

Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī
Introduction

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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-Qurṭubī

INTRODUCTION

translated by
Aisha Bewley

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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	ḥ	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	َ	a [<i>fathah</i>]
و	ū	ُ	u [<i>dammah</i>]
ي	ī	ِ	i [<i>kasrah</i>]
أُؤ	aw		
أَي	ay		

Translator's note

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 the exact same meaning, sometimes rendering an exact 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.

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Introduction

In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful

We seek His help and may Allah bless our master Muḥammad and his family and Companions and grant them abundant peace. Thus speaks the *faqīh*, imam of knowledge and action, the hadith scholar, Abū ‘Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Abī Bakr ibn Farḥ al-Anṣārī al-Khazrajī al-Andalusī, then al-Qurṭubī:

Praise belongs to Allah who began by praising Himself before any praiser praised Him! I testify that there is no god but Allah alone with no partner, the Lord who is One and Self-Sustaining, the Living, Self-Subsistent Who does not die, the Master of Majesty and Nobility and immense gifts, He Who has spoken the Qur’an, He Who created the human being and blessed him with faith and sent His Messenger Muḥammad ﷺ to make the message clear. He sent him with the Clear Book, which distinguishes between doubt and certainty, which eloquent men cannot oppose and intelligent men cannot contradict. They cannot produce its like, even if they help one another. He made its examples lessons for those who reflect on them and His commands guidance for those who study them. In it He explains the obligatory judgments and differentiates between the lawful and unlawful. In it He repeats admonitions and stories for understanding and different types of metaphors and reports about matters of the Unseen.

Allah Almighty says, ‘*We have not omitted anything from the Book.*’ (6:38) He addresses it to His friends and they understand; and He explains to them what He means in it and they grasp it. So those who recite the Qur’an bear a concealed secret of Allah and guard His preserved knowledge. They are the caliphs of His Prophets and His trustees, who

are His people, elite and chosen ones. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, 'Allah has his own people (*ahlīn*) among us.' They asked, 'Who are they, Messenger of Allah?' He replied, 'They are the people of the Qur'an, the people of Allah and His élite.' Ibn Mājah transmitted it in the *Sunan* and Abū Bakr al-Bazzār in his *Musnad*.

Anyone who knows the Book of Allah and remembers what has been explained to him in it should be restrained by its prohibitions and fear Allah, be mindful of Him and be ashamed before Him. He has taken on the heavy responsibility of the Messengers and has become a witness at the Rising against any opponents among the people of other religions. Allah Almighty said, '*In this way We have made you a middlemost community, so that you may act as witnesses against mankind.*' (2:143) The proof is against the one who knows it and neglects it, rather than against the one who is lacking in it and ignorant of it. If someone is given knowledge of the Qur'an and does not benefit from it, is not constrained by its prohibitions and is not deterred by it, and commits ugly sins and vile crimes, the Qur'an is an argument against him. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, 'The Qur'an is an argument either for you or against you.' Muslim transmitted it. Therefore it is obligatory for anyone chosen by Allah to memorise His Book to have proper respect for it, reflect on the truth of its words, understand its marvels and clarify what is unusual in it. The Almighty says: '*It is a Book We have sent down to you, full of blessings, so let people of intelligence ponder its Signs*' (38:29) and '*Will they not then ponder the Qur'an or are there locks upon their hearts?*' (47:24) May Allah make us among those who respect it properly, reflect on it deeply, implement its justice, fulfil its conditions and do not seek guidance elsewhere! May He guide us to its outward signs and radiant definitive judgments and by it combine for us the best of this world and the Next! He is worthy to be feared and entitled to forgive!

Then He gave to His Messenger clarification of what was unspecified, explanation of what was difficult, and determination of what was probable, so that, as well as conveying the Message, he ﷺ showed his special competence regarding the Revelation which was entrusted to him. Allah says: '*And We have sent down the Reminder to you so that you can make clear to mankind what has been sent down to them.*' (16:44) Then, after the Messenger of Allah ﷺ the scholars were appointed to educe the meanings which it indicates and to point out its principles in order that through *ijtihād* they may reach the knowledge of what is meant. By that they are distinguished from others and are singled out for reward on account of their efforts. Allah Almighty says: '*Allah will raise in rank those*

of you who believe and those who have been given knowledge.' (58:11) So the Book became the basis, the Sunnah its clarification, and the deduction of the scholars its exposition and elucidation. Praise be to Allah who has made our breasts the vessels of His Book, our ears the springs of the Sunnah of His Prophet ﷺ, and our aspirations directed to learning the Qur'an and investigating its meanings and unusual words, and through that our seeking to please the Lord of the worlds and rise to knowledge of the *dīn*.

The Book of Allah is the source of all the sciences of the Sharī'ah which convey the Sunnah and the obligatory. It was brought down by the Trustworthy One of heaven to the Trustworthy One of the earth. I thought that I should devote myself to it for my entire life and devote my strength to that cause by writing a brief commentary on it containing some points of *tafsīr*, linguistics, grammar, and recitation, refutation of the people of deviation and misguidance, as well as several hadiths which attest to what we mention in it regarding judgments and the revelation of *āyahs*, thereby combining the meanings of both and explaining what is abstruse in them using the statements of the Salaf and those who followed them. I have done this to remind myself and as a security for the day when I am buried, and as a righteous action to continue beyond my death. Allah says: '*On that Day man will be told what he did and failed to do*' (75:13) and '*Each self will know what it has sent ahead and left behind.*' (82:15) The Prophet ﷺ said, 'When a man dies, his actions are cut off except for three — an ongoing *ṣadaqah* and knowledge which brought benefit and a virtuous child who makes supplication for him.'

I intend in this book to attribute statements to their speakers and hadiths to their compilers. It is said that part of the blessing of knowledge is to ascribe a statement to its speaker. Many unattributed hadiths are reported in books of *tafsīr* and *fiqh* and so the one who reads them does not know who transmitted them. Therefore someone without information about that remains confused and does not know the sound from the weak. It is a vast science. Therefore he does not accept it as evidence until he knows the person to whom it is ascribed among the famous imams and reliable scholars of Islam. We have indicated some of that in this book. Allah is the One Who grants success. I have only used those stories of commentators and reports of historians that are necessary for clarification purposes and also help to elucidate the *āyahs* which contain legal rulings so as to disclose the full meaning and guide one to what is demanded by them. With every *āyah* I have included whatever rulings it contains and other matters that we will explain, when it contains reasons for its

revelation, unusual commentary and wisdoms. If it does not contain any legal judgement, I talk about its interpretation.

The full title of this book is: The General Judgments of the Qur'an and Clarification of what it contains of the Sunnah and *āyahs* of Discrimination. May Allah make it sincerely for His sake and grant me and my parents the benefit of it. He hears the supplication and is quick to respond. Amen.

The general virtues of the Qur'an and encouragement to study it. The excellence of the one who seeks it, recites it, listens to it and acts by it.

This topic is vast and scholars have written many books about it. We will mention some points that point out the excellence of the Qur'an and what Allah has prepared for its people when they are sincere for His sake and act by it. The first aspect of the excellence of the Qur'an that the believer should be aware of is that it is from the Lord of the worlds and is uncreated. It consists of unparalleled words and has a quality which has no equivalent or like. It comes from the Light of Allah's Essence. Recitation of it is by the voices of the reciters and their vocalisation. It is their acquisition and they are commanded to do it as an obligation in certain acts of worship and it is recommended at many times. They are reprimanded if they avoid it, and are rewarded for doing it and punished for abandoning it. This is something that the Muslims, the people of the Truth, agree on. Traditions state that and well-known reports prove it.

Reward and punishment are only connected to what is part of what people earn, as will be explained. Were it not that Allah had placed in the hearts of His slaves the strength to bear it so that they can reflect on it, study it and remember what it contains regarding obedience to Him, worship and performing their duties and obligations, they would be too weak and would collapse under its weight or perish. How could they bear it when Allah says, *'Had We sent down this Qur'an onto a mountain, you would have seen it humbled, crushed to pieces out of fear of Allah'* (59:21)? What is the strength of hearts compared to that of the mountains? But Allah provided His slaves with the strength to bear what He wishes as a favour and mercy from Him.

As for traditions about this topic, the first is what at-Tirmidhī transmitted from Abū Sa'īd that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, 'The blessed and exalted Lord said, "If anyone is distracted from asking Me by the Qur'an and remembrance of Me, I will give him better than what I give to those

who ask.” He also said, ‘The excellence of the words of Allah over all other words is like the excellence of Allah over His creation.’ He said that it is a *ḥasan gharīb* hadith. Abū Muḥammad ad-Dārimī as-Samarqandī reported in his *Musnad* that ‘Abdullāh said, ‘The seven long *sūrah*s are like the Torah. The *sūrah*s with a hundred *āyah*s are like the Gospel, and the Mathānī is like the Zabūr. The rest of the Qur’an is excellent in itself.’

In at-Tirmidhī, al-Ḥārith reported that ‘Alī said, ‘I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say, “There will be trials like patches of dark night.” I asked, “Messenger of Allah, how can one escape them?” He replied, “The Book of Allah, blessed and exalted be He, contains your history, information about what came before you, news about what will come after you and correct judgment between you. It is decisive, not a jest. Allah will crush any tyrant who abandons it and Allah will misguide whoever seeks guidance from other than it. It is the Firm Rope of Allah, His Clear Light and the Wise Reminder. It is the Straight Path. Passions are not misguided by it, tongues do not become sated with it, and the godfearing do not become bored by it. It does not wear out when it is recited a lot, and its wonders do not cease. It is that which the jinn did not leave once they had heard it. They said, ‘We heard a wonderful Qur’an which guides to right guidance.’ (72:1-2) Whoever knows it has knowledge which takes precedence. Whoever utters it speaks the truth. Whoever judges by it is just. Whoever acts by it is rewarded. Whoever calls to it is guided to a straight path. Take it, O one-eyed.”’ (‘One-eyed’ referred to al-Ḥārith). Ash-Sha‘bī accused al-Ḥārith of lying and of being of no consequence. There are no evident lies from al-Ḥārith, but he is reprovved for his excessive love for ‘Alī and preferring him to anyone else. Allah knows best, but this is why ash-Sha‘bī called him a liar, since he preferred Abū Bakr and states that he was the first to become Muslim. Abū ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-Barr said, ‘I think that ash-Sha‘bī was punished for what he said about al-Ḥārith al-Hamdānī being a liar.’

Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Bashshār ibn Muḥammad al-Anbārī, the linguist and grammarian, says in his book, *The Refutation of the One who Opposes the Recension of ‘Uthman*, transmitting from ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, ‘This Qur’an is the Banquet of Allah. Learn as much as you can from His Banquet. This Qur’an is the Rope of Allah, and it is the Clear Light and Useful Healing. It is a protection for the one who clings to it and a rescue for the one who follows it. It is not crooked and so puts things straight. It does not stray so as to be blamed. Its wonders do not cease. It does not wear out with much repetition. So

recite it. Allah will reward you with ten good deeds for every letter of its recitation. I do not say that *Alif-Lām-Mīm* is a letter. Let me not find any of you placing his foot on the other abandoning the recitation of Sūrat al-Baqarah. Shayṭān flees from a house in which Sūrat al-Baqarah is recited. The house most devoid of good is a house empty of the Book of Allah.’

In his *Gharīb* Abū ‘Ubayd quotes ‘Abdullāh (ibn Mas‘ūd): ‘This Qur’an is the Banquet of Allah. Whoever enters it is safe.’ He said, ‘The interpretation of the hadith is that it is a metaphor. The Qur’an is likened to something Allah has prepared for people. They have good and benefit from it. Then He invites them to it.’ If the word is ‘*ma’dubah*’, then it is something that someone prepares and then invites people to partake of. If it is read as ‘*ma’dabah*’, it means the means of instruction which leads to someone having good manners (*adab*). The evidence for this is found in another hadith: ‘This Qur’an is the means of instruction of Allah Almighty, so learn from His means of instruction.’ Al-Aḥmar said that both words are from different dialects and mean the same thing, but I have not heard anyone besides him say this. I prefer the first explanation.

Al-Bukhārī transmits from ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān that the Prophet ﷺ said, ‘The best of you is the one who learns the Qur’an and teaches it.’ Muslim transmitted from Abū Mūsā that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, ‘The metaphor of a believer who recites the Qur’an is that of a citron – its scent is fragrant and its taste is good. The metaphor of a believer who does not recite the Qur’an is that of a date – it has no scent but its taste is sweet. The metaphor of a hypocrite who recites the Qur’an is that of basil – its scent is fragrant but its taste is bitter. The metaphor of a hypocrite who does not recite the Qur’an is that of colocynth – it has no scent and its taste is bitter.’ One variant has ‘deviant’ instead of ‘hypocrite’.

Abū Bakr al-Anbārī mentioned that Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā al-Ḥulwānī reported from Yaḥyā ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd from Hushaym, and from Idrīs from Khalaf from Hushaym from al-‘Awwām ibn Ḥawshab that when someone finished the Qur’an, Abū ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān as-Sulamī would have him sit before him and put his hand on his head and say to him, ‘You! Fear Allah! I do not know of anyone better than you if you act by what you know.’ Ad-Dārimī reported that Wahb adh-Dhimārī said, ‘If Allah gives someone the Qur’an and he stands reciting it at the ends of the night and the ends of the day and acts by what is in it and dies in obedience, on the Day of Rising Allah will raise him up with the angels and Prophets.’

Muslim related that ‘Ā’ishah reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, ‘Someone who recites the Qur’an and is fluent in it is with the noble pious angels. Someone who recites the Qur’an and stammers in it has two rewards, as it is difficult for him.’ He will have one reward for the recitation and one reward for the difficulty. The levels of the fluent reciter are all above that, because the Qur’an was difficult for him and then he rose beyond that to be like the angels. Allah knows best.

At-Tirmidhī reports from ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, ‘Whoever recites a letter of the Book of Allah earns a good deed, and each good deed is worth ten like it. I do not say that ‘*Alif-Lām-Mīm*’ is one letter, but that *alif* is a letter, *lām* is a letter, and *mīm* is a letter.’ He said that it is a sound *ḥasan gharīb* hadith by this path of transmission. It is also related *mawqūf*.

Muslim reported that ‘Uqbah ibn ‘Āmir said, ‘The Messenger of Allah ﷺ came out to us while we were in the Şuffah and asked, “Which of you would like to go every day to Buḥān or to al-‘Aqīq and bring two large-humped she-camels from it without wrongdoing?” We said, “Messenger of Allah, all of us would like that!” He said, “Does not one of you go to the mosque and learn or recite two *āyahs* from the Book of Allah? That is better for him than two camels, and three *āyahs* are better for him than three camels, four *āyahs* are better than four camels, and so on regarding the number of camels.”’

Abū Hurayrah reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, ‘Allah will relieve anyone who relieves a believer of one of the afflictions of this world of one of the afflictions of the Day of Rising. Allah will give ease in this world and the Next to anyone who eases the hardship of another. Allah will veil anyone who veils another Muslim in this world and the Next. Allah will help His slave as long as His slave is helping his brother. Whoever travels a path on which he seeks knowledge, Allah will make the path to the Garden easy for him. People do not meet in one of the houses of Allah to recite the Book of Allah and study it together without tranquillity descending on them, mercy covering them, angels encircling them and Allah mentioning them to those who are with Him.’

Abū Dāwūd, an-Nasā’ī, ad-Dārimī, and at-Tirmidhī reported that ‘Uqbah ibn ‘Āmir heard the Prophet ﷺ say, ‘The one who recites the Qur’an publicly is like the person who gives his *ṣadaqah* publicly. The one who recites the Qur’an secretly is like the person who conceals his *ṣadaqah*.’ At-Tirmidhī said that it is a *ḥasan gharīb* hadith. At-Tirmidhī reported from Abū Hurayrah that the Prophet ﷺ said, ‘The Qur’an will

come on the Day of Rising and say, “O Lord, robe him!” and He will put on him the crown of nobility. It will say, “O Lord, more!” and He will put on him the robe of honour. Then it will say, “O Lord, be pleased with him!” and He will be pleased with him. It will be said, “Recite and ascend,” and he will be increased with a good deed for every *āyah*.’ He said that it is a sound hadith.

Abū Dāwūd reported from ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Amr that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, ‘Those who know the Qur’an will be told, “Recite and ascend. Recite slowly as you did in the world below. Your station will be at the last verse you recite.”’ Ibn Mājah transmits it in the *Sunan* from Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī who reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, ‘The one who knows the Qur’an will be told, “Recite and ascend.” He will recite and rise a degree by every *āyah* until he reaches the last one he has.’

Abū Bakr al-Anbārī transmitted from Abū Umāmah al-Ḥimṣī that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, ‘Whoever is given a third of the Qur’an has been given a third of Prophethood. Whoever is given two-thirds of the Qur’an has been given two-thirds of Prophethood. Whoever recites all of the Qur’an has been given all of Prophethood although he has not received any revelation. On the Day of Rising he will be told, “Recite and ascend.” He will recite an *āyah* and rise a degree until he finishes what he knows of the Qur’an. Then he will be told, “Take,” and he will take. Then he will be asked, “Do you know what is in your hands? Eternity is in your right hand and bliss in your left.”’

Idrīs ibn Khalaf related from Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Ayyāsh from Tammām from al-Ḥasan that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, ‘Whoever takes a third of the Qur’an and acts on it has taken a third of Prophethood. Whoever takes half of the Qur’an and acts on it has taken half of Prophethood. Whoever takes all of the Qur’an has taken all of Prophethood.’

Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā al-Marwazī related from Muḥammad ibn Sa‘dān from al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad from Ḥafṣ from Kathīr ibn Zādhān from ‘Aṣim ibn Ḍamrah from ‘Alī that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, ‘If someone reads the Qur’an, recites it and memorises it, Allah will admit him to the Garden and let him intercede for all the people of his family for whom the Fire is mandatory.’ Umm ‘d-Dardā’ said, ‘I visited ‘Ā’ishah and asked her, “What is the excellence of the one who recites the Qur’an over the one who does not recite it among those who enter the Garden?”’ ‘Ā’ishah replied, “The number of the *āyahs* of the Qur’an is according to the number of degrees of the Garden. No one