

A GIFT FOR YOU · FROM DEEN2U.COM

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Surah Al-Anbiya

The Prophets · Makki · 112 ayat — reflections on surah
21 of the Qur'an

QURAN

deen2u.com

One-stop center for Islamic resources · free to share
September 2026 · v1.304.1

CONTENTS

Surah Al-Anbiya

1	The surah in brief	What it is, when it came, what it sets out to do
2	Its themes	5 threads running through the surah
3	Key verses	4 passages, with a reflection on each
4	Reading it closely	4 sections
5	Carrying it	4 things to take from it

الأنبياء — Al-Anbiya, “The Prophets”. Surah 21 of 114, revealed in Makkah, 112 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/21/.

ONE

The surah in brief

A survey of the prophets before Muhammad ﷺ, all delivering the one message of tawhid, that affirms the coming Judgment, God's absolute oneness, and His mercy, reassuring the believers that no messenger was left unaided.

Al-Anbiya warns that the reckoning has drawn near while people remain heedless and play (21:1), then presents a rapid gallery of prophets to show that revelation has always carried one message. Ibrahim shatters his people's idols and reasons with them; Nuh, Dawud and Sulayman, Ayyub, Yunus, Zakariyya and Maryam each appear briefly, united by their calling upon God in hardship and His response. The surah argues tawhid through nature and logic — had there been other gods, the order of the heavens and earth would collapse (21:22) — and closes affirming the Prophet as a mercy to all creation (21:107). Its rhythm moves from the negligence of the deniers to the earnest supplications of the prophets, contrasting two ways of meeting the same approaching Hour.

TWO

Its themes

- Nearness of the reckoning
- Unity of the prophetic message
- Rational proofs of tawhid
- Prophets' supplication and rescue
- Universal mercy of the Prophet

THREE

Key verses

If there were, in the heavens and the earth, other gods besides Allah, there would have been confusion in both! but glory to Allah, the Lord of the Throne: (High is He) above what they attribute to Him!

Qur'an 21:22

'Had there been gods besides God, both would have gone to ruin' — al-Tabari presents this as the argument from mutual exclusion: two ultimate wills cannot govern one ordered cosmos.

Do not the Unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one unit of creation), before we clove them asunder? We made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe?

Qur'an 21:30

The heavens and earth were once joined then parted, and 'every living thing is made of water' — the mufasssirun read this as a sign inviting reflection on origins that points back to a single Maker.

And remember Zun-nun, when he departed in wrath: He imagined that We had no power over him! But he cried through the depths of darkness, "There is no god but thou: glory to thee: I was indeed wrong!"

Qur'an 21:87

Yunus's cry from the darkness — 'there is no deity but You, glory be to You, I was among the wrongdoers' — is presented by Ibn Kathir as the supplication of distress that God never leaves unanswered.

We sent thee not, but as a Mercy for all creatures.

Qur'an 21:107

'We sent you only as a mercy to the worlds' — al-Qurtubi notes the mercy extends even to those who reject him, since his coming lifted the world from the darkness of ignorance.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Sūrat al-Anbiyā', "The Prophets," is a Makkan surah addressed to a people who kept the Hereafter at arm's length even as it drew near. Its very first verse sets the alarm: "The reckoning of mankind has drawn near, yet they turn away in heedlessness" (21:1). The surah is a sustained answer to a society that treated the message as a passing amusement, demanded miracles it had no intention of believing, and mocked the idea that they would be raised and judged.

The surah is named for the long procession of prophets that fills its second half — sixteen or so are mentioned, from Mūsā and Ibrāhīm to Ayyūb, Yūnus, and Zakariyyā. But it is not a set of biographies. Each prophet appears briefly, almost as a single luminous scene, and the cumulative effect is an argument: that the messengers were one brotherhood carrying one message, all of them human servants of the one God, all of them tried and then delivered. The surah gathers them as witnesses.

Its character is urgent and argumentative, moving quickly between the folly of the deniers and the dignity of the believers, between the shaking of the Last Day and the tender scenes of prophets calling on their Lord. It builds toward two of the Qur'ān's most quoted lines — the declaration that the Prophet ﷺ was sent as nothing but a mercy to all the worlds (21:107), and the promise that the righteous servants shall inherit the earth (21:105).

How the surah unfolds

The surah opens by confronting the heedlessness of those who face an approaching reckoning while treating revelation as a joke and the Prophet ﷺ as merely a bewitched man (21:1–10). It reminds them of the generations destroyed before them and how, when God's punishment came, they fled and were told there is no escape (21:11–15). It then lays out the foundations of belief: that God did not create the heavens and earth in play (21:16), that He hurls truth against falsehood and crushes it (21:18), and — the decisive argument of tawḥīd — that "had there been within the heavens and earth gods besides God, they both would have fallen into ruin" (21:22). The order of the cosmos is itself proof of the oneness of its Maker.

The surah answers the specific slander that God has taken the angels as daughters or offspring, insisting the angels are honoured servants who do not speak ahead of Him and act only by His command (21:26–29). It then turns to signs in nature — the heavens and earth once joined and then parted, every living thing made from water, the mountains set firm, the sky a protected canopy, the night and day, the sun and moon each swimming in an orbit (21:30–33) — as evidence for a purposeful Creator. It reminds every soul that death is certain and life is a trial "with evil and with good as a test" (21:35), and it rebukes the deniers who mock the warning yet will one day be unable to ward the Fire from their faces (21:36–41).

The second movement is the gallery of prophets, introduced by the reminder that God gave Mūsā and Hārūn the criterion and light (21:48). Ibrāhīm receives the fullest treatment: his reasoned rejection of his people's idols, his shattering of all but the largest

so they would confront the absurdity of worshipping what cannot help itself, and God's command to the fire, "Be coolness and safety upon Ibrāhīm" (21:69). Then come Lūṭ, Nūḥ, and Dāwūd and Sulaymān with their God-given judgement and knowledge, the mountains and birds glorifying with Dāwūd, the wind subjected to Sulaymān (21:74–82). Ayyūb calls out in his affliction and is answered and restored (21:83–84); Ismā'īl, Idrīs, and Dhū al-Kifl are named among the patient and righteous (21:85–86). Yūnus — Dhū al-Nūn — cries from the darkness of the whale's belly, "There is no deity except You; exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers" (21:87), and is saved, the surah adding that thus God saves the believers. Zakariyyā is granted Yaḥyā, and Maryam and her son are made a sign for the worlds (21:89–91). The surah then declares that all these were one community whose Lord is one (21:92), warns of the Day of Gog and Magog and the terror of the Hour (21:96–104), and closes with the promise that the righteous will inherit the earth (21:105), the mission of the Prophet ﷺ as a mercy to all worlds (21:107), and a final call to submit to the one God (21:108–112).

The major themes, in depth

The central theme is the oneness of God argued from the order of creation. The surah offers what later theologians called the "argument from mutual exclusion": if the heavens and earth had more than one god, the two would have collapsed into ruin (21:22), for competing wills cannot sustain a single, coherent order. The flawless, unbroken functioning of the cosmos — sun and moon in their orbits, the sky held as a canopy, the earth anchored by mountains, everything alive drawn from water (21:30–33) — is presented not as neutral fact but as a signature.

Ibn Kathir and al-Sa'dī both draw out how the surah keeps pointing from the design to the Designer, insisting that a universe this purposeful cannot be the product of many hands or of none. This tawhīd is then defended against every dilution: God has no offspring, and even the angels, whom the pagans imagined as His daughters, are servants who tremble in awe (21:28).

A second theme is the unity of the prophetic message across all the messengers. The surah's procession of prophets is capped by the verse "Indeed this, your religion, is one religion, and I am your Lord, so worship Me" (21:92). Every prophet named — however different his circumstances — is shown calling to the same God and living the same servanthood. Ibrāhīm breaks idols with argument; Nūḥ is delivered from grief; Ayyūb bears loss with patience; Yūnus repents from the depths; Zakariyyā prays for a child. The variety of their trials underlines the constancy of their creed. The surah thereby dismantles the Quraysh's assumption that Muḥammad ﷺ was a novelty; he is the latest voice in an ancient, single chorus.

A third theme is the reality of resurrection and the seriousness of life as a test. The surah opens and closes on the nearness of the reckoning. It states flatly that the world was not made in vain (21:16) and that "every soul will taste death; and We test you with evil and with good as a trial" (21:35). It portrays the deniers' future regret — their inability to shield their faces from the Fire when it comes suddenly (21:39–40) — and paints the Day when the heavens are rolled up like a scroll (21:104). Against the pagan

attitude that this life is all there is and its pleasures a game, the surah insists that existence is meaningful, accountable, and moving swiftly toward its close.

A fourth theme, resolving the whole, is God's mercy toward His servants — mercy shown in the deliverance of every prophet and crowned in the mission of Muḥammad ﷺ. Notice how each prophetic vignette ends not in tragedy but in rescue: the fire is cooled for Ibrāhīm, Ayyūb is healed and given back his family, Yūnus is drawn from the darkness, Nūḥ is saved from the great distress. The surah generalises from these: "And thus do We save the believers" (21:88). It then universalises mercy itself in the person of the final Prophet — "We have not sent you except as a mercy to the worlds" (21:107) — and promises that the servants who are righteous will inherit the earth, echoing the Psalms (21:105). The surah's answer to a heedless, mocking people is not merely threat but the offer of the same deliverance that met every prophet who turned to God.

Points of reflection

Al-Anbiyā' shakes the reader out of the heedlessness it opens by naming. Its first verse — the reckoning has drawn near while people turn away (21:1) — is a mirror for every generation that lets the certainty of death and judgement slip to the margins of a busy life. The surah asks the believer to feel the nearness of the Hour as a present reality that reorders priorities now, not as an abstraction to be dealt with later.

It also offers the prayer of Yūnus as a lifeline for anyone in distress. From inside layered darkness, having done wrong, he calls out with pure tawḥīd and confession — "there is no deity

except You; exalted are You; indeed I was of the wrongdoers" (21:87) — and is delivered. The Prophet ﷺ taught that no distressed believer prays with these words but that God relieves him. The surah embeds it in a whole pattern: every prophet's rescue teaches that the door of return is never shut to one who turns.

Finally, it invites the believer to see the Prophet ﷺ, and the faith he brought, as mercy — mercy to the worlds (21:107). This is a corrective to any grim or merely fearful religiosity. The surah's God is one, its message ancient and single, its Day of Judgement real, and its deepest word about itself is *rahma*. To live by al-Anbiyā' is to worship the one God with the awe its cosmic arguments inspire and the hope its rescues promise, and to carry into the world the mercy that the final Prophet embodied.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Every prophet preached one God; difference of era never changed the core call.
2. In the tightest darkness, admitting one's wrong and glorifying God is the door out.
3. Creation itself argues against many gods for those who reflect.
4. The Prophet's coming is mercy first, and its light reaches even his opponents.

Where this reading draws from. Ibn Kathir, al-Tabari, al-Qurtubi, al-Sa'di. A summary is not a tafsir: for the verse-by-verse treatment go to the works themselves, or to the close studies at deen2u.com/tadabbur/.