.** It is a necessary consequence of moral responsibility and freedom of choice in man, that he should be left free to stray if he chooses to do so, in spite of all the warning and the instruction he receives. Allah's channels of warning and instruction-His spiritual forces-are infinite, as are His powers. No man can know them. But this warning or reminder is addressed to all mankind.

All things are referred to Allah. But we must not attribute evil to Him. In 4:79 we are expressly told that the good comes from Allah, and the evil from ourselves.

وَمَا هِيَ إِلَّا ذِكْرَى لِلْبَشَرِ (٣١)

and this is no other than a warning to mankind.

## Section 2

### كَلَّا وَالْقَمَرَ (٣٢)

#### 32. Nay, verily: by the Moon,

**C5798.** An oath in human speech calls in evidence something sacred in the heart of man. In Allah's Message, also, when delivered in human language, solemn emphasis is indicated by an appeal to something striking among the Signs of Allah, which will go straight to the human heart which is addressed. In each case the symbol of the appeal has reference to the particular point enforced in the argument.

Here we are asked to contemplate three wonderful phenomena, and they lead up to the conclusion in verse 38.

1. The moon, next after the sun, is the most striking luminary to our sight. Its reflected light has for us even a greater mystery than the direct light of the sun, which looks to us like pure fire. The moon was worshipped as a deity in times of darkness. But in reality, though she rules the night, her rays are only reflections, and are wanting in warmth and vitality. So every soul which looks up to a mere creature of Allah for a sort of vicarious salvation is in spiritual darkness or error; for the true source of spiritual light and life is Allah, and Allah alone.
  2. For the Night and
  3. the Dawn,
- see the following note.

### وَاللَّيْلِ إِذْ أَدْبَرَ (٣٣)

#### 33. And by the Night as it retreateth,

**C5799.** 2 The Night when it is illuminated by the Moon is light in a sense, but it is really dark and must give place to 3 the Dawn when it comes, as the harbinger of the Sun.



So in spiritual matters, when every soul realises its own responsibility, it will look less and less to reflected lights, and through the beauty of a dawn-like awakening, will be prepared more and more for the splendour of the light of Allah Himself, the goal of the Heaven of our dreams.

وَالصُّبْحُ إِذَا أَسْفَرَ (٣٤)

34. And by the Dawn as it shineth forth --

إِنَّهَا لِيُحْدَى الْكَبِيرِ (٣٥)

35. This is but one of the mighty (Portents),

**C5800. "This is but one,"** etc.

There are numerous Signs of Allah, of which Judgment is one, and one of the mightiest portents.

Or the reference may be to the waning of the Moon, the decline of the night, and the glorious sunrise, as tokens or symbols of the world renewed when the present transitory world passes away.

According to some commentators **"This"** here refers to Hell. (R).

نَذِيرًا لِلْبَشَرِ (٣٦)

36. A warning to mankind --

لِمَنْ شَاءَ مِنْكُمْ أَنْ يَتَقَدَّمَ أَوْ يَتَأَخَّرَ (٣٧)

37. To any of you that chooses to press forward, or to follow behind -

**C5801.** Three interpretations are possible.

- Those pressing forward may be the Righteous, and those following behind may be the laggards, the Unbelievers, who reject Allah's love, care, and mercy.
- Men of two kinds of temperament may be referred to:

those who are always in the van and those who are always in the rear.

Allah's Message is open to both. But there may be a danger to both:

in the one case, over-confidence, or hope in wrong things:

in the other case missing great opportunities so that their spiritual lives may be "bound in shallows and in miseries".

Extremes should be avoided.

- Or it may mean that the warning is effective only for those willing to move forwards or backwards, as the case may be, but is lost on the inert or the lethargic. For our moral and spiritual progress, we have in some cases to go forwards, but in some cases we have to retreat from false positions. The hopeless case is that of the obstinate man, whose heart is so dead that he dares not advance to the right or withdraw from the wrong.

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ رَهِينَةٌ (٣٨)

38. Every soul will be (held) in pledge for its deeds.

**C5802.** Cf. 52:21.

Man cannot shift his responsibility to vicarious saviours or saints. His redemption depends upon the grace of Allah, for which he should constantly and wholeheartedly strive by means of right conduct. If he does so he will be redeemed and he will join the Companions of the Right Hand.

إِلَّا أَصْحَابَ الْيَمِينِ (٣٩)

39. Except the Companions of the Right Hand.

**C5803.** Cf. n. 5223 to 56:3, and see 56:27-38.

The Companions of the Right Hand will be the Righteous or the Blessed in the Hereafter. Their grounds of merit will be Prayer, Charity, Earnestness, and Faith in Allah's just Judgment: all of which are within the reach of the humblest Seeker. They are not separate acts or virtues,

but are all inter-connected. At Judgment, the pledge of their soul will be redeemed by Allah's Grace at the Taking of the Account.

فِي جَنَّاتٍ يَنْسَاءَلُونَ (٤٠)

40. (They will be) in Gardens (of Delight);  
they will question each other,

عَنِ الْمُجْرِمِينَ (٤١)

41. And (ask) of the Sinners:

مَا سَلَكَكُمْ فِي سَقَرٍ (٤٢)

42. "What led you into Hell-fire?"

قَالُوا لَمْ نَكُ مِنَ الْمُصَلِّينَ (٤٣)

43. They will say: "We were not of those who prayed;"

وَلَمْ نَكُ نَطْعُمُ الْمَسْكِينِ (٤٤)

44. "Nor were we of those who fed the indigent;"

وَكُنَّا نَحُوضُ مَعَ الْخَائِضِينَ (٤٥)

45. "But we used to talk vanities with vain talkers;"

وَكُنَّا نَكْذِبُ بِيَوْمِ الدِّينِ (٤٦)

46. "And we used to deny the Day of Judgment,"

حَتَّىٰ أَتَانَا الْيَقِينُ (٤٧)

47. "Until there came to us (the Hour) that is certain."

**C5804.** Cf. 15:99, and n. 2018.

The Hour that is Certain is usually taken to the Death.  
(R).

فَمَا نَنْفَعُهُمْ شَفَاعَةُ الشَّافِعِينَ (٤٨)

48. Then will no intercession of (any) intercessors profit them.

فَمَا لَهُمْ عَنِ التَّذْكَرَةِ مُعْرِضِينَ (٤٩)

49. Then what is the matter with them that they turn away from admonition? --



**C5805.** If the Day of Judgment is inevitable, it is strange that men should not heed a plain warning, but go on as if they were thoughtless and obstinate asses stampeding from a lion. Instead of heeding the warning, they try to avoid it. They are frightened at Allah's Word.

كَأَنَّهُمْ حُمُرٌ مُسْتَنْفِرَةٌ (٥٠)

50. As if they were affrighted asses,

فَرَّتْ مِنْ قَسْوَرَةٍ (٥١)

51. Fleeing from a lion!

بَلْ يَرِيدُ كُلُّ امْرِئٍ مِّنْهُمْ أَنْ يُؤْتَىٰ صُحُفًا مُّتَنَسَّرَةً (٥٢)

52. Forsooth, each one of them wants to be given scrolls (of revelation) spread out!

**C5806.** Cf. 17:93: "Until thou send down to us a book, that we could read."

The Unbelievers pretend in ridicule that they would believe if a special message written on open scrolls and addressed to them severally were brought to them by a miracle! There is a disease in their hearts and understandings. The Teacher's warning is plain, and enough for any reasonable man who has the will to seek Allah.

كَلَّا بَلْ لَّا يَخَافُونَ الْآخِرَةَ (٥٣)

53. By no means! But they fear not the Hereafter.

كَلَّا إِنَّهُ تَذَكُّرٌ (٥٤)

54. Nay, this surely is an admonition:

فَمَنْ شَاءَ ذَكَرْهُ (٥٥)

55. Let any who will, keep it in remembrance!

**C5807.** The Quran itself is the admonition-the latest among the revealed Books of Allah. If man has the will to learn, he will keep the Message always before Him,

and Allah's grace will help him to carry it out in his conduct.

وَمَا يَذْكُرُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ ...

56. But none will keep it in remembrance except as Allah wills:

...هُوَ أَهْلُ التَّقْوَى وَأَهْلُ الْمَعْفِوَةِ (٥٦)

**He is the Lord of Righteousness, and the Lord of Forgiveness.**

**C5808.** Righteousness as well as Forgiveness have their source in Allah's Will.

Man's Righteousness has no meaning except in relation to the universal Will.

For Taqwa see [n. 26](#) to 2:2.

If we take the word here in the sense of "the fear of Allah", the translation would be:

"He alone is worthy to be feared, and He alone is entitled to grant Forgiveness."