

## **The Qur'anic Concept Of Ajal: Theological, Existential, And Ethical Dimensions**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the Qur'anic concept of ajal (appointed term), a notion often misunderstood or oversimplified in contemporary discourse. The research addresses three key questions: (1) What is the essential meaning of ajal in the Qur'an? (2) How is its existential reality portrayed? and (3) What are its theological and ethical significances? Using a qualitative, library-based method with thematic interpretation (tafsir mawḍūʿī) and content analysis, the study synthesizes insights from the Qur'an and exegetical works. The findings reveal that: (1) etymologically, ajal denotes a divinely determined limit, covering human life, contracts, and temporal events; (2) existentially, ajal is inevitable, neither hastened nor delayed; and (3) Qur'anic discourse on ajal carries five major implications: (a) the value of time, urging responsibility and timely action; (b) the transience of blessings and hardships, fostering gratitude and resilience; (c) theological and ethical dimensions, affirming divine eternity and human accountability; (d) spirituality and eschatological awareness, nurturing preparedness for the Hereafter; and (e) social ethics and justice, inspiring fairness, compassion, and integrity. Overall, this research contributes to Qur'anic studies by offering a comprehensive thematic understanding of ajal, bridging theological reflection with existential, ethical, spiritual, and social dimensions of human temporality.

**Kata Kunci:** Ajal; Al-Qur'an; Kematian; Tafsir Tematik; Ketetapan Ilahi.

### **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini mengkaji konsep ajal (batas waktu yang ditentukan) dalam al-Qur'an, sebuah gagasan yang sering disalahpahami atau direduksi dalam wacana kontemporer. Kajian ini menjawab tiga pertanyaan pokok: (1) Apa makna esensial ajal dalam al-Qur'an? (2) Bagaimana realitas eksistensialnya digambarkan? dan (3) Apa signifikansi teologis dan etisnya? Dengan metode kualitatif berbasis studi pustaka melalui tafsir tematik (tafsir mawḍūʿī) dan analisis isi, penelitian ini menggabungkan data dari al-Qur'an dan karya tafsir klasik maupun kontemporer. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa: (1) secara etimologis, ajal berarti batas yang ditentukan Allah, mencakup kehidupan, perjanjian, dan peristiwa temporal; (2) secara eksistensial, ajal bersifat pasti, tidak dapat ditunda maupun dipercepat; dan (3) diskursus Qur'ani tentang ajal memiliki lima implikasi utama: (a) nilai waktu, yang menekankan tanggung jawab dan urgensi memanfaatkan peluang; (b) kefanaan nikmat dan ujian, yang menumbuhkan syukur dan ketabahan; (c) dimensi teologis dan etis, yang menegaskan keabadian ilahi serta akuntabilitas manusia; (d) spiritualitas dan kesadaran eskatologis, yang menyiapkan manusia menghadapi akhirat; dan (e) etika sosial dan keadilan, yang mendorong keadilan, kasih sayang, dan integritas. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini berkontribusi pada studi al-Qur'an dengan menawarkan pemahaman tematik



yang komprehensif tentang ajal dalam dimensi teologis, eksistensial, etis, spiritual, dan sosial.

**Keywords:** Ajal; Qur'an; Mortality; Thematic Interpretation; Divine decree.

## Introduction

One of the fundamental aspects of Islamic theology is the belief that ajal (the divinely appointed term or end of every creature) remains beyond human knowledge and control. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes that the time of one's death, as well as the ultimate end of creation, is predetermined by Allah and cannot be hastened or delayed even by a moment. Classical exegetes and contemporary scholars alike have debated the layers of meaning embedded in the term ajal, ranging from individual death to collective destiny, and from temporal life spans to the eschatological reality of resurrection. This multiplicity of interpretations highlights the depth and complexity of the Qur'anic discourse on ajal.

The scholarly tradition identifies at least two main categories of ajal. The first refers to the individual's death, the conclusion of human life in this world. The second relates to the Day of Resurrection (*yawm al-qiyāmah*) or the appointed time of ultimate accountability. Some exegetes, however, expand these interpretations further by distinguishing between sleep and death, between the life span of past nations and that of future ones, or between time already elapsed and time yet to come. Despite such diversity of perspectives, the dominant view remains that ajal encompasses both death and resurrection, situating human finitude within the broader theological affirmation of divine eternity and omnipotence.<sup>1</sup>

The significance of studying ajal extends beyond theological abstraction. It speaks directly to human existence, ethics, and social responsibility. The Qur'an describes life and death not as random occurrences but as realities created "in due proportion and measure" (Q.S. al-Qamar [54]: 49):

إِنَّا كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْنَاهُ بِقَدَرٍ

"Indeed, we have created everything according to a determined measure."

This verse, along with others, underscores that every stage of life hope, trial, calamity, and death is embedded within a divinely ordained framework. In this sense, ajal functions as both a reminder of human limitation and a motivator for ethical action, urging

<sup>1</sup>M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, Vol. IV, (Cet. VII; Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2007), h. 10-13

believers to value time, fulfill responsibilities, and cultivate resilience in the face of life's temporality.

Previous studies on ajal have provided valuable insights, particularly in the fields of semantics, linguistics, and exegetical comparison. For instance, Rahman and Setyadi examined the application of ajal in explaining the rise and fall of nations through the lenses of Tafsir al-Azhar and Tafsir al-Misbah.<sup>2</sup> Ozi Setiadi analyzed the Qur'anic concept of death as a transitional stage to the hereafter,<sup>3</sup> while Ajirni and Syukran Abu Bakar investigated the semantic interplay between ajal and mawt.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Atika Heny Artany explored the nuances of the term mawt using a semantic approach.<sup>5</sup> While these works are significant, they primarily focus on linguistic or partial aspects of the concept, leaving a gap in the comprehensive thematic understanding of ajal in the Qur'an.

This research seeks to address the gap by employing a thematic (mawḍūʿī) approach, systematically collecting Qur'anic verses on ajal and analyzing them through the lenses of theology, existence, and ethics. By adopting this method, the study provides a holistic understanding that goes beyond linguistic analysis to reveal the depth of Qur'anic discourse.

The significance of this study lies in two areas. First, it contributes to Qur'anic scholarship by clarifying the essence and scope of ajal, demonstrating its comprehensive meaning beyond mere physical death. Second, it highlights the practical relevance of ajal for contemporary human life, particularly in cultivating ethical urgency, spiritual resilience, and reflective awareness of mortality. In a modern world where time is often commodified and death marginalized, revisiting the Qur'anic notion of ajal offers an essential corrective by grounding human existence in divine wisdom and moral responsibility.

The objectives of this research are threefold: (1) to examine the essential meaning of ajal in the Qur'an, (2) to explore its existential reality as a fixed and inevitable decree, and (3) to analyze its theological and ethical implications for human life.

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<sup>2</sup> Rahman Setyadi (2016) Aplikasi Konsep "Ajal" Dalam Al-Quran Menurut Tafsir Al-Azhar Dan Tafsir Al-Misbah Terhadap Keruntuhan Bangsa-Bangsa Muslim. Thesis, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta.

<sup>3</sup>Ozi Setiadi, "Kematian Dalam Prespektif Al-Quran," *Alashriyyah* 6, no. 01 (2020): 45–61, <https://doi.org/10.53038/alashriyyah.v6i01.126>.

<sup>4</sup>Ajirni Ajirni and Syukran Abu Bakar, "Kematian Dalam Al-Qur'an," *TAFSE: Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2016): 34, <https://doi.org/10.22373/tafse.v1i1.14275>.

<sup>5</sup>Atika Heny Artany, "Konsep Maut Dalam Al-Qur'an (Kajian Semantik)," *Skripsi, Fakultas Ushuluddin Dan Pemikiran Islam UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta*, 2016, <https://digilib.uin-suka.ac.id/id/document/437224>.

The article is structured as follows: after presenting the methodology and theoretical framework, it discusses the etymology and semantic range of ajal. It then examines Qur'anic verses describing its inevitability and connection to divine decree. Finally, the article analyzes the theological affirmation of divine eternity, the ethical call to responsibility, and the existential cultivation of resilience, before concluding with reflections on its contribution to Qur'anic scholarship and contemporary existential discourse.

## Method

This study employs a qualitative library-based approach using the thematic interpretation (tafsīr mawḍūʿī) method combined with content analysis. Primary data are derived from the Qur'an and classical tafsīr works (al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, Ibn Kathīr), while secondary sources include contemporary Qur'anic scholarship. The verses related to ajal were systematically collected, classified by thematic context (individual, social, and cosmic), and analyzed through linguistic, theological, and ethical perspectives. The analysis follows three steps: identifying key terms, comparing exegetical interpretations, and synthesizing the findings into an integrated Qur'anic understanding of ajal as both a theological concept and an anthropological reality.

## Result and Discussion

### Definition of Ajal

In the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (Indonesian Dictionary), the word ajal is understood as the end of life determined by God, the limit of a promise, or also interpreted as imminent death. This definition highlights two important aspects: first, ajal as a divine decree that can neither be postponed nor accelerated; and second, ajal as a marker of boundaries in social interaction, such as the time limit of an agreement or a given deadline.

Etymologically, the word ajal is derived from the root 'ajila-ya'jalu-ajalan (أَجَلَ-), consisting of the letters hamzah, jīm, and lām. In the tradition of Arabic lexicography, this root denotes the fundamental meaning of مدة مضروبة للشئ (muddatun maḍrūbatun li-shay'in), which means "a fixed time appointed for something." In other words, from its very root, the term ajal conveys the idea of limitation and certainty in time).

One of the main references in the corpus of Arabic lexicography is Lisān al-'Arab by Ibn Manẓūr. In this encyclopedic dictionary, ajal is defined as: غاية الوقت في الموت وحلول (ghāyatu al-waqt fī al-mawt wa ḥulūlu al-dayn wa naḥwihi). This translates as: the final limit of time in relation to death, the maturity of debt, and similar matters. This

definition affirms that ajal is not confined to biological death but also encompasses the notion of an appointed end for various phenomena—whether the span of life, the due date of a debt, a contractual term, or other forms of social commitment.

Furthermore, Ibn Manẓūr records another meaning, namely مدة الشيء (muddat al-say'), which refers to “the duration or period of something.” This can be observed in the Qur'anic usage of ajal, such as in the verse QS.al-Baqarah [2]:235:

ولا تعزموا عقدة النكاح حتى يبلغ الكتاب أجله

This verse refers to the prohibition of entering into a marriage contract until the prescribed period (iddah) reaches its ajal that is, the completion of its appointed time. In this context, ajal indicates a fixed legal waiting period that must be observed before an action may be lawfully carried out. The term ajal also possesses several derivative forms with equally rich implications. Its plural is ājāl (أجال), denoting multiple appointed times or deadlines. The word ta'jīl (تأجيل) means “postponement,” the opposite of ta'jīl (تعجيل), which means “acceleration.” This illustrates that, both in classical usage and in daily practice, ajal is not limited to mortality but extends to the flexibility of time whether it is delayed or hastened.

Additionally, the expression al-ājilah (الأجله) is used as a synonym for al-ākhirah (الآخرة), meaning the Hereafter, whereas al-‘ājilah (العاجله) refers to the worldly life (dunyā). The contrast between these terms underscores a Qur'anic worldview that situates worldly life as transient (‘ājilah) in contrast to the eternal reality of the Hereafter (ājilah).

Ibn Fāris, another renowned lexicographer, adds an important nuance to the understanding of ajal. He notes that the word ajal is also employed as a conversational response: “أَجَلٌ” (ajal), meaning “yes” or “indeed.” According to him, this usage is connected to the original sense of ajal as “completion” or “reaching the end.” When a person says ajal in agreement, it is as though they are affirming that a matter has reached clarity, has been completed, or has arrived at its intended conclusion.

From the above definitions, it becomes evident that the concept of ajal carries a profound and multi-dimensional significance. Broadly speaking, it refers to the endpoint of something, whether it be the end of human life, the expiration of a contract, the completion of a legal waiting period, or the culmination of a cosmic cycle. Nothing in existence is exempt from ajal; everything has its predetermined limit.

Thus, the concept of ajal affirms two fundamental truths: first, the mortality of all created beings, emphasizing that every creature including humans lives within divinely set boundaries; and second, the eternity of the Creator, affirming that only God transcends time and is free from the limitations of ajal. This theological principle is reinforced in the Qur'anic verse, Q.S. al-Qashash [28]: 88:

كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ

“Everything will perish except His Face (Allah).”

This verse underscores the ultimate reality that ajal is intrinsic to all created entities, while eternity belongs solely to Allah.

### The Term Ajal in the Qur'an and Other Related Terms

In the Qur'an, the word ajal (appointed time/deadline) and its various forms are mentioned 55 times, with the following details:

1. In the passive participle form (mu'ajjalan), it appears once (Q.S. Āl 'Imrān [3]:145); ajalān appears 3 times (Q.S. Al-An'ām [6]:2; Al-Isrā' [17]:99; Ghāfir [40]:67); ajalahunna appears 5 times (Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]:231, 232, 234; Aṭ-Ṭalāq [65]:2, 4); ajalāhā appears twice (Q.S. Al-Ḥijr [15]:5; Al-Mu'minūn [23]:43); ajalnā appears once (Q.S. Al-An'ām [6]:128); 'ajjalta appears once (Q.S. Al-An'ām [6]:128); and ajalahu appears once (Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]:235).
2. In the genitive form (ilā ajalīn), it appears 15 times (Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]:282; An-Nisā' [4]:77; Al-A'rāf [7]:135; Hūd [11]:3; Ibrāhīm [14]:10, 44; An-Naḥl [16]:61; Al-Ḥajj [22]:5, 33; Luqmān [31]:29; Fāṭir [35]:45; Az-Zumar [39]:42; Ash-Shūrā [42]:14; Al-Munāfiqūn [63]:10; Nūḥ [71]:4); li ajalīn appears 4 times (Q.S. Hūd [11]:104; Ar-Ra'd [13]:2; Fāṭir [35]:13; Az-Zumar [39]:5); min ajalī appears once (Q.S. Al-Mā'idah [5]:32); ilā ajalīhi appears once (Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]:282); and likulli ajalīn appears once (Q.S. Ar-Ra'd [13]:38).
3. In the accusative noun form (inna ajalā), it appears 2 times (Q.S. Nūḥ [71]:4; Al-'Ankabūt [29]:5); and al-ajala appears once (Q.S. Al-Qaṣaṣ [28]:29).
4. In the nominative form (ajalun), it appears 5 times (Q.S. Al-An'ām [6]:2; Al-A'rāf [7]:34; Yūnus [10]:11; Ṭāhā [20]:129; Al-'Ankabūt [29]:53).
5. In the past passive verb form (ujjilat), it appears once (Q.S. Al-Mursalāt [77]:12).

6. In the active participle form (ajaluhum), it appears 6 times (Q.S. Al-A'raf [7]:34, 185; Yūnus [10]:11, 49; An-Nahl [16]:61; Fāṭir [35]:45); ajaluha appears once (Q.S. Al-Munāfiqūn [63]:11)..

A lexical survey shows that the term ajal appears fifty-five times in the Qur'an. Of these, fifty-four occurrences consistently denote the meaning of a “predetermined end point” or “appointed time,” whether in reference to the span of human life, contractual deadlines, or periods decreed by God. The only exception is in Sūrat al-Mā'idah [5]: 32, where the term carries the meaning of “cause” rather than “time”:

مِنْ أَجْلِ ذَلِكَ كَتَبْنَا عَلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ أَنَّهُ مَنْ قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ أَوْ فَسَادٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَكَأَنَّمَا قَتَلَ النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَمَنْ أَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا أَحْيَا النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا...

Translation:

“For that reason, We decreed upon the Children of Israel that whoever kills a soul unless as retribution for murder or for corruption in the land it is as though he has killed all mankind. And whoever saves a life, it is as though he has saved all mankind...” (Q. 5:32).

Here, the phrase *min ajli dhālika* denotes “because of that” or “for that reason,” diverging from the usual sense of “appointed time.” This demonstrates that, while overwhelmingly temporal, the semantic field of ajal admits a broader application in certain contexts.

#### a. Ad-Dahr

The word *ad-dahr* (eternity/age/time span) comes from the root d-h-r, meaning “to happen upon”. It appears twice in the Qur'an in the singular form (Q.S. Al-Jathiyah [45]:24:

وَقَالُوا مَا هِيَ إِلَّا حَيَاتُنَا الدُّنْيَا نَمُوتُ وَنَحْيَا وَمَا يُهْلِكُنَا إِلَّا الدَّهْرُ...

Translation:

“They say, ‘There is nothing but our worldly life; we die and we live, and nothing destroys us except Time (*ad-dahr*).’ Yet they have no knowledge of this; they only speculate.” (Q. 45:24).

And QS. Al-Insan [76]:1:

هَلْ أَتَىٰ عَلَى الْإِنْسَانِ حِينٌ مِّنَ الدَّهْرِ لَمْ يَكُن شَيْئًا مَّذْكُورًا

Translation:

“Has there not come upon man a period of time (*ad-dahr*) when he was not even a thing mentioned?” (Q. 76:1).

Several interpretations of ad-dahr exist: (1) One opinion holds that ad-dahr refers to the time before creation; (2). According to Al-Raghib al-Asfahani, it means the span of time the universe passes through from its creation to its end; (3) Ath-Thabarsi argues that ad-dahr refers to the cycle of day and night.

The differences in interpretation arise due to various understandings of whom “al-insan” refers to in Q.S. Al-Insan. If it refers to Adam, ad-dahr refers to the pre-creation time. If it refers to humanity at large, then it means the general span of human existence. And in the interpretation of Q.S. Al-Jathiyah, pre-Islamic Arab communities are said to have believed that it was "time" (i.e., day and night) that caused life and death.

These opinions are not necessarily contradictory; rather, they can be seen as layers of the same concept with long durations containing shorter, measurable units.

### **b. Al-Waqt**

The word waqt (time/appointed time) and its derivatives appear 10 times in the Qur'an (e.g., Q.S. Al-Hijr [15]:38; Sad [38]:38; Al-A'raf [7]:142, 143, 155, 187; Ash-Shu'ara [26]:38; Al-Waqi'ah [56]:50; An-Naba' [78]:17; Ad-Dukhan [44]:40).

The plural form mawaqit implies technical divisions of time, such as the number of days and the obligation to complete certain duties within those time frames. For instance, in Q.S. Al-A'raf [7]:142, the number of nights that Musa (Moses) was to spend receiving the commandments is specified.

وَوَاعَدْنَا مُوسَىٰ ثَلَاثِينَ لَيْلَةً وَأَتَمَمْنَاهَا بِعَشْرِ فَتَمَّ مِيقَاتُ رَبِّهِ أَرْبَعِينَ لَيْلَةً...

“We appointed for Moses thirty nights and completed them with ten [more]; thus the appointed time (mīqāt) of his Lord was fulfilled in forty nights. Moses said to his brother Aaron, “Take my place among my people, act rightly, and do not follow the way of the corrupters.” (Q. 7:142).

Similarly, the performance of prayer is linked with waqt, as in Q.S. An-Nisa' [4]:103, emphasizing that prayer times are fixed and must be observed accordingly.

إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ كَانَتْ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ كِتَابًا مَّوْقُوتًا

“Indeed, the prayer has been decreed upon the believers at appointed times (mawqūt).” (Q. 4:103).

### **c. Al-'Asr**

Al-'Asr comes from the root 'a-s-r, meaning: (1) An absolute time (dahr); (2) The pressing of something until its contents are extracted; (3) Clinging or attaching to something. These meanings suggest that human activity is intrinsically linked to time and that people are expected to exert themselves mentally and physically over time.

Al-‘asr and its derivatives appear 5 times in the Qur’an, The five verses are spread across four surahs (three Meccan surahs and one Medinan surah):

1. With the meaning of extracting juice (Q.S. Yusuf [12]:36, 49).

إِنِّي أَرَانِي أَعْصِرُ خَمْرًا

“Indeed, I saw myself [in a dream] pressing wine.” (Q. 12:36)

2. Referring to stormy wind or pressure (Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]:266; An-Naba’ [78]:14).
3. As a reference to "time" or "age" (Q.S. Al-‘Asr [103]:1), where Allah swears by time.

وَالْعَصْرِ إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ

“By Time (al-‘aṣr). Indeed, mankind is in loss, except for those who have believed, done righteous deeds, and advised one another to truth and patience.” (Q. 103:1–3).

The Conclusions on the Relationship between These Time-Related Terms in the Qur’an:

The Qur’an presents various terms to describe and convey different dimensions and nuances of time. Among them are ajal, ad-dahr, waqt, and al-‘asr, each of which carries distinct meanings and implications. Understanding the interrelationships between these terms deepens one’s appreciation of how time is perceived in the Islamic worldview and how it shapes human responsibilities and divine decrees.

The term ajal signifies a fixed term or an appointed time for something to come to an end. This concept underscores the transient nature of all creation; everything that exists is subject to an eventual conclusion, whether it be human life, a contract, or the duration of a given event. The Qur’an emphasizes that nothing in this world is eternal except Allah, the Creator. Everything else is bound by limitations and will eventually meet its ajal. This concept cultivates awareness of mortality, the importance of time management, and the need to prepare for the afterlife.

On the other hand, the term ad-dahr refers to the vast, indefinite continuum of time. It encompasses time in its broadest sense, unbounded and immeasurable, stretching beyond human perception. The use of this term implies that everything that now exists was once non-existent, created within this unending expanse. This reinforces the idea that creation is rooted in temporality and that permanence belongs only to Allah. Ad-dahr reminds humans of their limited span within a much larger temporal reality.

The term *waqt* has a more practical and concrete application. It refers to specific, designated segments of time within which particular actions or responsibilities must be performed. For example, the term is often associated with the appointed times for daily prayers (*salat*), which are fixed and non-negotiable. It can also refer to deadlines for fulfilling obligations such as loan repayments, fasting periods, or other legal and religious requirements. *Waqt* reflects a disciplined structure in the Islamic way of life, encouraging believers to value and manage their time efficiently and purposefully.

The term *al-‘asr*, commonly translated as “the declining day” or “the passage of time,” carries profound moral and existential connotations. It suggests that every passing moment should be utilized wisely and diligently. *Surah Al-‘Asr* emphasizes the urgency of using time productively, engaging in righteous deeds, upholding truth, and persevering with patience. This term highlights the fleeting nature of time and serves as a call to action, reminding believers that every moment wasted is a lost opportunity for spiritual and worldly success.

In conclusion, these four Qur’anic terms, *ajal*, *ad-dahr*, *waqt*, and *al-‘asr*, are interrelated through their focus on the concept of time, yet each offers a distinct perspective. *Ad-dahr* denotes an infinite stretch of time beyond human grasp, while *ajal*, *waqt*, and *al-‘asr* refer to finite, measurable time frames. These include specific deadlines (such as the *iddah* or waiting period), contractual time limits, and obligatory prayer schedules. Together, these terms demonstrate the Qur’an’s multidimensional portrayal of time, encompassing both metaphysical depth and practical guidance, urging believers to live with purpose, urgency, and mindfulness.

### **The Nature of *Ajal* in the Qur’an and Its Categories**

After examining and observing all the verses that speak about *ajal*, the following picture emerges:

1. *Ajal* means death, sleep, destruction of the universe, the Day of Judgment, resurrection, the due date of a debt, the time for performing worship, the postponement of a matter, and the waiting period (*iddah*) for women.
2. The Qur’an explains that no human can delay or hasten the arrival of *ajal*. Another verse also records the request of disbelievers to Allah to postpone their death so they might do good deeds. However, Allah firmly responds that He will never delay it once its time has come.

3. There is a difference of opinion among the commentators in interpreting ajal in Surah al-An'am [6]:2. This is because the Qur'an indicates there are two different ajals. This can be seen from the wording in the verse:

The verse implies two kinds of ajal. This is also understood from the use of the indefinite form of the word ajal. According to linguistic rules, "When the same word is repeated in an indefinite form, the first and second instances carry different meanings.

Most commentators interpret the first ajal to mean "death" and the second as "resurrection." Others understand the first as sleep and the second as death. A different view is presented by al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, who states that ajal has two kinds: a general ajal whose time is unknown and an ajal that is with Allah, which is unchangeable due to its link to the phrase "with Him." The relationship between the first and second ajal is like that between conditional and absolute decrees. A conditional decree might not occur if the condition is not met, unlike an absolute decree, which will happen without condition. Referring to the verse, "For every term is a Book. Allah eliminates what He wills and confirms what He wills, and with Him is the Mother of the Book,"

Ṭabāṭabā'ī says that the ajal determined with Him refers to that which is recorded in the "Umm al-Kitab" (Preserved Tablet), while the ajal that can be erased or confirmed is called by him لوح المحفوظ. Ahl al-Sunnah refer to this as قضاء المعلق (conditional decree) and قضاء المبرم (absolute decree). Some divine decrees depend on conditions (like prayers), and some are unchangeable. The ajal of humans that is in the Umm al-Kitab is of a mubham (unclear/undisclosed) nature.

4. The concept of ajal in the Qur'an can be classified into several types:
  - a. Ajal means the due date of a debt (QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 282) The Qur'an states: "O you who believe, when you contract a debt for a fixed term, write it down..." According to al-Qurṭubī in his al-Jāmi'li Ahkām al-Qur'ān, citing Ibn Munzir, the phrase ilā ajalīn musamman indicates that transactions (such as buying, selling, or loans) that do not have a defined time are not permitted. This is reinforced by a hadith: "Whoever sells dates must specify the exact weight, measure, and time." (Reported by Ibn 'Abbas)
  - b. Ajal means the waiting period (iddah) of women (QS. Al-Ṭalāq [65]: 4) Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī explains that the waiting period for pregnant women is until they give

birth. This is agreed upon by scholars. For widows who are pregnant, scholars differ some believe the verse applies generally, including them.

- c. Ajal means the limit of fetal life (birth or death) (QS. Al-Ḥajj [22]: 5) M. Quraish Shihab explains in his tafsir that Allah has decreed for the mudghah (embryo) whether it will miscarry or continue developing until the determined time of birth (between six to nine months). Then the human is born, raised to maturity, and some die before reaching it, while others live long until old age and senility, unable to remember what they once knew.
- d. Ajal means the end of the ritual process of qurban (QS. Al-Ḥajj [22]: 33). The “ajal al-musammā” refers to the time of slaughtering the sacrificial animals during the days in Mina within the specified period.
- e. Ajal means the lifespan of the heavens and earth and their contents (QS. Al-Rūm [30]: 8). Al-Zamakhsharī interprets the verse to mean that the heavens and the earth were not created in vain but with purpose and wisdom. Their existence is not eternal they will end with the coming of the Day of Judgment.
- f. Ajal means the lifespan of a generation or civilization (QS. Yūnus [10]: 49) Ibn Kathīr states that every generation (or civilization) has an appointed term. When that term ends, it can neither be delayed nor hastened. Ṭanṭāwī similarly says that every nation and civilization has a limited lifespan in Allah’s knowledge. Once it ends, it cannot be brought forward or delayed.
- g. Ajal means the postponement of a matter (QS. An-Nisā’ [4]: 77). The disbelievers asked why fighting was made obligatory for them at that moment and not delayed. The verse replies that worldly pleasures are brief and the afterlife is better for the pious.

### **The Urgency of Understanding Ajal in Life**

The concept of ajal occupies an essential position in Islamic thought, as it represents the divine determination of the end of life and the temporality of human existence. It reminds humankind that nothing in this world is permanent, serving as a boundary that separates the Creator from His creations. This awareness demonstrates the weakness of created beings before the eternal and omnipotent Creator (al-‘Aziz, al-Hakim). Understanding ajal is therefore not merely a theological discourse but also a practical guide for human life.

## 1. Ajal and the Value of Time

At its core, ajal teaches that every moment of life is limited. Such an understanding cultivates an awareness of time management, responsibility, and the urgency of seizing opportunities before they expire. Scholars such as Rahman emphasize that the Qur'anic concept of ajal is not only about the inevitability of death but also about the reminder that human life is governed by divine order and purpose. When people realize that time is finite, procrastination and negligence can be minimized, leading to more meaningful outcomes in personal, social, and spiritual aspects of life.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) reinforced this principle through his advice: preserve youth before old age, health before sickness, wealth before poverty, free time before busyness, and life before death. This hadith can be regarded as a practical expression of Allah's command in QS. al-Ḥashr [59]:18,

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَانظُرُوا نَفْسَكُمْ مَا قَدَّمْتُمْ لِغَدٍ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ

“O you who believe! Fear Allah, and let every soul look to what it has put forth for tomorrow. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is Aware of what you do.”

which urges believers to prepare for what they will present for the Hereafter. In essence, both the Qur'an and hadith teach that understanding ajal nurtures a sense of accountability and motivates individuals to maximize their potential in the limited span of life granted to them.

## 2. The Transience of Blessings and Hardships

Another important implication of ajal is the recognition that every blessing enjoyed in this world has an end. Comfort, wealth, health, and social status are all temporary and subject to termination at the appointed time. This realization shapes human attitudes toward detachment, gratitude, and preparation. Ahmad and Hamid argue that the Qur'anic view of temporality instills a balanced perspective, preventing people from excessive attachment to worldly pleasures.

If this is the case for blessings, then the same principle applies to hardships. The Qur'an states, “For indeed, with hardship [will be] ease. Indeed, with hardship [will be] ease” (QS. al-Inshirāḥ [94]:5–6):

فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا

“For indeed, with hardship [will be] ease. Indeed, with hardship [will be] ease.”

This verse reflects the theological understanding that every trial has a limit, and beyond it lies relief. Recognizing the temporality of both blessings and difficulties fosters optimism and resilience. A believer facing hardship can endure it with patience and strive for solutions, knowing that the hardship will eventually end. This psychological resilience reflects a central purpose of ajal: to help humans face both prosperity and adversity with awareness of their fleeting nature.

### 3. Theological and Ethical Dimensions

Theologically, ajal situates human finitude within the framework of divine eternity. While human life is limited, Allah's existence and authority are absolute and everlasting. As noted by Nasr, this distinction establishes the relationship between servant and Lord: humans are temporary, while Allah is eternal. Such awareness encourages humility and the recognition of divine omnipotence.

Ethically, ajal becomes a reminder of moral responsibility. Since life is temporary, every action must be weighed carefully, for all deeds will be presented before Allah on the Day of Judgment. This ethical orientation discourages negligence and injustice, fostering instead integrity, accountability, and compassion in social relations.

The urgency of understanding ajal in life lies in its multidimensional role: theological, ethical, and practical. It teaches the temporality of worldly existence, the value of time, the transient nature of blessings and hardships, and the certainty of accountability before God. Such an understanding equips believers with optimism, discipline, and resilience in navigating life's challenges. More importantly, it instills humility before the eternal Creator, ensuring that human beings live purposefully and in alignment with divine guidance.

### 4. Ajal as a Source of Spiritual Strength and Eschatological Awareness

The realization of life's limitations brings humans closer to Allah. Ajal serves as a reminder that this world is only a temporary passage, while the true and eternal life awaits in the Hereafter. Allah says:

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ ۗ وَإِنَّمَا تُؤْفَقُونَ أَجُورَكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ

“Every soul will taste death. And you will only be given your [full] compensation on the Day of Resurrection...” (Qur'an, Āli 'Imrān 3:185).

Through this awareness, a Muslim strengthens their faith, increases righteous deeds, and prepares for the afterlife. The spirituality shaped by the understanding of ajal

protects humans from being deceived by worldly attachments and nurtures constant remembrance of eschatological realities in daily life.

### 5. Ajal as the Foundation of Social Ethics and Justice

The awareness of life's limitations also motivates humans to build more just and civilized social relations. Knowing that life is temporary discourages oppression, corruption, and the hoarding of wealth without concern for others. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

خَيْرُ النَّاسِ أَنْفَعُهُمْ لِلنَّاسِ

“The best of people are those who are most beneficial to others.” (Narrated by Ahmad).

This hadith shows that the consciousness of ajal drives people to fill their lives with positive contributions to society. Thus, ajal is not only an individual reflection but also a foundation for social ethics that fosters compassion, solidarity, and justice..

### Conclusions

Based on the explanations presented above, several points can be drawn as answers to the research questions as follows: (a) Etymologically, ajal refers to a predetermined time limit for something. In its application, the term al-ajal is used to indicate the end time of something, or to signify that everything must come to an end, such as the end of human life, the expiration of agreements, debts, and other matters. (b) The nature of ajal indicates that no human being can delay or hasten its arrival, and once its time has come, “no one can postpone it even for a moment, nor can they bring it forward.” (c) The urgency of understanding ajal can be summarized in at least three key points: (1) Ajal serves as a distinction between the Creator and His creation, emphasizing that nothing in this universe is eternal except Allah; (2) it teaches humans the importance of managing time in fulfilling responsibilities and making the most of opportunities before ajal arrives. Such awareness has the potential to reduce negligence and procrastination; (3) it fosters optimism, because ajal teaches that every hardship a person faces will eventually come to an end.

This research suggests that future scholars expand the thematic study of ajal by exploring its interconnection with other Qur'anic concepts such as qadar (divine decree), rizq (sustenance), and sabr (patience). Integrating interdisciplinary approaches from theology, psychology, sociology, and ethics may provide a more holistic understanding of how ajal influences human behavior, spirituality, and social structures. In addition, the pedagogical integration of ajal into Islamic education is recommended, as it can enhance students' appreciation of time management, accountability, and resilience.

The implications of this study are threefold. Theologically, the understanding of ajal reinforces human humility before the eternal and omnipotent Creator, reminding believers of their temporality and ultimate accountability. Ethically, it provides a framework for cultivating discipline, responsibility, and a proactive attitude in fulfilling one's duties. Practically, the concept of ajal can be applied in personal and social life as a motivation to optimize time, reduce procrastination, and maintain resilience in facing challenges. These implications affirm that the Qur'anic concept of ajal is not merely a doctrinal teaching but a transformative principle that shapes human character and guides meaningful living in the temporal world.

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