

**Al-Hikma in  
Surat al-Jumu'a**

**Prof. Doctor  
Muhammad Abdel Haleem  
SOAS, University of London**

## Al-Hikma in Surat al-Jumu'a

Department of Islamic Studies, SOAS, University of London

Email: [haleems@lamaan.com](mailto:haleems@lamaan.com)

### Abstract:

This study provides an in-depth analysis of Surat al-Jumu'a from a structural and linguistic perspective, highlighting the importance of this approach in understanding the sura's true message. The study observes that many Western scholars, such as Richard Bell and Alan Jones, tend to examine the sura in a fragmented manner, analyzing each verse in isolation without considering the overall context and structure. This often leads to multiple interpretations that can be inaccurate, as they fail to account for the holistic view that the Qur'an invites.

In contrast, the researcher proposes a different method, one based on structural analysis that takes into consideration both the linguistic structures and the broader context of the Qur'anic text. The analysis divides Surat al-Jumu'a into three interconnected sections: (a) Verses 1-4: These verses emphasize the glorification of all things in the heavens and on earth, while introducing God's divine attributes. (b) Verses 5-8: These verses highlight the favor God granted to the Arabs by sending them a prophet to purify them and teach them the scripture and wisdom. The researcher also responds to the claims of the Jews who begrudged the Arabs this divine favor, emphasizing that these verses serve not merely as criticism but as a reminder to the Muslim community of the importance of benefiting from God's guidance. (c) Verses 9-11: These verses stress the importance of responding to the call of prayer and refraining from trade to demonstrate loyalty to God, showing how believers should balance their spiritual duties with worldly life.

Through structural and linguistic analysis, the researcher demonstrates that the sura is not a collection of isolated verses, as claimed by some Western scholars, but a unified whole that reflects the interconnection of religious and social concepts. The concept of **ḥikma** (wisdom) is central to the sura, particularly in the teachings regarding prayer and the abandonment of worldly distractions.

The researcher applies a structural and linguistic methodology, considering the linguistic elements of each verse within the context of the sura as a whole. Additionally, a comparative approach is used to examine the differences between traditional interpretations and structural readings of the sura.

**Keywords:** Western understanding, partial interpretation, structural analysis, linguistic analysis, Surat al-Jumu‘a, wisdom, goodness, Qur’anic message, Qur’anic context.



الحكمة في سورة «الجمعة»

محمد عبد الحليم

قسم الدراسات الإسلامية، كلية الدراسات الشرقية، جامعة لندن

البريد الإلكتروني: [com.lamaan@haleems](mailto:com.lamaan@haleems)

الملخص:

تقدم الدراسة تحليلاً معمقاً لسورة الجمعة من منظور بنيوي ولغوي؛ فتسلط الضوء على أهمية هذا المنهج في فهم الرسالة - أو الدلالة - الحقيقية للسورة. وتشير الدراسة إلى أن معظم الأكاديميين الغربيين - مثل: «ريتشارد بيل» و«آلان جونز» - ينظرون إلى السورة بشكل مفكك؛ حيث يدرسون كل آية على حدة دون مراعاة للسياق العام والتركيب الكلي للسورة؛ مما يؤدي بهم إلى تفسيرات متعددة وغير دقيقة في بعض الأحيان.

وفي المقابل، يقدم الباحث منهجاً مختلفاً يعتمد على التحليل البنيوي الذي يأخذ في اعتباره التراكيب اللغوية والسياق العام للنص القرآني؛ حيث يركز الباحث على تحليل سورة الجمعة من خلال تقسيمها إلى ثلاثة أقسام مترابطة: (أ) الآيات ١-٤: تأكيد على تسبيح كل شيء في السماوات والأرض لله، وتعريف بصفات الله تعالى. (ب) الآيات ٥-٨: بيان فضل الله على العرب، الذي يتمثل في بعث رسول إليهم؛ ليزكيهم ويعلمهم الكتاب والحكمة، والرد على اليهود الذين حسدوا العرب على نبيهم وكتابهم وزعموا أنهم أولياء الله من دون الناس، ويبين الباحث من خلال هذه المقابلة أن هذه الآيات ليست مجرد انتقاد، بل تذكير للأمة الإسلامية بأهمية الاستفادة من الهداية التي منحها الله لهم. (ج) الآيات ٩-١١: تركيز على وجوب الاستجابة لنداء الصلاة والابتعاد عن التجارة من أجل إظهار الولاء لله. هذه الأوامر تُظهر كيف ينبغي على المؤمنين أن يحققوا التوازن بين حياتهم الدنيوية وواجباتهم الروحية، مما يُبرز معاني الحكمة والخير المرتبطة بالصلاة.

من خلال التحليل البنيوي واللغوي، يظهر الباحث أن السورة ليست مجموعة من الآيات المنفصلة كما ادعى بعض الأكاديميين الغربيين، بل هي وحدة مترابطة تُظهر تداخلاً بين المفاهيم الدينية والاجتماعية. وقد أظهرت الدراسة أن الحكمة (Hikma) في السورة تتجسد في تعاليم الصلاة وترك التجارة، وهو أمر يصب في مصلحة المؤمنين الذين يُدعون للتخلي عن الملهيات الدنيوية لأداء العبادة بشكل كامل.

يعتمد الباحث على منهج تحليلي بنيوي ولغوي يتناول السورة من خلال دراسة العناصر اللغوية لكل آية داخل سياق السورة ككل، كما يطبق منهجاً مقارناً لدراسة الفروق بين الفهم التقليدي والفهم البنيوي للسورة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الفهم الغربي، التفسير الجزئي، التحليل البنيوي، التحليل اللغوي، سورة الجمعة، الحكمة، الخير، الرسالة القرآنية، السياق القرآني.

## Al-Ḥikma in Surat al-Jumu‘a

Muhammad Abdel Haleem

SOAS, University of London

In the Islamic tradition of tafsir, with a few notable exceptions, interpreters have often approached suras by examining each verse individually, rather than contemplating the sura as a cohesive whole. This fragmented approach obscures the clarity of the sura’s message, as it disregards the broader context and the intricate structure underpinning the text. Consequently, many mufasssirun have presented varying interpretations for individual verses, some of which falter when viewed within the larger framework of the sura.

In contrast, Western academics have generally placed greater emphasis on the overarching structure of the suras. Yet, their efforts have frequently been hindered by an incomplete grasp of the Qur’an’s unique linguistic and stylistic nuances. This limitation has presented challenges even to prominent scholars of Arabic and Qur’anic studies, particularly in understanding the methods through which the Qur’an conveys its profound messages (adat al-Qur’an).

This article seeks to unveil the vital role that structural and linguistic analysis plays in uncovering the true essence of the suras. To illustrate this approach, it delves into the rich tapestry of Surat al-Jumu‘ah, first reflecting on the interpretations offered by certain Western scholars, and then embarking on a meticulous structural and linguistic exploration to illuminate the sura’s intricate connections and profound message.

Surat al-Jumu‘ah, a Medinan sura of 11 verses, derives its name from the mention of the Friday prayer in verses 9–11. Yet, as we journey through its verses, it becomes clear that the sura’s soul resides in the concept of **ḥikma**—a guiding light that threads through its lines, revealing a message of balance, wisdom, and divine insight.

## Western Perspectives on the Structure of Surat al-Jumu‘a

Richard Bell<sup>(1)</sup> stands as the first English writer to attempt an analysis of the structural composition of the suras across the Qur’an. While his endeavor laid a foundation that many scholars later engaged with,<sup>(2)</sup> its impact, in Bell’s hands, was marred by significant limitations. His analysis was steeped in speculation, a fog of uncertainty reflected in the frequent use of terms such as “perhaps,” “maybe,” “probably,” “before,” and “after.” A single paragraph in his *The Qur’an: Translated with a Critical Rearrangement of the Surahs* (p. 248, vol. 1) brims with over 20 such ambiguous expressions.

Though his candid acknowledgment of doubt is understandable in such pioneering work, Bell’s tendency to venture into unsupported claims undermines the reliability of his insights. Furthermore, his approach often bore the weight of preconceived notions, with his interpretations seemingly shaped before encountering the text. These biases colored his readings, particularly in his views on the Qur’an’s origins and the character and mission of the Prophet, clouding his engagement with the intricate tapestry of the Qur’anic text.

Bell’s willingness to cast aside portions of suras as fragmented or to label the text as disjointed stems from a fundamental misreading of the Qur’an’s linguistic and stylistic essence. His grasp of the text appears clouded, unable to discern the intricate patterns woven into its fabric. The case of Surat al-Jumu‘a stands as a telling example. Bell declares with certainty:

---

(1) Richard Bell, a Professor of Arabic at Edinburgh University, is well known for his work *The Qur’an: Translated with a Critical Rearrangement of the Surahs* (2 vols, Edinburgh, 1937; reprinted 1960). He also authored *Commentary on the Qur’an* (Victoria University, Manchester, 1991) and *Introduction to the Qur’an* (Islamic Surveys, No. 8, Edinburgh University Press, 1953), which was later revised by W. Montgomery Watt in 1970 and issued in a new edition in 1995.

(2) Notable scholars following in this field include Angelika Neuwirth, Neal Robinson, Alan Jones, and Muhammad Abdel Haleem.



This sura seems to consist of a number of disconnected pieces. Vv. 1, 2, 4 belong to the period shortly before the change of qibla when Muhammad is turning from the People of the Book towards the Arabs. Into this, v. 3 has been inserted at some later stage. Verse 5 is little more than a scrap, noting down a simile ... It shows the controversy with the Jews already fairly acute. Vv. 6–8 also belong to the controversy with the Jews ... Vv. 9, 10 are quite unconnected and deal with the Friday prayer... verse 11 is evidently private and not really connected with the preceding verses unless it be that they are the public exhortation induced by such conduct as this verse takes note of.<sup>(1)</sup>

A more contemporary voice engaging with this sura is Alan Jones, a Professor of Arabic at Oxford University.<sup>(2)</sup> Reflecting on the structure of Surat al-Jumu‘a, he observes:

It falls into three sections, the first four verses dwell on God’s power, with verse 2 focusing on a specifically Arabian context, the middle section, verses 5–6, refers to Muhammad’s Jewish opponenets; and finally there is a brief section on the believers and prayer 9–11.<sup>(3)</sup>

### **My Own Analysis of Surat al-Jumu‘ah**

Let us now turn to the sura itself, examining it through the lens of structural and stylistic analysis. Al-Jumu‘a belongs to a select group of five suras, collectively known as al-musabbihat (Suras 57, 59, 61, 62, and 64), each beginning with a hymn of glorification to God. In all these suras, a thread of

(1) Bell, *The Qur’an*, pp. 579 ff.

(2) He authored *The Qur’an: Translated into English* (2007, Gibb Memorial Trust), a work that seeks to bridge linguistic realms, and *Arabic Through the Qur’an* (Islamic Texts Society, Cambridge).

(3) Jones, A. *The Qur’an Translated into English*, p. 518.

admonition follows, directed at those who fail to align their lives with the exaltation of God’s majesty.

In my view, Surat al-Jumu’ah unfolds gracefully into three distinct sections:

- i. Verses 1– 4,
- ii. Verses 5 – 8,
- iii. Verses 9 – 11.

Each of these sections will be explored in detail below.

i. **Section 1: vv. 1–4**

Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies God, the Controller, the Holy One, the Almighty, the one who decides.<sup>(1)</sup> It is He who raised a messenger among the people who had no Scripture, to recite His revelations to them, to make them grow spiritually and teach them the Scripture and wisdom (hikma) – before that they were clearly astray –, to them and others yet to join them. He is the Almighty, the one who decides: such is God’s favour; He grants it to whoever He will; God’s favour is immense.

These verses call upon the readers to remember that all within the heavens and earth ceaselessly glorify God (Q. 62:1). This reminder serves as an invitation to join the harmonious symphony of creation in its worship, for to abstain is to fall out of step with the divine rhythm that governs existence. The verses illuminate God’s majestic attributes—His ultimate control over all things, His sanctity, His might, and His role as the supreme arbiter—all of which render Him deserving of absolute glorification and obedience.

---

(1) Hakim is often rendered as “Wise,” yet in the context of the preceding attributes, “the one who decides” emerges as a more fitting translation, capturing the essence of divine authority and judgment.



In this sura, as well as in Q. 64, the verb *yusabbih* appears in the present tense, unlike the past tense *sabbaha* used in the other three *musabbihat*. The choice of the present tense resonates deeply with the theme of Surat al-Jumu‘ah, which centers on the ongoing act of prayer, aligning the sura’s message with the perpetual nature of divine worship<sup>(1)</sup>.

It is intriguing that Bell, without offering any explanation, assigns this sura to the period shortly before the change of qibla.<sup>(2)</sup> Similar verses appear at the beginning of Q. 57, 59, 61, and 64, yet none bear any connection to the change of qibla. Furthermore, the Prophet did not “turn” to the Arabs, as Bell implies, for his mission had been directed at them from its very inception.

Of particular note are the divine attributes highlighted in the *tasbih* of this sura. Among these, two—al-Malik (the Controller) and al-Quddus (the Holy)—do not appear in the other *musabbihat*. Al-Malik underscores God’s sovereignty, as He alone determines who receives His favors, while al-Qud-dus resonates deeply with the sura’s theme of prayer. Following these are al-‘Aziz (the Mighty) and al-Hakim (the Decider), which, though found in the other suras, remain perfectly attuned to the message of this sura, as the subsequent verses reveal.

Q. 62:2, a pivotal verse in this sura, begins with the rhetorical device of *hasr* (“restriction”): ‘It is He who...’. In Arabic rhetoric (*balagha*), *hasr* serves as a rebuttal to those who hold opposing beliefs or claims. Here, it challenges those who begrudged the Arabs the privilege of having a prophet. This sentiment is further underscored by the phrase *al-ummiyyin* (“those who have no scripture”), also mentioned in the verse. Historical accounts suggest that

(1) C.f. Q. 24:36: “shining out in houses of worship. God has ordained that they be raised high and that His name be remembered in them, with men in them celebrating His glory (*yusabbihu lahu*) morning and evening”

(2) Bell, *The Qur’an*, p. 579.

some Jews in and around Medina denied the possibility of a prophet arising from among the Arabs.<sup>(1)</sup>

Q. 62:4 affirms, ‘Such is the favour (faḍl) of God;<sup>(2)</sup> He grants it to whoever He will,’—extending this divine favor to the ummiyyin, regardless of others’ objections. This aligns with Q. 4:54, which states: ‘Do they envy other people for the favour (faḍl) God has granted them? We gave the descendants of Abraham the Scripture and wisdom and we gave them a great kingdom.’ Just as the Jews were granted a prophet, scripture, and wisdom, so too are the ummiyyin now recipients of God’s faḍl, as He bestows His grace according to His will.

The Prophet, being one of the ummiyyin and not of Jewish lineage, was divinely entrusted with three sacred missions: to recite God’s revelations, to spiritually nurture his people, and to teach them the scripture and wisdom (hikma).<sup>(3)</sup> This, in turn, appears as a fulfillment of Abraham’s prayer in S. 2:127–129, made alongside Ishmael while raising the foundations of the Ka’ba.

<sup>129</sup>‘Our Lord, make a messenger of their own rise up from among them, to recite Your revelations to them, teach them the Scripture and Wisdom, and purify them: You are the Almighty, the One who Decides.’

(1) It is narrated that upon the Prophet’s emergence, the Jews of Medina wrote to their brethren in Khaybar, saying, “If you follow him, we shall follow you; but if you turn away, we too shall turn away.” The reply from Khaybar came resolute and steeped in pride: “We are the sons of the Friend of God, and ‘Uzayr, the son of God, is from among us, as are the prophets. When has there ever been a prophet among the Arabs? We are far more deserving of prophethood than Muhammad, and it is inconceivable for us to follow him.” (See Abu Hayyan, *Tafsir al-Baḥr al-Muḥit* (Beirut, 1993), Vol. 8, p. 264).

(2) An example of this is the granting of prophethood (*ibid.*, p. 263).

(3) We will revisit the concept of hikma later in this article.

Observe that the phrasing remains unchanged, and like the first verse of Surat al-Jumu'a, this verse concludes with the names al-'Aziz al-Hakim.

While this limitation (hasr) serves as a rebuttal to those who denied the ummiyin the privilege of having a messenger of their own, it simultaneously serves as a reminder to the Muslims that it is none but God who has bestowed His favor upon them. Those who receive His grace must show their gratitude by living in accordance with His scripture; otherwise, they do not partake in the true benefit of the teachings they have received. Instead, they bear a weight that brings them no advantage. This truth is plainly expressed in the upcoming verse: 'those entrusted with the Torah, yet fail to follow its commands, are like donkeys burdened with books.' It is telling that the Qur'an does not compare 'Jews' to donkeys, but rather those charged with the Torah who neglect their duty.<sup>(1)</sup> A comparison with Q. 5:44 makes it clear that it is the rabbis in particular who are entrusted with preserving the Torah and delivering judgment based on its teachings. The individuals spoken of in Sura 62 are those who limit God's favor, denying Him the liberty to choose His messengers and asserting that they alone are His favored ones. The passive verb employed here, hummilu al-Tawrah, mirrors the passive form in Q. 5:44, ustuhfizu min kitabi-llahi, where the rabbis are praised for their adherence to the Torah.

We revealed the Torah with guidance and light, and the prophets, who had submitted to God, judged according to it for the Jews. So did the rabbis and the scholars in accordance with that part of God's scripture which they were entrusted to preserve and to which they were witnesses.

This nuanced distinction between the Jewish people as a whole and the \_\_\_\_\_

(1) Abu Hayyan holds that these are the Jews who lived during the time of the Prophet. They were entrusted with the task of upholding the Torah's commandments and prohibitions, yet they failed to fulfill this sacred charge (ibid., p. 263).

actions of certain individuals is woven throughout the Qur'an. An illustration of this can be found in Q. 3:75, which states:

There are people of the Book [that is, Jews as shown by the context] who, if you [Prophet] entrust them with a heap of gold will return it to you intact, but there are others of them who, if you entrust them with a single dinar, will not return it to you unless you keep standing over them, because they say, 'We are under no obligation towards the gentiles (al-ummiyyin)'. They tell a lie against God, and they know it. No indeed! God loves those who keep their pledges and are mindful of Him.

Thus, in Surat al-Jumu'a, it becomes evident that those likened to asses are only those who neglect their duty, failing to draw benefit from the Torah, which God sent down as a beacon of light and guidance. In a similar vein, Muslims also refer to scholars of their faith who do not live by the Qur'an's teachings as 'asses.' Such a label was cast upon them in the past, <sup>(1)</sup> and it endures into the present. Indeed, the Qur'an also compares Arabs who turn away from God's teachings to asses, as we shall see in due course.

Bell seems to have overlooked the deeper significance of hasr ('restriction' or 'confining'), as well as the weight of al-ummiyyin<sup>(2)</sup> and fadl Allah, which He bestows upon whomever He wills, a favor so vast that even the granting of prophethood to the Jews does not exhaust it. Thus, Bell inevitably missed the subtle link between Q. 62:5 and the preceding verses when he dismissed it as merely a fleeting simile, claiming, "verse 5 is little more than a scrap noting down a simile [...] it shows the controversy with the Jews already fairly

---

(1) Al-Razi, al-Tafsir al-kabir (Beirut, n.d.), part 30, p. 5.

(2) The use of al-ummiyyin signals that the verse is aimed specifically at the Jews. In contrast, when the Qur'an addresses the Muslims, it employs expressions such as fi-kum, fi-him, or al-mu'minin, as seen in Q. 2:129, 151, and Q. 3:164.

acute.”<sup>(1)</sup> Alan Jones,<sup>(2)</sup> too, failed to grasp the full depth, asserting that “the first four verses dwell on God’s power, with verse two focusing on a specifically Arabian content. The middle section (verses five and six) refers to Muhammad’s Jewish opponents.” This reading misses the essence of hasr and the intricate connection between the verses. In Q. 62:5, the Qur’an highlights that some who have received the divine faḍl do not live up to it—among them, the Jews. Yet, this also casts a shadow on some Muslims, as revealed in Q. 62:11, where they too will find themselves similarly reproached.

## ii. Section 2 vv. 5–8

Those who have been charged to obey the Torah, but do not do so, are like asses carrying books: how base such people are who disobey God’s revelations! God does not guide people who do wrong. Say [Prophet], ‘You who follow the Jewish faith,<sup>(3)</sup> if you truly claim that out of all people you alone are friends of God, then you should be hoping for death.’ But because of what they have stored up for themselves with their own hands they would never hope for death – God knows the wrongdoers very well – so say, ‘The death you run away from will come to meet you and you will be returned to the One who knows the unseen as well as the seen: He will tell you everything you have done.’

The Jews who envied the Arabs for their prophet and scripture arrogantly claimed that they alone were the “friends (awliya’) of God.”<sup>(4)</sup> The Qur’an

---

(1) Bell, The Qur’an.

(2) Alan Jones, The Qur’an Translated into English (Short Run Press, Exeter, 2007), p. 518.

(3) Here, it is noteworthy that instead of speaking directly, God instructs the Prophet to address the Jews in Medina, who had brought up this matter.

(4) Al-Baydawi, in his Tafsir (Beirut, 1988, Vol. 2, p. 493), interprets this verse as stemming from the claim, “We are the sons of God and His beloved” (Q. 5:18). =



confronts them, challenging their assertion: if, among all people (min duni-‘l-nas), including the Arabs, they are truly God’s chosen friends and recipients of His favor, they should long for death to be united with Him. Yet, they would never wish for it. They flee from death, but it is inescapable and will inevitably overtake them. In the end, they will return to God, who will unveil the truth of their deeds, including their failure to uphold the commandments of the Torah.

Thus, the verses of Sura 62, up to verse 8, address primarily<sup>(1)</sup> those Jews who resented the ummiyyin for receiving prophethood. However, the hasr (restriction) in verse 2, “It is He who raised a messenger...,” carries a profound lesson for Muslims as well. It serves as a reminder that, despite the jealousy and objections of others, it was God—and none other—who chose to raise a messenger from among them, a people without scripture. This messenger recited God’s revelations to them, nurtured their spiritual growth, and taught them the scripture and wisdom (hikma). The verse further recalls how they had once been in clear error, and the Prophet was sent not only to them but also to others who would later join their ranks (verse 3). At that moment, it was a divine reassurance that their faith would be carried forward by future generations of believers, as part of God’s immense favor to those who had once been astray<sup>(2)</sup>.

---

=Similarly, Al-Razi explains that, according to Ibn ‘Abbas, the Prophet invited a group of Jews to embrace Islam and warned them of God’s punishment. Their response was, “How can you warn us about God’s punishment when we are His sons and beloved?” Al-Razi clarifies further, stating, “This pertains solely to this particular group of Jews” (al-Tafsir al-Kabir, Beirut, n.d., part 11, p. 192).

(1) When the Qur’an addresses the Muslims directly or refers to the same divine favor granted to them, it refrains from describing them as al-ummiyyin (see Q. 2:129, 151; Q. 3:164).

(2) Bell argues, without providing evidence, that verse 3 was introduced at a later stage (see earlier footnote).



Having granted this great favor, God immediately presents an example of those who failed to honor His blessings and neglected their duty to live according to His teachings. This serves as a stark warning, urging the believers to take heed, listen attentively to the teachings, and abide by them with sincerity.

### iii. Section 3: vv. 9–11

The narrative shifts in verse 9, addressing “you who have believed” after previously speaking to “you who follow the Jewish faith” in verse 6: “When the call to prayer is made on the Day of Congregation, hasten to remember God and leave off your trading.” Bell<sup>(1)</sup> contends that “vv. 9–10 are quite unconnected and deal with the Friday prayer.” According to his view, the sura ought to have concluded with verse 8, leaving it as a mere critique of the Jews who disregarded divine guidance and an acknowledgment of the favor bestowed upon the Arabs with the gift of a prophet. However, such an interpretation runs counter to the Qur’an’s characteristic pattern.

Whenever the Qur’an speaks of God’s favor, it calls for gratitude in action. For instance, in Surat al-Duha (Q. 93), the Qur’an comforts the Prophet, affirming that God has neither abandoned him nor forsaken him, and assures him that the future holds greater promise than the past. It points to the Prophet’s life as evidence: “Did He not find you an orphan and shelter you, find you lost and guide you, in need and satisfy you?” (Q. 93:6–8). Yet the sura does not stop there; it continues in verses 9–11 with a call to action: “So do not be harsh with the orphan, do not chide the one who asks for help, and proclaim the blessings of your Lord.”

Similarly, in Surat al-Jumu’a, after reminding the believers of the divine favor bestowed upon them, God commands them to uphold His teachings

(1) Bell, *Ibid.*

and avoid emulating those who squandered such blessings. The Prophet was sent to them to proclaim God’s revelation, nurture their spiritual growth, and teach them the scripture and wisdom—all of which converge in the sacred act of the Friday prayer and sermon. Far from being “quite unconnected” as Bell claims, <sup>(1)</sup> these verses reflect the seamless flow of divine instruction. The sura continues:

Believers! When the call to prayer is made on the day of congregation, go quickly to the prayer and leave off your trading – that is better for you, if only you knew – then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out God’s bounty. Remember God often so that you may prosper.

Q. 62:9–10

In Arabic, Friday is known as yawm al-jumu’a (“the day of gathering”). It has been suggested<sup>(2)</sup> that this day coincided with the market day for Arabs and Jews, during which the Jews of Medina would procure their needs for the Sabbath. This notion finds support in the verses above, where the Qur’an commands the believers to “cease trading”—even if the Jews continue to trade. This creates another link to the earlier sections discussing the Jews, who were prohibited from any form of labor throughout the entirety of the Sabbath. In contrast, the believers are instructed only to halt their trading during the time of prayer, to leave the marketplace, and to come together in worship and remembrance of God. It is within the mosque that they are to

---

(1) Bell, *Ibid.*

It is worth noting that failing to abandon trading during the Jumu’a prayer would liken them to those who violated the Sabbath (see Q. 7:163ff). This may also explain why the Jumu’a prayer is mentioned in this particular sura, alongside the discourse concerning the Jews and their claims.

(2) Patrick D. Gaffney, “Friday Prayer,” in J.D. McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an*, Vol. 2 (Leiden, 2005), pp. 271–272.

glorify God, as mentioned in verse 1, and where the Prophet will recite the Qur'an to them, purify them, and teach them the scripture and wisdom, as stated in verse 2.

In Q. 62:10, two commanding verbs resonate with urgency: *is'aw* ("hasten to") and *dharu'l-bay'a* ("leave trading"). The Qur'an, in setting forth its injunctions, employs these decisive orders yet delivers them in a tone of gentle persuasion, addressing the believers with "you who believe...". This approach appeals to their faith and their belonging to the community of believers, encouraging them to act in harmony with their commitment to God.

After issuing the command, the verse softly reassures, "this is better (*khayr*) for you, if only you knew," implying that God, in His infinite wisdom, knows the hidden benefits contained in His decree. Were the believers to grasp this knowledge, they would eagerly hasten to obey.<sup>(1)</sup> The verse's gentle persuasion continues with the words, "When the prayer is ended, disperse (*intashiru*) in the land." This command, contrasting semantically with *al-jumu'a* ("gathering"), underscores the temporary nature of the call to unite for prayer, after which they are free to return to their worldly pursuits.

The term *intashiru* is framed as an order, yet jurists interpret it as permission (*li'l-ibaha*), less binding than the earlier imperatives to cease trading and hasten to God's remembrance. Notably, the Qur'an instructs believers to "disperse in the land" rather than return to the market or their homes, symbolizing that the entire earth (*al-ard*) is open to them. The verse then continues, "and seek the bounty (*fadl*) of God," directly linking this *faḍl* to the earlier favor mentioned in verse 4. Before the gathering for prayer, their activity was called *al-bay'* ("trading"); afterward, their labor is elevated to "seeking the bounty of

(1) This mirrors the directive to fast in Q. 2:184: "and fasting is better for you, if only you knew".

God.” Even as they pursue this bounty, they are reminded to “remember Him much, so that [they] may prosper,” completing the arc of persuasion that runs through Q. 62:9–10.

Yet, verse 11 introduces a sharp contrast, addressing not those who fulfill their obligations but those who fail to do so: “Yet they dash out towards trade or entertainment whenever they observe it, and leave you [Prophet] standing there. Say, ‘What God has is better than any entertainment or trade: God is the best provider.’” Bell says, ‘Verse 11 is evidently private and not really connected with the preceding verses...’<sup>(1)</sup>. However, it is far from being unconnected; it serves as a contrast. Here, the Qur’an shifts from directly addressing the believers to speaking about them—a rhetorical device (*iltifat*) signaling distance and displeasure.

This verse references a specific event: while the Prophet was delivering the Friday sermon, a trade caravan arrived, accompanied by the usual fanfare. A large number of attendees abandoned the mosque, leaving only about a dozen behind.<sup>(2)</sup> The words *infaddu ilayha* (“dash out towards it”) starkly contrast with the earlier *is’aw ila* (“hasten to the remembrance of God”) in Q. 62:9. They did not wait for the prayer to conclude (*qudiyāt al-salah*); instead, they flagrantly disregarded the Prophet, leaving him standing before them as he addressed them.

If the Prophet had been seated in the front row with his back to the congregation and they had slipped out discreetly, their behavior would have been less egregious. But their actions bore the mark of open disrespect. The Qur’an likens them to asses bearing a burden they ignore, as stated in verse 5. This imagery finds resonance in Q. 74:49–51, which portrays another

(1) Bell, *Ibid.* p. 271

(2) Salih b. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Al-Shaykh *Mawsu’at al-hadith al-sharif al-kutub al-sitta* (Riyadh, 1999), p. 161.

analogy: “What is the matter with them? They turn away from the Reminder (tadhkira) like frightened asses fleeing from a lion.” Such vivid comparisons serve as a stern warning, urging believers not to turn away when reminded by the Prophet.

In his sermon, the Prophet would guide them, reciting the divine revelations to nurture their souls and impart to them the Scripture and wisdom (Q. 62:2). The wisdom lies in awakening them to the truth that what God offers is far more valuable than trade and fleeting pleasures—if only they understood.<sup>(1)</sup>

Finally, in Q. 62:12, the Prophet is directed to remind them: “What God has is better (khayr) than any entertainment or trade,” concluding with the absolute declaration: “God is the best provider.” It is noteworthy that while God Himself addresses the believers in verse 9 to offer guidance, He instructs the Prophet in verses 6 and 10 to speak to the Jews and Muslims who are transgressing the divine teachings bestowed upon them. This creates a balanced symmetry between the two faiths, Judaism and Islam, and their followers. Both have been granted a share of God’s favor (min fadli’llah), which proves far superior for those who embrace it; those who neglect this divine grace and fail to live by it are likened to asses. Both should recall that God is the best provider. Q. 62:4 concludes with wa’llahu dhu’l-fadli’l-azim (“God’s favor is immense”), and verse 11 finishes with wa’llahu khayru’l-raziqin (“God is the best provider”)—and who can provide more abundantly than “the Controller, the Holy, the Mighty, the Decider,” whose praise resounds throughout everything in the heavens and earth (verse 1)? Those who do not join in this celestial praise and fail to become worthy recipients of His faḍl are blind to what is truly best (khayr) for them. This symmetry ties together the diverse elements of the surah.<sup>(2)</sup>

(1) See also Q. 2:267–9, which implies that what God offers surpasses any transient gain or the fear of poverty sown by Satan.

(2) The rhyme scheme, with verses ending in –im, –in, and –un in Arabic, serves as an additional thread of unity throughout the text.



It is striking that the key verbs in this sura share a common trait—speed. Thus, tafirruna (“run away from,” verse 8), is’aw (“rush towards,” verse 9), intashiru fi’l-’ard (“disperse in the land,” verse 10), and infaddu ilayha (“scatter towards it,” verse 11) all evoke a sense of swiftness. In the first instance, the speed is in fleeing from danger; in the latter three, it is in hurrying to seek gain. This swiftness becomes a thread weaving the sura’s parts together.

The title is deeply revealing: a single, concise word that encapsulates the very essence of the sura. It calls the believers to unite in glorifying God, to immerse themselves in the knowledge of scripture and purification, momentarily putting aside trade, and placing their trust in God’s provision and faḍl. Those who remain until the end of the gathering are those who are observing and drawing benefit from the revelation entrusted to them.

To fully grasp the unity of Surat al-Jumu’a, one must approach it with an open mind, free from preconceived notions, and engage in a careful, attentive examination of the text. Only then can the sura be analyzed in light of the Qur’an’s norms. Contrary to Bell’s assertion, the sura is not a patchwork of disconnected fragments. Rather, it is a tightly woven, balanced composition, both in form and in content.

We have observed that the wisdom in this sura is intertwined with the Friday prayer, a theme that is particularly evident in the final section. At its core, wisdom is the ability to discern what is truly best in a situation, even when it is not immediately apparent, and to adhere to it. This is exemplified in the repeated use of the word khayr, which appears three times in Section 3: “Cease trading, dhalikum khayrun lakum (that is better for you if only you knew)”; in the last verse, where what God has is declared to be better than merriment or trade; and finally, “God is the best provider.” The word khayr is used as an adjective on three levels: good, better, and best, and the Qur’an guides the



believers to recognize and follow what is khayr and wise. This word appears in various forms 178 times throughout the Qur'an.<sup>(1)</sup> True Wisdom resides in what is khayr, and this is what the Qur'an directs Muslims to seek. It is not a philosophical discourse but a call to discern where khayr lies and to pursue it.

By examining Surat al-Jumu'ah from a structural and linguistic perspective, we have demonstrated that this approach is the most fitting for achieving a true understanding of the Qur'an's message. This method helps to sidestep the fragmented interpretations often offered by many mufassirun, as well as the mistaken assumptions of certain Western scholars. In this way, the hikma at the heart of Surat al-Jumu'ah comes into sharp focus.



---

(1) Badawi & Haleem, An Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage, p. 292.

## Bibliography

- Abdel Haleem, M.A.S., The Qur'an: A New Translation, Oxford University Press 2004–16.
- Al-Baydawi, Tafsir (Beirut, 1988), Vol. 2.
- Al-Razi, al-Tafsir al-kabir (Beirut, n.d.)
- Badawi, E. and Abdel Haleem, M. An Arabic–English Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage, Brill 2007.
- Bell, R., The Qur'an: Translated with a Critical Rearrangement of the Surahs (2 vols) (Edinburgh, 1937, reprinted 1960). Bell also wrote
- Commentary on the Qur'an (Victoria University, Manchester 1991)
- Introduction to the Qur'an Islamic Surveys 8. Edinburgh University Press, 1953, revised by W. Montgomery Watt (EUP, 1970).
- Jones, A. The Qur'an Translated into English (Short Run Press, Exeter, 2007).
- Gaffney, Patrick D. 'Friday Prayer', in J.D. McAuliffe (ed.), Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an (Leiden, 2005), Vol. 2.

