INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: SŪRAT Al-Muddaththir, 74.

This Sūra dates from about the same time as the last one. Its subject-matter is also similar: Prayer and Praise, and the need of patience in a period of great spiritual stress: the unjust who cause sorrow and suffering now will themselves experience agony in the Hereafter.
Al-Muddaththir, or One Wrapped Up.

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

1. O thou wrapped up (In a mantle)!

2. Arise and deliver thy warning!

3. And thy Lord
   Do thou magnify!

4. And thy garments
   Keep free from stain!

5. And all abomination shun!

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

5778. In these wonderful early verses there is a double thread of thought: (1) A particular occasion or person is referred to; (2) a general spiritual lesson is taught. As to (1), the Prophet was now past the stage of personal contemplation, lying down or sitting in his mantle; he was now to go forth boldly to deliver his Message and publicly proclaim the Lord: his heart had always been purified, but now all his outward doings must be dedicated to Allah, and conventional respect for ancestral customs or worship must be thrown aside; his work as a Messenger was the most generous gift that could flow from his personality, but no reward or appreciation was to be expected from his people, but quite the contrary; there would be much call on his patience, but his contentment would arise from the good pleasure of Allah. As to (2), similar stages arise in a minor degree in the life of every good man, for which the Prophet's life is to be a universal pattern.

5779. Possibly, in its immediate application, there is a reference to the dirt and filth which the Pagans used to throw at the Prophet to insult and persecute him.

5780. Rujz or Rijz: abomination: usually understood to refer to idolatry. It is even possible that there was an idol called Rujz. But it has a wider signification, as including a mental state opposed to true worship, a state of doubt or indecision.

5781. The legal and commercial formula is that you give in order to receive. And usually you expect to receive what is worth to you a little more than you give. The spiritual consideration is that you give, but expect nothing from the receiver. You serve Allah and Allah's creatures.
7. But, for thy Lord's (Cause)\textsuperscript{5782}
   Be patient and constant!

8. Finally, when the Trumpet
   Is sounded,

9. That will be—that Day—
   A Day of Distress,—\textsuperscript{5783}

10. Far from easy
    For those without Faith.

11. Leave Me alone, (to deal)\textsuperscript{5784}
    With the (creature) whom
    I created (bare and) alone!—\textsuperscript{5785}

12. To whom I granted
    Resources in abundance,

13. And sons to be
    By his side!—\textsuperscript{5786}

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

\textsuperscript{5782}. Our zeal for Allah's Cause itself requires that we should not be impatient, and
that we should show constancy in our efforts for His Cause. For we have faith, and we
know that He is All-Good, All-Wise, and All-Powerful, and everything will ultimately be
right.

\textsuperscript{5783}. The Sinner's course is now shown in contrast to the Seeker's. The Sinner may
be self-complacent now: but what will be his position when the Reckoning comes? Not
easy, indeed a Day of Distress!

\textsuperscript{5784}. The question of Justice and Punishment to men is for Allah alone. For man
at his best can see only one side of truth, and only Allah is All-Knowing. He alone can
judge the limits of Justice and Mercy.

\textsuperscript{5785}. Man's adventitious advantages—wealth, power, position, talents—are not due to
his own merits. They are gifts from Allah, Who created him. In himself he came bare
and alone.

\textsuperscript{5786}. The great ones of the earth may have wealth, a large following, sons by their
side to defend them and do their bidding and man-power to help them in their battles.
Life may be smooth and agreeable to them. But their responsibility is to Allah.
15. Yet is he greedy—
   That I should add
   (Yet more);\textsuperscript{5787}

16. By no means!
   For to Our Signs
   He has been refractory!

17. Soon will I visit him
   With a mount of calamities!\textsuperscript{5788}

18. For he thought
   And he determined;—

19. And woe to him!\textsuperscript{5789}
   How he determined!—

20. Yea, woe to him:
   How he determined!—

21. Then he reflected;

22. Then he frowned
   And he scowled;

23. Then he turned back
   And was haughty;

24. Then said he;\textsuperscript{5790}
   “This is nothing but magic,
   Derived from of old;

\textsuperscript{5787} The Sinner takes Allah’s gifts as if they were his right. The more he gets, the more is he greedy. Yet to Allah’s Signs and revelations he is wilfully deaf or even openly rebellious. But he is only preparing the way for his own undoing.

\textsuperscript{5788} “A mount of calamities” or disasters: may be understood as a phrase for cumulative disasters.

\textsuperscript{5789} Cf. li. 10: “Woe to the falsehood-mongers!”

\textsuperscript{5790} The Commentators understand the reference to be to Walid ibn Mugaira, who was a wealthy Sybarite, Pagan to the core, and an inveterate enemy to the holy Prophet. He and Abū Jahl did all they could, from the beginning of the preaching of Islam, to abuse and persecute the Preacher, to run down his doctrine, and to injure those who believed in it. But the meaning for us is much wider. There are Wallids in all ages. They cannot understand divine inspiration, and seek to explain its wonderful influence over the lives of men by some such unmeaning formula as “magic”. The eternal Hope is to them mere human delusion!
25. “This is nothing but
    The word of a moral!”

26. Soon will I
    Cast him into Hell-Fire!\(^{5791}\)

27. And what will explain
    To thee what Hell-Fire is?

28. Naught doth it permit
    To endure, and naught\(^{5792}\)
    Doth it leave alone!–

29. Darkening and changing
    The colour of man!

30. Over it are Nineteen.\(^{5793}\)

31. And We have set none\(^{5794}\)
    But angels as guardians
    Of the Fire; and We

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5791. The Sinner’s perversity can only end in the Fire of Punishment. It enters his very being. See next note.

5792. He is in a state in which he neither lives nor dies (Ixxxvii. 13). Looked at in another way, the things that in a good man are meant to last and grow, are for the sinner destroyed, and no part of his nature is left untouched. The brightness of his very manhood is darkened and extinguished by sin.

5793. The figure nineteen refers to angels appointed to guard Hell. See verse 31 below and the corresponding note.

5794. Cf. lxvi. 6, and n. 5540.

There was a great volume of angelology in the religious literature of the People of the Book (i.e., the Jews and Christians) to whom (among others) an appeal is made in this verse. The Essenes, a Jewish brotherhood with highly spiritual ideas; to which perhaps the prophet Jesus himself belonged, had an extensive literature of angelology. In the Midrash also, which was a Jewish school of exegesis and mystical interpretation, there was much said about angels. The Eastern Christian sects contemporary with the birth of Islam had borrowed and developed many of these ideas, and their mystics owed much to the Gnostics and the Persian apocalyptic systems. In the New Testament the relation of the angels with Fire is referred to more than once. In Rev. ix. 11 we have “the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon”. In Rev. xiv. 18 there is an “angel which had power over fire”, and in Rev. xvi. 8 an angel has “power...given unto him to scorch men with fire”. In the Old Testament (Daniel vii. 9-10) the essence of all angels is fire: thousand thousands of them issued as a fiery stream from before the Ancient of Days, whose “throne was like the fiery flame, and His wheels as burning fire”. 
Have fixed their number
Only as a trial
For Unbelievers,—in order
That the People of the Book
May arrive at certainty,
And the Believers may increase
In Faith,—and that no doubts
May be left for the People
Of the Book and the Believers,
And that those in whose hearts
Is a disease and the Unbelievers
May say, “What
Doth Allah intend by this?”
Thus doth Allah leave to stray
Whom He pleaseth, and guide
Whom He pleaseth: and none
Can know the forces
Of thy Lord, except He,
And this is no other than
A Reminder to mankind.

5795. The significance of numbers is a favourite theme with some writers, but I lay no stress on it. In Christian theology the number of the Beast, 666, in Rev. xiii. 18 has given rise to much controversy, and may refer only to the numerical value of the letters in the name of the Roman Emperor Nero. In our own literature I think that we ought to avoid too much insistence on speculative conjectures.

5796. There are four classes of people mentioned here. (1) The Muslims will have their faith increased, because they believe that all revelation is from Allah Most Merciful, and all His forces will work in their favour. (2) The People of the Book, those who had received previous revelations of an analogous character, the Jews and Christians, had numerous sects disputing with each other on minute points of doctrine; but they will now, if they believe, find rest from controversies in a broad understanding of scripture. (3) Those in whose hearts is a disease (see ii. 8-10, notes 33-34), the insincere ones, the hypocrites, will only be mystified, because they believe nothing and have rejected the grace and mercy of Allah. (4) The Unbelievers have frankly done the same and must suffer similar consequences.

5797. It is a necessary consequence of moral responsibility and freedom of choice in man, that he should be left free to stray if he chooses to do so, in spite of all the warning and the instruction he receives. Allah’s channels of warning and instruction—his spiritual forces—are infinite, as are His powers. No man can know them. But this warning or reminder is addressed to all mankind.

All things are referred to Allah. But we must not attribute evil to Him. In iv. 79 we are expressly told that the good comes from Allah, and the evil from ourselves.
SECTION 2

32. Nay, verily:
   By the Moon. 5798

33. And by the Night 5799
   As it retreateth,

34. And by the Dawn
   As it shineth forth,–

35. This is but one 5800
   Of the mighty (Portents),

36. A warning to mankind,—

5798. An oath in human speech calls in evidence something sacred in the heart of man. In Allah's Message, also, when delivered in human language, solemn emphasis is indicated by an appeal to something striking among the Signs of Allah, which will go straight to the human heart which is addressed. In each case the symbol of the appeal has reference to the particular point enforced in the argument. Here we are asked to contemplate three wonderful phenomena, and they lead up to the conclusion in verse 38. (1) The moon, next after the sun, is the most striking luminary to our sight. Its reflected light has for us even a greater mystery than the direct light of the sun, which looks to us like pure fire. The moon was worshipped as a deity in times of darkness. But in reality, though she rules the night, her rays are only reflections, and are wanting in warmth and vitality. So every soul which looks up to a mere creature of Allah for a sort of vicarious salvation is in spiritual darkness or error; for the true source of spiritual light and life is Allah, and Allah alone. For (2) the Night and (3) the Dawn, see the following note.

5799. (2) The Night when it is illuminated by the Moon is light in a sense, but it is really dark and must give place to (3) the Dawn when it comes, as the harbinger of the Sun. So in spiritual matters, when every soul realises its own responsibility, it will look less and less to reflected lights, and through the beauty of a dawn-like awakening, will be prepared more and more for the splendour of the light of Allah Himself, the goal of the Heaven of our dreams.

5800. "This is but one," etc. There are numerous Signs of Allah, of which Judgment is one, and one of the mightiest portents. Or the reference may be to the waning of the Moon, the decline of the night, and the glorious sunrise, as tokens or symbols of the world renewed when the present transitory world passes away. According to some commentators "This" here refers to Hell.
37. To any of you that chooses to press forward,
   Or to follow behind;  5801

38. Every soul will be (held)
   In pledge for its deeds.  5802

39. Except the Companions
   Of the Right Hand,  5803

40. (They will be) in Gardens
   (Of Delight): they will
   Question each other,

41. And (ask) of the Sinners:

42. “What led you
   Into Hell-Fire?”

43. They will say:
   “We were not of those
   Who prayed;

5801. Three interpretations are possible. (1) Those pressing forward may be the Righteous, and those following behind may be the laggards, the Unbelievers, who reject Allah's love, care, and mercy. (2) Men of two kinds of temperament may be referred to: those who are always in the van and those who are always in the rear. Allah's Message is open to both. But there may be a danger to both: in the one case, over-confidence, or hope in wrong things: in the other case missing great opportunities so that their spiritual lives may be "bound in shallows and in miseries". Extremes should be avoided. (3) Or it may mean that the warning is effective only for those willing to move forwards or backwards, as the case may be, but is lost on the inert or the lethargic. For our moral and spiritual progress, we have in some cases to go forwards, but in some cases we have to retreat from false positions. The hopeless case is that of the obstinate man, whose heart is so dead that he dares not advance to the right or withdraw from the wrong.

5802. Cf. lii. 21. Man cannot shift his responsibility to vicarious saviours or saints. His redemption depends upon the grace of Allah, for which he should constantly and whole-heartedly strive by means of right conduct. If he does so he will be redeemed and he will join the Companions of the Right Hand.

5803. Cf. n. 5223 to lvi. 3, and see lvi. 27-38. The Companions of the Right Hand will be the Righteous or the Blessed in the Hereafter. Their grounds of merit will be Prayer, Charity, Earnestness, and Faith in Allah's just Judgment: all of which are within the reach of the humblest Seeker. They are not separate acts or virtues, but are all interconnected. At Judgment, the pledge of their soul will be redeemed by Allah's Grace at the Taking of the Account.
44. "Nor were we of those
Who fed the indigent;

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

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

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

48. Then will no intercession
Of (any) intercessors
Profit them.

49. Then what is
The matter with them
That they turn away
From admonition?—

50. As if they were
Affrighted asses,

51. Fleeing from a lion!

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

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

5804. Cf. xv. 99, and n. 2018. The Hour that is Certain is usually taken to the Death.

5805. If the Day of Judgment is inevitable, it is strange that men should not heed a plain warning, but go on as if they were thoughtless and obstinate asses stampeding from a lion. Instead of heeding the warning, they try to avoid it. They are frightened at Allah's Word.

5806. Cf. xvii. 93: "Until thou send down to us a book, that we could read." The Unbelievers pretend in ridicule that they would believe if a special message written on open scrolls and addressed to them severally were brought to them by a miracle! There is a disease in their hearts and understandings. The Teacher's warning is plain, and enough for any reasonable man who has the will to seek Allah.
54. Nay, this surely
   Is an admonition:
55. Let any who will,⁵⁸⁰⁷
   Keep it in remembrance!
56. But none will keep it
   In remembrance except
   As Allah wills: He⁵⁸⁰⁸
   Is the Lord of Righteousness,
   And the Lord of Forgiveness.

⁵⁸⁰⁷. The Qur-ân itself is the admonition—the latest among the revealed Books of
Allah. If man has the will to learn, he will keep the Message always before Him, and
Allah’s grace will help him to carry it out in his conduct.

⁵⁸⁰⁸. Righteousness as well as Forgiveness have their source in Allah’s Will. Man’s
Righteousness has no meaning except in relation to the universal Will. For Taqwâ see
n. 26 to ii. 2. If we take the word here in the sense of “the fear of Allah”, the translation
would be: “He alone is worthy to be feared, and He alone is entitled to grant
Forgiveness.”