

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Surah Al-Mu'minun

The Believers · Makki · 118 ayat — reflections on surah
23 of the Qur'an

QURAN

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September 2026 · v1.305.0

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Surah Al-Mu'minun

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المؤمنون — Al-Mu'minun, "The Believers". Surah 23 of 114, revealed in Makkah, 118 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/23/.

ONE

The surah in brief

Opening with the traits that guarantee the believers' success, chiefly humble, focused prayer, the surah contrasts them with the arrogant rejecters, tracing creation and the prophets to prove Resurrection and the accountability that follows.

Al-Mu'minun begins by declaring the believers successful and then itemizing the traits that earn that success — humility in prayer, turning from idle talk, purifying charity, guarding chastity, keeping trusts and covenants, and safeguarding prayer (23:1–11). It moves to the wonder of the human being shaped from a drop through the stages of creation (23:12–14), then recounts Nuh, Musa, and Isa to show one unbroken community of faith fractured by later people into sects. The surah presses the reality of death and the barrier (barzakh) that blocks any return (23:99–100), and ends by asking whether they thought they were created purposelessly (23:115). Al-Sa'di reads it as a single arc: the qualities that lead to felicity, the signs that make faith reasonable, and the accountability that makes it urgent.

TWO

Its themes

- Marks of the successful believer
- Khushu in prayer
- The stages of human creation
- One community, many sects
- Death, barzakh, and accountability

THREE

Key verses

Those who humble themselves in their prayers;

Qur'an 23:2

Success is tied first to 'those who are humble in their prayer' — the mufasssirun make khushu, presence of heart, the sign that distinguishes living worship from empty motion.

Then We made the sperm into a clot of congealed blood; then of that clot We made a (foetus) lump; then we made out of that lump bones and clothed the bones with flesh; then we developed out of it another creature. So blessed be Allah, the best to create!

Qur'an 23:14

After tracing the embryo's stages God says 'so blessed is God, the best of creators' — al-Qurtubi notes the verse turns the study of our own bodies into praise.

(In Falsehood will they be) Until, when death comes to one of them, he says: "O my Lord! send me back (to life),-

Qur'an 23:99

The dying wrongdoer begs to return to do good, but a barzakh stands until resurrection — Ibn Kathir reads this as the closing of the door of deeds at death, a warning to act now.

"Did ye then think that We had created you in jest, and that ye would not be brought back to Us (for account)?"

Qur'an 23:115

'Did you think We created you aimlessly, and that you would not be returned to Us?' — al-Sa'di calls this the question that overturns a purposeless view of life.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Sūrat al-Mu'minūn, "The Believers," is a Makkan surah, and it is one of the most beautifully structured chapters of its period. It opens by announcing the success of the believers and immediately listing the qualities that earn it, and it closes, one hundred and eighteen verses later, with the ruin of those who thought they were created for nothing. Between that promise and that warning lies a sustained meditation on why the human being exists and where he is headed.

The surah takes its name from its very first word — qad aflaḥa al-mu'minūn, "Successful indeed are the believers" (23:1). 'Umar reported that when these opening verses were revealed, the Prophet ﷺ said that ten verses had come down by which, whoever fulfilled them, would enter Paradise, and the tradition preserves the awe with which the early community received this portrait of the redeemed soul. The surah's character is confident and hopeful at its edges and searching in its middle, moving from the felicity of faith to the folly of denial and back to the reckoning that separates the two.

Its structure is deliberate and satisfying. It begins with the inner life of the believer, turns to the signs of God in creation and in the human body, marshals a line of prophets who all met the same denial, exposes the arguments of the deniers, and ends on the courtroom of the Hereafter. The whole surah is

bracketed by the theme of falāḥ — true success — and asks the reader, again and again, whether they are building toward it or squandering it.

How the surah unfolds

The surah opens with the charter of the successful believer (23:1–11): those who are humble in their prayer, who turn away from idle talk, who are active in zakāt, who guard their chastity, who keep their trusts and covenants, and who carefully maintain their prayers — these are the inheritors who will abide in the highest Garden, al-Firdaws. It is a compact portrait of a life organised around God, moving from the private act of prayer outward through speech, wealth, sexual conduct, and social trust, and back to prayer as the frame that holds it all.

From the ideal believer the surah turns to the God who made him, tracing the stages of human creation with striking precision — from an extract of clay, to a drop lodged in a secure place, to a clinging clot, to a lump, then bones clothed in flesh, "then We produced it as another creation; so blessed is God, the best of creators" (23:12–14). It moves outward to the heavens, the rain sent down in measure, the gardens of date-palms and vines, the olive tree of Sinai, and the cattle from which we drink and eat (23:17–22) — signs of a purposeful, generous Maker. Then it recounts the prophets. Nūḥ preaches for lifetimes and is met with the same charge of being "only a man like yourselves" seeking superiority, until the flood delivers him in the ark (23:23–30). A later generation raises another messenger and rejects him with the identical objection — denying the resurrection, asking how they could be brought

back after becoming dust and bones — and they too are seized (23:31–41). Generations rise and fall, messengers come one after another, and "every time there came to a nation its messenger, they denied him" (23:44). Mūsā and Hārūn are sent to Pharaoh with clear signs and dismissed with arrogance (23:45–48); ʿĪsā and his mother are made a sign and given refuge (23:50).

The surah then addresses the messengers collectively, commanding wholesome food and righteous deeds and affirming that this single community's religion is one, though people broke into sects, each rejoicing in what it had (23:51–54). It punctures the illusion that worldly wealth is a sign of God's approval (23:55–56) and paints instead the true elect: those who live in awe of their Lord, believe in His signs, do not associate partners with Him, and give what they give while their hearts tremble because they are returning to Him — "it is those who hasten to good deeds, and they are foremost in them" (23:57–61). It insists God burdens no soul beyond its capacity and warns the heedless whose hearts are veiled from this (23:62–63). It then confronts the deniers directly — their crying out when punishment seizes their affluent ones (23:64), their turning on their heels when the verses were recited, their contempt (23:66–67) — and reasons with them: had the truth followed their desires, the heavens and earth would have been corrupted (23:71). It closes on the Hereafter with unforgettable force: the disbeliever's plea at death, "My Lord, send me back, that I might do righteousness in what I left behind" — refused, for it is merely a word he speaks (23:99–100); the blast of the Horn and the end of all kinship on that Day (23:101); the weighing of deeds (23:102–103); and God's own question to those in the

Fire, "Did you think that We created you uselessly, and that you would not be returned to Us?" (23:115). It ends by exalting God, the Sovereign, the Truth, and warning that the deniers will not succeed (23:116–118).

The major themes, in depth

The governing theme is *falāḥ* — real, lasting success — and the specific character that secures it. The surah does not leave "the believer" as an abstraction; it defines him by seven concrete traits (23:2–9): *khushūʿ* in prayer, turning from vain talk, giving *zakāt*, guarding chastity, honouring trusts and pledges, and guarding the prayers. Al-Saʿdī observes that the list begins and ends with prayer, as if prayer were the two banks between which the whole river of a righteous life flows. The point is that faith is not a claim but a form of life with an inner and outer shape, and that the Garden of Firdaws is inherited by those in whom this shape is real (23:10–11). The surah then reinforces it near its centre with a second, subtler portrait of the elect — those who give charity with trembling hearts, fearful even in their good deeds because they know they are returning to God (23:60) — teaching that true piety is marked not by self-satisfaction but by humble awe.

A second theme is the argument for resurrection from the wonder of human creation and the order of the world. The surah's account of the embryo's stages (23:12–14) is offered as evidence: a being fashioned so deliberately, brought from clay to a fully formed "other creation," is not the work of a Maker who would then let him vanish meaninglessly. "Then indeed, after that, you are to die; then indeed, on the Day of Resurrection,

you will be resurrected" (23:15–16). The deniers' whole case rests on the incredulity that dust and bones could live again (23:35, 23:82), and the surah answers by pointing to the God who made them from less than dust the first time, and who sends water from the sky and revives the earth. The refusal to believe in resurrection is exposed as a refusal to reason from what one already sees.

A third theme is the unbroken unity of the prophetic call and the monotony of its rejection. The surah lines up Nūḥ, the unnamed messenger after him, Mūsā and Hārūn, and ʿĪsā, and the deniers in every age say almost the same words: he is only a human like us, he seeks superiority, we will not be raised (23:24, 23:33–37). This repetition is the argument. It shows that disbelief is not a considered response to evidence but a recurring posture of the arrogant heart, and that the messengers form "one community" with "one Lord" (23:52). The tragedy the surah names is that people "cut off their affair among themselves into sects, each faction rejoicing in what it has" (23:53) — the fragmenting of the one true call into rival self-satisfied camps.

A fourth theme is the seriousness of purpose behind human existence, delivered most piercingly at the end. The surah refuses the notion that life is idle or without consequence. It shows the deniers begging, at the moment of death, to be returned so they can finally do good (23:99–100) — the most futile of wishes, because the time for deeds is now, not then. And it culminates in God's own rhetorical question to the damned: "Did you then think that We created you in vain, and that you would not be returned to Us?" (23:115). The whole surah

has been building to this. Its answer is that no, the human being was made for a reckoning, and the successful are precisely those who lived every day in the light of it, while the losers are those who "took My verses in ridicule" and imagined existence was a game (23:110–111).

Points of reflection

Al-Mu'minūn hands the believer a practical mirror. Its opening list (23:2–9) is not poetry to admire but a checklist to live: Is my prayer attentive or absent? Do I turn from vanity or drown in it? Do I keep my trusts and pledges? The surah promises that whoever embodies these will inherit the highest Paradise, and it quietly insists that faith is measured by these habits, not by mere self-description.

It also teaches a humbler, more trembling piety through the striking verse about those who "give what they give while their hearts are fearful" (23:60). The Prophet ﷺ explained that these are not sinners but the righteous who fast, pray, and give, yet fear their offering may not be accepted. The surah thus cures both complacency and despair: it asks the believer to act with sincerity and then to hope, not to presume, remembering that all of us are returning to God.

Most of all, the surah refuses to let life be trivial. Its final question — "Did you think We created you in vain?" (23:115) — is one to carry through ordinary days. If existence has a purpose and an end, then the dying man's futile wish to be sent back (23:99) is really an argument for urgency now. The surah closes by exalting God as "the Sovereign, the Truth" and declaring plainly that the deniers will not succeed (23:116–117), leaving the

reader with the same choice it opened with: to be among the successful believers, or among those who wake too late to the seriousness of the trust they were given.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Felicity has a concrete profile: humble prayer, clean speech, guarded chastity, kept trusts.
2. Studying how we are formed should deepen awe, not just knowledge.
3. Death seals the account; no wish to 'go back and fix it' will be granted.
4. We were made for a purpose and a return, so life is not a game without stakes.

Where this reading draws from. Ibn Kathir, al-Sa'di, al-Qurtubi, al-Tabari. 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/.