

Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī

Vol. 9

Sūrah Hūd

Sūrah Yūsuf

Sūrat ar-Ra‘d

Sūrah Ibrāhīm

Sūrat al-Hijr

Tafsīr al-Qurtubī

The General Judgments of the Qur'an
and Clarification of what it contains
of the Sunnah and *Āyahs* of Discrimination

Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Abī Bakr
ibn Farḥ al-Anṣārī al-Khazrajī al-Andalusī al-Qurtubī

Vol. 9

Sūrah Hūd

Sūrah Yūsuf

*Sūrat ar-Ra'*d

Sūrah Ibrāhīm

Sūrat al-Hijr

translated by

Aisha Bewley

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CONTENTS

Table of Transliterations	vi
Translator's note	vii
11. Sūrah Hūd	1
12. Sūrah Yūsuf – Joseph	122
13. Sūrat ar-Ra‘d – Thunder	276
14. Sūrah Ibrāhīm – Abraham	340
15. Al-Ḥijr	392
Table of Contents for Āyats	456
Glossary	463

Table of Transliterations

ء	,	ض	ḍ
ا	a	ط	ṭ
ب	b	ظ	ẓ
ت	t	ع	‘
ث	th	غ	gh
ج	j	ف	f
ح	h	ق	q
خ	kh	ك	k
د	d	ل	l
ذ	dh	م	m
ر	r	ن	n
ز	z	ه	h
س	s	و	w
ش	sh	ي	y
ص	ṣ		
Long vowel		Short vowel	
ا	ā	ـ	a [fathah]
و	ū	ـ	u [dammah]
ي	ī	ـ	i [kasrah]
أو	aw		
أي	ay		

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The Arabic for the *āyats* is from the Algerian State edition of the *riwāyah* of Imam Warsh from the *qirā'ah* of Imam Nāfi‘ of Madīnah, whose recitation is one of the ten *mutawātir* recitations that are mass-transmitted from the time of the Prophet ﷺ.

There are minor omissions in the text. Some poems have been omitted which the author quotes to illustrate a point of grammatical usage or as an example of orthography or the usage of a word, often a derivative of the root of the word used in the *āyah*, but not the actual word used. Often it is difficult to convey the sense in English. Occasionally the author explores a grammatical matter or a tangential issue, and some of these may have been shortened. English grammatical terms used to translate Arabic grammatical terms do not have exactly the same meaning, sometimes rendering a precise translation of them problematic and often obscure.

The end of a *juz'* may vary by an *āyah* or two in order to preserve relevant passages.

11. SŪRAH HŪD

It is Makkan according to al-Hasan, ‘Ikrimah, ‘Atā’ and Jābir. Ibn ‘Abbās and Qatādah said except for *āyah* 114. Abū Muḥammad ad-Dārimī related from Ka‘b that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, ‘Recite *Sūrah Hūd* on the day of *Jumu‘ah*.’ At-Tirmidhī related from Ibn ‘Abbās that Abū Bakr said, ‘Messenger of Allah, you have white hair!’ He said, ‘*Hūd*, *al-Wāqi‘ah*, *al-Mursalāt*, *Ammā yatasā’alūna* and *at-Takwīr* gave me white hair.’ He said that it is a *gharīb hasan hadīth*. Something like this is related *mursal*. At-Tirmidhī al-Ḥakīm transmitted in *Nawādir al-uṣūl* that Abū Juḥayfah said, ‘They said, “Messenger of Allah, we see that you have white hair!” He replied, “*Hūd* and its sisters made me white-haired.”’

Abū ‘Abdullāh said, ‘Fear gives white hair. That is because fear frightens the soul and dries up the moisture of the body. Under every hair is a pore by which it sweats. When fear dries up the moisture of the body, the pores dry up and the hair becomes dry and turns white as we see with green crops before they are watered. When they are not watered, they dry up and turn white. An old man’s hair goes white because his moisture departs and his skin becomes dry. The soul is frightened by the threat of Allah and the terrors which are reported from Allah and so it is alarmed and the threat of that warning and the terror it brings dry it up and one result of that is white hair. Allah Almighty says: “*a Day which will turn children grey*.” (73:17) They will turn grey from fear.’

When the people of certainty read the passages in *Sūrah Hūd* where Allah mentions the previous nations and what happened to them as a result of the immediate violent force of Allah, the effect of that appears on their hearts because of His sovereignty, authority and the times when His force smites His enemies and it would actually be more fitting for them to die of fear. But Allah – exalted is He and blessed is His Name – is gentle to them at those times so that they are able to read His words. Its sisters are similar *sūrahs*, like *al-Hāqqah*, *al-Ma‘ārij*, *at-Takwīr*, and *al-Qāri‘ah*. Reading these *sūrahs* exposes the hearts of people with direct knowledge of Him to the reality of His authority and force and so souls are alarmed at it and heads become white. It is said that what made the hair of the Prophet ﷺ turn white in *Sūrah Hūd* were Allah’s words: ‘*Go straight as you have*

been commanded as will be made clear, Allah willing. Yazīd ibn Abān said, ‘I saw the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in a dream and recited *Sūrah Hūd* to him and when I finished it, he said, “Yazīd, this is the recitation, but where is the weeping?”’

Our scholars say that Abū Ja‘far an-Naḥḥās said, ‘One says “This (f) is *Hūdu*” without *tanwīn* as the name of a *sūrah*. If one named a woman “Zayd”, it would not be declined. This is the position of al-Khalīl and Sībawayh.’ Īsā ibn ‘Umar, on the other hand, said, ““This (f) is *Hūdun*” has *tanwīn* because it is the name of a *sūrah*. That is also the case if a woman is called Zayd because when there is a *sukūn* on the middle letter, it is light and therefore inflected. If you want to elide, then all say that it is inflected. So you say, “This is *Hūd*” when you mean *Sūrah Hūd*.’ Sībawayh said, ‘The evidence for that is that you say, “This (f) is *ar-Rahmān*.” If you had not meant this is *Sūrat ar-Rahmān*, you would not have said this (f).’

أَلْرَبِّكُنْبُ احْرَكْتَ - اِيْنُهُ وْثُمَّ فُصِّلَتْ مِنْ لَدُنْ حَكِيمٍ خَبِيرٍ ①
 إِلَّا اللَّهُ إِنَّهُ لَكُوْنِهِ نَدِيرٌ وَنَشِيرٌ ② وَإِنْ إِسْتَغْفِرُواْ رَبَّكُمْ ثُمَّ تُوْبُوْ إِلَيْهِ
 يُمْتَعَنُكُمْ مَتَّعًا حَسَنًا إِلَى أَجَلٍ مُسَمَّى وَنُوْتُ كُلَّ ذَيْهِ فَضْلٌ فَضْلَهُ وَإِنْ تَوَلُّوْ
 فَإِنِّي أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ كَيْرٍ ③ إِلَى اللَّهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ وَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ
 قَدِيرٌ ④

1-4 Alif Lām Rā’ A Book whose āyahs are perfectly constructed, and then demarcated, coming directly from One Who is All-Wise, All-Aware. ‘Do not worship anyone but Allah! I am a warner and bringer of good news to you from Him. Ask your Lord for forgiveness and then repent to Him. He will let you enjoy a good life until a specified time, and will give His favour to all who merit it. But if you turn your backs, I fear for you the punishment of a Mighty Day. You will return to Allah. He has power over all things.’

Alif Lām Rā’ A Book whose āyahs are perfectly constructed, and then demarcated

Alif Lām Rā’ was already discussed (at the beginning of *Sūrat Yūnus*). ‘A Book’ means: ‘This is a Book.’ The adjective ‘perfectly constructed’ is in the nominative describing ‘Book’. The best of what is said about this is what Qatādah said. He said that it is all perfectly constructed with no gaps or falsehood in it. The word *iḥkām* implies the prohibition of any falseness whatsoever, meaning that it is organized perfectly with no deficiencies and no gaps.

Ibn ‘Abbās said, ‘No Book can abrogate it which was not the case with the Torah and Gospel.’ According to this meaning, it means: ‘Some of its āyahs are perfectly constructed by being made abrogating and not abrogated.’ This was already discussed (3:7). The generic noun is applied to the category as when you say, ‘I ate Zayd’s food,’ when you only ate some of it. Al-Hasan and al-‘Āliyah said that they are ‘perfectly constructed’ with respect to commands and prohibitions and ‘then demarcated’ with respect to promise and threat and reward and punishment. Qatādah said that Allah perfected them by freeing them from falsehood and then made them distinguish between the lawful and unlawful. Mujāhid said, ‘They are ‘perfectly constructed’ in general and then made clear by āyahs which combine what is necessary of proofs of *tawhīd*, Prophethood, the Resurrection and other things. It is said that it is collected in the Preserved Tablet and then *demarcated* in the Revelation. It is said that it means: ‘revealed little by little so that they may be properly considered.’ Ikrimah recited ‘*fāsalat*,’ implying put forth with the Truth from One Who is all-Wise in dealing with matters, and All-Aware of everything which is or is not.

Do not worship anyone but Allah.

Al-Kisā’ī and al-Farrā’ said that it means: ‘it is *perfectly constructed* and *demarcated*, commanding that one should worship Allah alone.’ Az-Zajjāj said, ‘It means “so that not”, in other words it is *perfectly constructed and then demarcated* so that you do not worship any but Allah.’ It is said that Allah commanded His Messenger to tell people to worship Him alone. ‘I am a warner from Allah, bringing warning about His punishment and violent force against anyone who disobeys Him, bringing good news of His pleasure for anyone who obeys Him.’ It is said that it is an aspect of the words of Allah, implying ‘Do not worship anyone but Allah. I warn you about worshipping other than Him’ as when He says, *Allah advises you to beware of Him.*’ (3:37)

Ask your Lord for forgiveness and then repent to Him

This is added to the first āyah. To ‘*repent to Him*’ is to return to Him with obedience and worship. Al-Farrā’ said that ‘*thumma*’ here means ‘and’ rather than ‘*then*’, in other words ‘and repent to Him’” because asking forgiveness is repentance and repentance is asking forgiveness. It is said that what is meant is, ‘Ask Him for forgiveness for your prior wrong actions and repent to Him of what you may do in the future.’ One of the righteous men said, ‘Asking for forgiveness without refraining (from wrongdoing) is the repentance of liars.’ This was discussed in *Āl*

Imrān (3:135) and *al-Baqarah* (2:231). It is said that asking forgiveness is mentioned first because forgiveness is the desired goal and repentance is the means to it. So forgiveness is first in what is sought and last in the reason. It is possible that it means: 'Ask Him for forgiveness for minor wrong actions and repent to Him for major ones.'

He will let you enjoy a good life until a specified time

'*A good life*' is the fruit of asking forgiveness and repentance, meaning that if you do that He will let you enjoy benefits of ample provision and easy life and not destroy you with the punishment as He did those before you. It is said that He will give you enjoyment and long life. The root of *imtā'* is to make something long. Sahl ibn 'Abdullāh said, 'A good life consists in abandoning creatures and turning to the Real.' It is said that it is enjoying what is there and not regretting what is not there.

The '*specified time*' is said to be death, or the Rising, or entering the Garden. According to this, a good life is protection from every disliked thing and the fearful aspects of the grave and other terrors of the Rising. The first understanding is clearer by Allah's words in this *sūrah*: '*My people, ask forgiveness of your Lord and then repent to Him. He will send heaven down to you in abundant rain and increase you with strength upon strength.*' (11:53) This inevitably ceases with death, which is the predestined term. Allah knows best.

Muqātil said, 'They refused to do this and so the Messenger of Allah ﷺ prayed against them and they were tested with drought for seven years to the point that they were cooking bones, filth, carrion and dogs.'

and will give His favour to all who merit it.

He will give to all of those who do right actions the reward for their actions. It is said that He will give *His favour*, which is the Garden, to everyone with more good actions than evil actions. This is the favour of Allah, so 'His' refers to Allah Almighty. Mujāhid said, 'It is what a man is called to reckoning for on account of what his tongue uttered or what he did with his hand or foot and what voluntary actions he did with his wealth. That is the favour of Allah which He gave him when he believed but did not accept from him when he disbelieved.'

the punishment of a Mighty Day

The '*Mighty Day*' is the Day of Rising. It is mighty because of the terrors in it. It is also said that it is the Day of Badr and other things. The verb '*turn your backs*' can be in the perfect tense, meaning, 'If they have turned their backs, tell them, "I fear

for you.” It can also be in the future tense, with one of the *tā*’s elided, meaning, ‘Tell them: “if you turn your backs, I fear for you.”’

You will return to Allah after death. He has power over the reward and punishment.

اَلَّا إِنَّهُمْ يَنْنُونَ صُدُورَهُمْ لِيَسْتَخْفُوا مِنْهُ الْأَجْيَانَ يَسْتَعْشُونَ شَيَّاً بَعْدُمْ يَعْلَمُ مَا يُسْرُونَ وَمَا يُعْلَمُونَ إِنَّهُ عَلَيْمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ ۝

5 See how they wrap themselves round trying to conceal their feelings from Him! No, indeed! When they wrap their garments round themselves, He knows what they keep secret and what they make public. He knows what their hearts contain.

Allah is speaking here about the enmity of the idolaters towards the Prophet ﷺ and the believers when they thought that their circumstances were concealed from Allah. They wrap themselves in enmity towards the Muslims. There is disagreement about it. Ibn ‘Abbās said, ‘They conceal rancour and enmity in themselves while they display the opposite of that.’ It was revealed about al-Akhnas ibn Shurayq. He was a man with sweet words who would meet the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in a pleasing way while concealing bad feelings in his heart. Mujāhid said that it is doubt and uncertainty. Al-Ḥasan said, ‘They wrap up what they have of unbelief.’

It is said that it was revealed about one of the hypocrites: when he passed by the Prophet ﷺ, he wrapped his clothing round his chest and back and bowed his head and covered his face so that the Prophet ﷺ would not see him and call him to faith. Something similar is related from ‘Abdullāh ibn Shaddād. The *hā*’ in ‘from Him’ can also refer to the Prophet ﷺ. It is said that when the hypocrites said, ‘When we close our doors, we wrap ourselves in garments and cover our breasts with our enmity towards Muhammad, who will know that about us?’ Then the āyah was revealed.

It is said that some Muslims used to cover their bodies and not expose them to the sky. Allah made it clear that devotions which occupy the hearts are belief and those with outward display are simply words and deeds. Ibn Jurayj related that Muḥammad ibn ‘Abbād ibn Ja‘far said that he heard Ibn ‘Abbās ﷺ say, ‘They wrap up their breasts to try and hide from Him.’ He said, ‘They used not to have intercourse with women or go to the lavatory while they were exposed to the sky. So this āyah was revealed.’

Someone other than Muḥammad ibn ‘Abbād related that Ibn ‘Abbās said, ‘*tathnaww*’ [without a *yā*]. The meaning is close to the two other readings because they are not wrapped until they wrap. It is said that It is said that some used to go to others to attack the Muslims and their ignorance reached the point where they imagined that that was hidden from Allah. ‘*Trying to conceal their feelings from Him*’ can mean from Muḥammad ﷺ or from Allah. ‘*When they wrap their garments round*’ means that they cover their heads with their garments. Qatādah said: ‘The greatest covering is when someone bends his back, covers himself with his garment, and conceals his concern in himself.’

وَمَا مِنْ دَائِبٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ رِزْقُهَا وَيَعْلَمُ مُسْتَقْرَرَهَا وَمُسْتَوْدَعَهَا
كُلُّ فِي كِتَابٍ مِّنِيْنَ ①

6 There is no creature on the earth which is not dependent upon Allah for its provision. He knows where it lives and where it dies. They are all in a Clear Book.

There is no creature on the earth which is not dependent upon Allah for its provision.

The *mā* is negative and the *min* is redundant. The noun ‘creature’ is in the nominative and implies: there is no creature. The preposition ‘*alā (upon)* here means ‘from’, in other words *its provision* is from Allah. This is indicated by the words of Mujāhid, ‘All provision that comes is from Allah.’ It is said that ‘*upon Allah*’ is used because it is by His favour, not by way of obligation. It is said that it is a true promise from Allah. This was explained in *an-Nisā’* (4:69-70). Nothing is mandatory for Him.

‘*Its provision*’ is in the nominative by the inceptive. According to the Kufans, it is an adjective. The literal meaning of the *ayah* is general while its meaning is individual because many animals die before they receive provision. It is said that it is general to every creature and, if any creature does not have provision by which it lives, its soul is nevertheless provided for. The reason for the structure here is that Allah is saying that He provides for all and does not neglect their upbringing, so how could your states be concealed from Him, unbelievers, when He provides for you?

A *dābbah* is every animal which moves and *rizq* is the reality of what nourishes a living creature and in which the soul persists and body grows. It is not permitted for *rizq* to mean property because animals are provided for and it is not valid to describe them as owning their fodder. The same is true of children who are

provided with milk: it is not said that the milk which comes from the breast is the child's property. The Almighty says: *'Your provision is in heaven.'* (51:22) There is no property in heaven. If provision had been property, when someone ate from the property of someone else, he would be eating from the provision of another. That is impossible because a slave only eats from his own provision. This understanding was mentioned in *al-Baqarah* (2:3).

Someone was asked, 'From where do you eat?' He answered, 'The One Who created the millstone brings flour to it and the One Who makes the jaws move is the Creator of provisions.' Abū Usayd was asked, 'From where do you eat?' He said, 'Glory be to Allah and Allah is greater! Allah provides for dogs, so would He not provide for Abū Usayd?' Hātim al-Asamm was asked, 'From where do you eat?' He said, "From Allah." He was asked, 'Does Allah send down dinars and dirhams on you from heaven?' He said, 'As if His domain were only heaven! This earth is His just as heaven is His. If provision does not come to me from heaven, He drives it to me from the earth.' He said:

How can I fear poverty when Allah is my Provider
and the Provider of all this creation in both hardship and ease?
He is in charge of all provision for every creature:
the lizard in the desert and the fish in the sea.

At-Tirmidhī al-Ḥakīm mentioned in *Nawādir al-usūl* that Zayd ibn Aslam said, 'When the Ash'arīs – Abū Mūsā, Abū Mālik and Abū 'Amir in a group – emigrated to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, during that expedition their provisions ran out and they sent a man to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ to ask him for something. When he reached the door of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, he heard him recite this āyah: "There is no creature on the earth..."' The man said, "The Ash'arīs are not lower than creatures in the eyes of Allah." So he went back and did not go in to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. He told his companions, "You have the good news that succour will come to you." They naturally thought that he had spoken to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ who had given him a promise. While they were in that situation, two men came to them carrying a bag between them which was filled with bread and meat and they ate what they wished of it. Then they said to one another, "We should take this food to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ so that he can use it for what he needs." They told the two men, "Take it to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. We have no need of it." Then they went to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and said, "Messenger of Allah, we have never seen better and more abundant food than what you sent to us!" He said, "I did not send you any food." They told him that they had sent

their companion and the Messenger of Allah ﷺ questioned him and he told him what he had done and said to them. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “That was provision which Allah gave you.”

He knows where it lives and where it dies.

‘He knows where it lives (mustaqarr)’ and where it seeks refuge in the earth. ‘Where it dies (mustawda)’ is the place in which it dies and is buried. Miqsam relayed this from Ibn ‘Abbās. Ar-Rabī‘ ibn Anas said that ‘where it lives’ is the days of its life and ‘where it dies’ is the time of its death and resurrection. Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr said that its *mustaqarr* is the womb and its *mustawda* is the loins. It is said that *mustaqarr* is its place in the Garden or the Fire and *mustawda* is its place in the grave. That is indicated by His description of the people of the Garden and the people of the Fire: ‘What an excellent lodging (*mustaqarr*) and abode!’ (25:76) and ‘It is indeed an evil lodging (*mustaqarr*) and abode!’ (35:66) The Clear Book is the Preserved Tablet.

وَهُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ وَكَانَ عَرْشُهُ، عَلَى
الْمَاءِ لِيَبْلُو كُمٌّ وَأَيْكُمٌ أَحَسَنُ عَمَالًا وَلَئِنْ قُلْتَ إِنَّكُمْ مَبْعُوثُونَ مِنْ بَعْدِ
الْمَوْتِ لِيَقُولُنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِنَّ هَذَا إِلَّا بَحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ ⑯

7 It is He Who created the heavens and the earth in six days when His Throne was on the water, in order to test which of you has the best actions. If you say, ‘You will be raised up after death,’ those who disbelieve will say, ‘This is nothing but downright magic.’

It is He Who created the heavens and the earth in six days when His Throne was on the water,

This was discussed in *al-A'rāf* (7:54). Allah makes it clear that He created the Throne and water before He created the heavens and earth. Ka'b said, ‘Allah created a green ruby and looked into it and it began to tremble out of fear of Allah. That is why water trembles even now, even if it is still. Then He created the wind and it was on its back and then He placed the Throne on the water.’ Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr reported that Ibn ‘Abbās was asked about ‘His Throne was on the water’: ‘What was the water on?’ He said, ‘On the back of the wind.’

Al-Bukhārī related that ‘Imrān ibn Huṣayn said, ‘I was with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ when some of the Banū Tamīm came to him. He said, “Good news, Banū Tamīm!” They said, “You have given us good news, so give to us (twice).”

Some of the people of Yemen entered and he said, ‘Accept the good news, people of Yemen, since the Banū Tamīm have not accepted it!’ They said, ‘We accept. We came to you so that you can teach us understanding of the *dīn* and ask you what this business is all about.’ He said ﷺ, ‘Allah was, and there was nothing with Him. His Throne was on the water. Then He created the heavens and the earth and wrote everything in the Reminder.’ Then a man came and said, ‘‘Imrān, go get your camel. It has gone.’’ I went to look for it. I could not see her because of a mirage. By Allah, I wish that it had gone and I had not got up.’’

in order to test which of you has the best actions.

Allah created all of that to test His slaves by their reflecting on it and deducing from it knowledge of His complete power and of the Resurrection. Qatādah said that ‘*which of you has the best actions*’ means which of you have the greatest intelligence. Al-Hasan and Sufyān ath-Thawrī said, ‘Which of you is the most ascetic in this world.’ It is mentioned that ‘Īsā passed by a man who was asleep and said, ‘Sleeper! Get up and worship!’ He answered, ‘Spirit of Allah, I have worshipped.’ He asked, ‘How did you worship?’ He replied, ‘‘I left this world to its people.’ He said, ‘Sleep. You are above the worshippers.’

Ad-Dāḥḥāk said it means, ‘which you has the most gratitude.’ Muqātil said it means, ‘which of you has the most *taqwā* of Allah.’ Ibn ‘Abbās said it means, ‘which of you does the most actions in obedience to Allah.’ Ibn ‘Umar related that the Prophet ﷺ recited ‘*which of you has the best actions*’ and said, ‘which of you has the best intellect, is the most scrupulous about the things Allah has forbidden, and the quickest to obey Allah.’ So he combined all of the views. Allah willing, this will also be mentioned in *al-Kahf*(18:7). The meaning of ‘*test*’ has already been discussed (2:49).

If you say, ‘You will be raised up after death,’ those who disbelieve will say, ‘This is nothing but downright magic.’

This means ‘If, Muhammad, you talk to people of the Resurrection and mention this to the idolaters, they will say that it is magic.’ *Inna* has a *kasrah* because it begins after the words but Sībawayh said that it has a *fathah*. ‘*Those who disbelieve*’ has a *fathah* on the *lām* (*la-yaqūlunna*) because it contains a pronoun. ‘*Magic*’ means delusion and falsehood because they thought that magic was false. Ḥamzah and al-Kisā’ī recited ‘*sāhir*’, alluding to the Prophet ﷺ.

وَلَئِنْ أَخْرَنَا عَنْهُمُ الْعَذَابَ إِلَىٰ أُمَّةٍ مَعْدُودَةٍ لَيَقُولُنَّ مَا يَحِسْسُهُ أَكَمْ
يَوْمَ يَأْتِيهِمْ لَيْسَ مَصْرُوْقًا عَنْهُمْ وَحَاقَ بِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا بِهِ يَسْتَهِنُونَ
⑧

8 If We postpone the punishment for them for a limited time, they will say, ‘What is holding it back?’ No, indeed! The day it reaches them it will not be averted from them and the things they mocked at will encompass them.

If We postpone the punishment for them for a limited time,

The *lām* connected to ‘if’ is for the oath. The phrase ‘*for limited time*’ means ‘until a known time’ because here *ummah* means a period of time. Ibn ‘Abbās, Qatādah and most commentators said that. The root meaning of *ummah* is a group. So the time and years are designated by *ummah* because *ummah* is in them. It is said that it is based on the elision of the *mudāf*. It means until the time when there is no believer among them so that they deserve destruction. Or until the time ends when there no longer remains anyone who believes.

Ummah is a noun with multiple meanings which is used in eight ways. It can mean group as when the Almighty says, ‘*he found a group (ummah) of people there.*’ (28:23) *Ummah* also means following the Prophets and it can consist of a man who embraces the good which is followed, like the words of Allah: ‘*Ibrāhīm was a community (ummah) in himself.*’ (16:120) *Ummah* is also the *dīn* and religion as when Allah says: ‘*We found our fathers following a religion (ummah).*’ (43:22) *Ummah* is also a time and period of time as in the way Allah uses it here and when He says: ‘*He remembered after a time (ummah).*’ (12:45) *Ummah* is also stature which is the height of man as one says, ‘*He has a good stature (ummah).*’ *Ummah* can be a man alone with his *dīn* with no one else with him. The Prophet ﷺ said, ‘*Zayd ibn ‘Amr ibn Nufayl was sent as a single nation.*’ *Ummah* is also the mother, used the same as *umm*, so you can say ‘*ummāt Zayd*’ or ‘*umm Zayd*’.

What is holding it back?

This refers to the punishment. They said this as denial of the punishment since it is delayed for them, or it is seeking to hasten it and mocking, implying, ‘What is keeping it from us?’

it will not be averted from them

This is said to refer to the killing of the idolaters at the Battle of Badr and Jibrīl killing the mockers as will be mentioned (15:95). ‘*Encompass*’ means it