

**Title:** Explaining Sūrah al-Takāthur

**Original Title:** تفسير جزء عمّ

**Original Author:** Muḥammad Ibn Ṣāliḥ al-‘Uthaymīn

EXPLAINING SŪRAH

# al-Takāthur

BY:

Muḥammad Ibn Ṣāliḥ al-‘Uthaymīn<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This article was taken from the book تفسير جزء عمّ (*Tafsīr Juz ‘Ammā*) by Muḥammad Ibn Ṣāliḥ al-‘Uthaymīn (1423/2002, Riyadh: Dar al-Thurayya). Some text, such as poetry, were not included in this translation. At the time of translating, the original Arabic text could be found at: [http://www.ibnothaimeen.com/all/books/article\\_17887.shtml](http://www.ibnothaimeen.com/all/books/article_17887.shtml).

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SŪRAH AL-TAKĀTHUR

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Bestower of all mercy

1	Competition in increasing in worldly pursuits diverts you	﴿ اَلْهَكْمُ التَّكَاثُرُ ﴾
2	Until you visit the graves	﴿ حَتَّىٰ زُرْتُمُ الْمَقَابِرَ ﴾
3	Surely, you will come to know.	﴿ كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴾
4	Again, surely you will come to know.	﴿ ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴾
5	Surely, if you only knew with certain knowledge	﴿ كَلَّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ ﴾
6	You will certainly see Hell	﴿ لَتَرَوُنَّ الْجَحِيمَ ﴾
7	Then you will see it with certain sight	﴿ ثُمَّ لَتَرَوُنَّهَا عَيْنَ الْيَقِينِ ﴾
8	Then, on that day, you will be asked about the blessings <sup>2</sup>	﴿ ثُمَّ لَتَسْأَلُنَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَنِ النَّعِيمِ ﴾

<sup>2</sup> The Quran, Sūrah al-Takāthur, 102:1-8

EXPLAINING SŪRAH AL-TAKĀTHUR

Verses 1 – 8

Verse 1: ﴿أَلْهَكُمُ التَّكَاثُرُ﴾

﴿**Competition in increasing in worldly pursuits diverts you**﴾ In this sentence, Allah (عَزَّ وَجَلَّ) addresses His servants, informing them that ﴿**Competition in increasing in worldly pursuits diverts you**﴾.

﴿**Competition**﴾ here means your occupation in pursuits of things which divert you from more important concerns such as remembering Allah and obeying Him. The entire nation of mankind is addressed by this verse is except for those who are busy with pursuits of the hereafter and neglect chasing after this worldly life’s amusements. But such people are few because it is authentically reported in a ḥadīth Qudsī that Allah (تبارك وتعالى) will say on the Day of Resurrection:

« يَا آدَمُ ، فَيَقُولُ : لَبَّيْكَ وَسَعْدَيْكَ وَالْخَيْرُ فِي يَدَيْكَ ، فَيَقُولُ : أَخْرِجْ بَعَثَ النَّارِ ،  
قَالَ : وَمَا بَعَثَ النَّارِ ؟ قَالَ : مِنْ كُلِّ أَلْفٍ تِسْعِمِائَةٍ وَتِسْعَةٌ وَتِسْعِينَ »

“Adam.” Adam will answer, “I respond to Your call and all good is in Your hands.” Allah will tell him, “Bring out the people of the fire,” but Adam will ask, “And who are the people of the fire?” Allah will say, “From every one thousand, nine hundred ninety-nine (are in the fire).”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 6530) and Muslim (no. 222, 379)

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Only one of every thousand people will be in Paradise, and nine hundred ninety-nine will be in the fire – a huge number. If there is only one individual from the Sons of Adam destined for Paradise and the rest are going to Hell, then verses such as this may address all mankind in general since 1/1000 is almost nothing when compared to the rest of those generally addressed.

﴿ **in increasing in worldly pursuits** ﴾ includes pursuing increases in anything such as wealth, family, status or reputation, or even increasing in knowledge. Anything in which people may rival one another to increase themselves in so they feel proud and boastful can be included in this verse. An example of this is what the owner of the garden estate said to his companion (as reported in the Quran):

﴿ أَنَا أَكْثَرُ مِنْكَ مَالًا وَأَعَزُّ نَفَرًا ﴾

**“I am greater than you in wealth and stronger in followers.”<sup>4</sup>**

Therefore, people may compete in the pursuit of wealth, hoping to acquire more money than others or a more expansive corporation. People also compete with one another with respect to the number of their party members or followers, saying, “We are greater than them in number.”

Likewise, people sometimes compete in acquiring knowledge. However, if someone seeks to increase his religious knowledge, then that is praiseworthy. As for any other type of knowledge, it may either be permissible, or impermissible.

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<sup>4</sup> Sūrah al-Kahf, 18:34

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Those are just some of the more common pursuits in which the Sons of Adam compete with each other to gain more. They occupy themselves in such activities more so than in the very reason for which they were created – the worship of Allah ( عز وجل ).

Verse 2: ﴿ حَتَّىٰ زُرْتُمُ الْمَقَابِرَ ﴾

﴿until you visit the graves﴾ means until you die. A person is prone to try and increase in worldly things continuously until his death.<sup>5</sup> When his pride in himself increases, so does his hope (for more worldly things or for his status to last); he grows old in both his age and in his hope for more. You may find a ninety-year-old man with more hopes and ambition for the future than a young man of fifteen, for example. This is the meaning of the verse: You are amusing yourselves, distracting yourselves with the increase of worldly things more so than the hereafter, and this continues until you die.

This verse ﴿until you visit the graves﴾ was mentioned by a righteous scholar and Umayyad leader of the past, ‘Umar Ibn ‘Abdul-Azīz ( رحمه الله ) as an evident analogy that any *visitor* is destined to return to his homeland, and his grave is not his final destination. It has been reported that when a Bedouin heard the verses ﴿Your

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<sup>5</sup> About this continual hoping for more wealth until death, the prophet ( صلى الله عليه وسلم ) said in a ḥadīth recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 6439) and Muslim (no. 1048):

«لَوْ أَنَّ لِابْنِ آدَمَ وَاذِيًّا مِنْ ذَهَبٍ أَحَبَّ أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُ وَاذِيَانِ ، وَلَنْ يَمْلَأَ فَهَ إِلَّا التُّرَابُ ، وَيَتُوبُ اللَّهُ عَلَى مَنْ تَابَ»

If the Son of Adam had a valley full of gold, he would like to have two valleys; nothing fills his mouth (satisfies him) except dirt (from his grave). And Allah forgives whoever repents to Him.

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**competition in increasing in worldly pursuits diverts you until you visit the graves** ﴿ he said, “By Allah, a *visitor* is not a resident. Therefore, he will certainly be resurrected.” And this is true, because a visitor is someone who visits a place then returns to his true home.

With this understanding, it is clear that what some people write in newspaper obituaries and the likes when someone dies that, “He has reached his final resting place” is completely wrong and a lie. The grave is not a *final* destination for anyone. If someone actually believes these words literally, he disbelieves in the resurrection. And believing in the resurrection is such a major Muslim belief that denying it is apostasy from Islam. Still, many people use such words not knowing what they actually mean. Or perhaps such statements are inherited from those atheists who do not believe in life after death.

Therefore, we should avoid such statements and not refer to someone’s grave as “his final resting place” because a person’s final destination is either Paradise or Hell on the Day of Resurrection.

Verse 3: ﴿ كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴾

Allah ( تعالی ) then says ﴿ **Surely, you will come to know** ﴾ It is said that the first Arabic word of the verse كَلَّا (kallā) is a word of deterrence. In other words: Stop this competition for the increase of worldly things. Other scholars say that كَلَّا means “truly” or “surely.”

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As for the meaning of ﴿**you will come to know**﴾ it means: You will know the consequences of these pursuits of yours when you reach the next life and that these worldly increases will not benefit you. It has come in a ḥadīth recorded by Muslim that the prophet (صلى الله عليه وعلى آله وسلم) said:

«يَقُولُ ابْنُ آدَمَ : مَالِي وَمَالِي ، وَلَيْسَ لَكَ مِنْ مَالِكَ إِلَّا مَا أَكَلْتَ فَأَفْنَيْتَ ، أَوْ لَيْسَتْ فَأَبْلَيْتَ ، أَوْ تَصَدَّقْتَ فَأَمْضَيْتَ»

The Sons of Adam say, “My wealth, my wealth!” But there is nothing (of benefit) from your wealth except for what you eat and you finish, or what you clothe yourself with and wear out, or that which you give as charity thereby sending it forward.<sup>6</sup>

People boast of their wealth, but other than those categories above, the rest of one’s wealth is simply left after his death to be enjoyed by someone else. This money we have in our hands, we either use it for 1) food that we eat and finish, or 2) we use it for clothing and essentials that wear out or finish, 3) or we give money in charity which we send forward for the Day of Resurrection, or 4) we leave our money (when we die) to be used by others. The wealth we own is only one of these four categories.

So ﴿**Surely, you will come to know.**﴾ means: You will know the consequences of occupying yourselves with increasing worldly things so much that you were distracted from concerning yourself with the next life.

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<sup>6</sup> Recorded by Muslim (no. 2958)

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Verse 4: ﴿ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ﴾

Allah then says ﴿**Again, surely you will come to know**﴾ and this verse is a confirmation of the previous one, reaffirming that people should stop (working to acquire this life more so than the next).

Verse 5: ﴿كَلَّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ﴾

﴿**Surely, if you only knew with certain knowledge**﴾ No doubt, if you only knew this for certain, you would realize you are misguiding yourselves. But you are not certain in this knowledge because you are heedless, preferring this lesser worldly life. If you only had certain knowledge of this fact, you would know you are in extreme misguidance and error.

Verse 6: ﴿لَتَرَوُنَّ الْجَحِيمَ﴾

﴿**You will certainly see Hell**﴾ This sentence is a separate verse and should not be misinterpreted to be a continuation of the previous verse to mean: If you only knew with certain knowledge, you will see Hell. For this reason, when reciting the Quran, the reciter must stop after reciting verse 5:

﴿كَلَّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ﴾

**Surely, if you only knew with certain knowledge.**

However, we often hear reciters in prayer combining verses 5 and 6, saying:

﴿كَلَّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ لَتَرَوُنَّ الْجَحِيمَ﴾

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**Surely, if you only knew with certain knowledge, you will certainly see  
Hell.**

This mistake in recitation is either from carelessness or forgetfulness, or because they do not carefully ponder the true meanings of the verses. If we carefully consider the meanings, we find that by combining the verses, reciting one right after the other without pausing, the meaning is incorrectly changed. For example, if we do not pause between the two verses saying, ﴿**Surely, if you only knew with certain knowledge – you will certainly see Hell**﴾ then, according to the Arabic syntax, this would mean that seeing Hell is only dependent and conditional upon people having sure knowledge that they will see it. This meaning is incorrect (because everyone will see Hell regardless whether they knew for certain, in this life, that they would see it).

We should be careful not to unintentionally change the meaning of verses with our recitation. Whoever hears someone recite, ﴿**Surely, if you only knew with certain knowledge – you will certainly see Hell**﴾ combining these two verses, he should bring this point to the reciter’s attention and inform him that combining these verses leads to an incorrect, assumed meaning. He must pause between the two verses and not recite both without stopping, first, because the rule is to pause after each individual verse, and second, because combining the verses negatively changes the meaning. So ﴿**You will certainly see Hell**﴾ is a separate sentence and a separate verse and should not be recited successively, combining it with the verse before it.

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The Arabic syntax of the verse also contains an oath, actually meaning, **“By Allah, you will certainly see Hell.”** This is why the scholars of Arabic sentence syntax say that the **لَ (la)** at the beginning of the verse ﴿لَتَرَوُنَّ الْجَحِيمَ﴾ is the oath and the rest of the verse is that which is being sworn to affirm. So the verse ﴿**You will certainly see Hell**﴾ contains an omitted oath, rendering the meaning **“By Allah, you will certainly see Hell.”**

As for the word **الْجَحِيمَ (al-Jahīm)**, it is one of the names of the fire of Hell.

Verse 7: ﴿ثُمَّ لَتَرَوُنَّهَا عَيْنَ الْيَقِينِ﴾

﴿**Then you will see it with certain sight**﴾ This is a confirmation of the actual, real seeing of the Hellfire. When will you see it? You will see it in reality on the Day of Resurrection.<sup>7</sup> It will be brought, pulled with seventy thousand reins, each rein pulled by seventy thousand angels.<sup>8</sup> Can you imagine such a fire? We seek protection from Allah from it. It is enormous since it will be pulled by seventy thousand reins, and every single rein will be pulled by seventy thousand angels,

<sup>7</sup> Allah says in the Quran (Sūrah Maryam, 19:71):

﴿وَإِنْ مِنْكُمْ إِلاضٌ وَارِدُهَا كَانَ عَلَى رَبِّكَ حَتْمًا مَقْضِيًّا﴾

**There is not one of you but will pass over it (Hell); this is with your Lord a decree which must be accomplished.**

<sup>8</sup> Ibn Mas'ūd narrated a ḥadīth recorded by Muslim (no. 2842) in which the prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

﴿يُؤْتَى بِجَهَنَّمَ يَوْمَئِذٍ لَهَا سَبْعُونَ أَلْفَ زِمَامٍ مَعَ كُلِّ زِمَامٍ سَبْعُونَ أَلْفَ مَلَكٍ يَجْرُونَهَا﴾

Hell will be brought on that day having seventy thousand reins. Each rein will have seventy thousand angels pulling it.

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especially since angels themselves are massive and extremely powerful. Therefore, Hell is amazingly massive; may Allah save us from it.

Verse 8: ﴿ثُمَّ لَتُسْأَلُنَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَنِ النَّعِيمِ﴾

﴿Then, on that day, you will be asked about the blessings﴾ At that time, at that terrifying standing (before Allah), you will be asked about the blessings and enjoyments you indulged in, in this world.

The scholars ( رَحْمَهُمُ اللهُ ) differ among themselves regarding this verse. Will only disbelievers be questioned about their worldly delights, or will both believers and disbelievers be questioned?

The correct understanding is that both believers and disbelievers will be questioned about the blessing they enjoyed in life. However, disbelievers in Allah will be asked as a way of criticizing and condemning them. As for believers, they will be asked simply as a way of reminding them of their worldly blessings. The proof that this questioning is general, including both groups, is the story reported about the prophet ( صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ ) along with Abū Bakr and 'Umar. Abū Hurayrah narrated that once the messenger of Allah ( صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ ) left his house and found Abū Bakr and 'Umar outside. He asked them:

« مَا أَخْرَجَكُمَا مِنْ بُيُوتِكُمَا هَذِهِ السَّاعَةَ ؟ »

What has brought you out at this hour?

They answered, "Hunger." The prophet ( صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ ) replied:

«أَمَّا أَنَا ، وَالَّذِي نَفْسِي بِيَدِهِ ، لِأَخْرَجَنِي الَّذِي أَخْرَجَكُمَا ، قُومُوا»

As for me, I swear by Him in whose hand is my life, what brought you both out has also brought me out. Stand up.

So they got up with him and went to a man from the *Anṣār* (the residents and “Helpers” of Medina), but he was not home. When his wife saw them, she said, “Most welcome!” Allah’s messenger ( صلى الله عليه وسلم ) asked her where the man was, to which she answered, “He went to get fresh water for us.” When the man returned and saw the messenger of Allah ( صلى الله عليه وسلم ) and his two companions, he said, “All praise is for Allah. Today, no one has more honorable guests than me.” He brought them a bunch of ripe dates and some dry and fresh dates, saying, “Eat from this.” He then took a long knife (for slaughtering). (Understanding his intentions), Allah’s messenger ( صلى الله عليه وسلم ) told him:

«إِيَّاكَ وَالْحُلُوبَ»

Beware of (slaughtering) a dairy animal.

He slaughtered a sheep for them, and they ate from the sheep and dates and drank (fresh water). When they had eaten their fill and satisfied their thirst, the messenger of Allah ( صلى الله عليه وسلم ) said to Abū Bakr and ‘Umar:

«وَالَّذِي نَفْسِي بِيَدِهِ لَتُسْأَلَنَّ عَنْ هَذَا النَّعِيمِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ ، أَخْرَجَكُم مِّنْ بُيُوتِكُمُ الْجُوعُ ، ثُمَّ لَمْ تَرْجِعُوا حَتَّى أَصَابَكُمْ هَذَا النَّعِيمُ»

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I swear by Him in whose hand is my life, you will certainly be questioned about this blessing on the Day of Resurrection. Hunger brought you out of your homes and you did not return until this blessing came to you.<sup>9</sup>

And in another wording of the same ḥadīth:

«هَذَا وَالَّذِي نَفْسِي بِيَدِهِ مِنَ النَّعِيمِ الَّذِي تُسْأَلُونَ عَنْهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ : ظِلٌّ بَارِدٌ  
وَرُطْبٌ طَيِّبٌ وَمَاءٌ بَارِدٌ»

This is, I swear by Him in whose hand is my life, from the blessings you will be questioned about on the Day of Resurrection: cool shade, fresh dates, and cool water.<sup>10</sup>

This story is evidence that both believers and disbelievers will be asked about worldly blessings. But again, the questioning will be different. A believer’s questioning will be by way of reminding him of Allah’s blessings on him to make him happy so that he knows that the One who blessed and honored him in this life is the same One who will bless and honor him in the next life. As for a

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<sup>9</sup> Recorded by Muslim (no. 2038)

<sup>10</sup> Recorded by al-Tirmidhī (no. 2369). Similarly, it is also reported that the prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said in another ḥadīth recorded by al-Tirmidhī (no. 3683):

«إِنَّ أَوَّلَ مَا يُسْأَلُ عَنْهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يَعْنِي الْعَبْدَ مِنَ النَّعِيمِ أَنْ يُقَالَ لَهُ أَلَمْ نُصِحِّحْ لَكَ جِسْمَكَ وَنُرْوِيكَ مِنَ الْمَاءِ الْبَارِدِ»

The first thing to be asked about on the Day of Resurrection—meaning the servant (of Allah) being questioned about the favors—is that he will be asked, “Did We not make your body healthy and give you cool water to drink?”

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disbeliever, his questioning will be as a way of scolding them and as a source of regret for him.<sup>11</sup>

We ask Allah ( تعالى ) to use us in His obedience and to make what (blessings) He has provided us as a means of obeying Him. He is capable of all things.

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<sup>11</sup> An example of the different ways in which Allah will call to account believers and disbelievers, the prophet ( صلى الله عليه وسلم ) said in a ḥadīth recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 4685) and Muslim (no. 2768):

«يُدْنَى الْمُؤْمِنُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ حَتَّى يَضَعَ عَلَيْهِ كَنَفَهُ ، فَيَقْرَرُهُ بِدُنُوبِهِ ، فَيَقُولُ : هَلْ تَعْرِفُ ؟ فَيَقُولُ : أَيْ رَبِّ أَعْرِفُ ، قَالَ : فَإِنِّي قَدْ سَتَرْتُهَا عَلَيْكَ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَإِنِّي أَغْفِرُهَا لَكَ الْيَوْمَ ، فَيُعْطَى صَحِيفَةً حَسَنَاتِهِ ، وَأَمَّا الْكُفَّارُ وَالْمُنَافِقُونَ فَيُنَادَى بِهِمْ عَلَى رُءُوسِ الْخَلَائِقِ : ﴿ هَؤُلَاءِ الَّذِينَ كَذَبُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ ﴾»

A believer will be brought close to his Lord ( عز وجل ) on the Day of Resurrection and He will place upon him His screen (to privately question him). Allah will make him confess his sins and ask him, “Do you know (of these sins)?” The person will answer, “Yes my Lord, I know of them.” Allah will say to him, “I concealed them for you in the worldly life, and I forgive them for you today.” He will then be given his record of good deeds. As for a disbeliever or a hypocrite, it will be announced concerning them in front of all creation:

﴿ هَؤُلَاءِ الَّذِينَ كَذَبُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ ﴾

**These are the ones who lied against their Lord.**

[Hūd, 11:18]