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Surah Luqman

Luqman · Makki · 34 ayat — reflections on surah 31 of the Qur'an

QURAN

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CONTENTS

Surah Luqman

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

لقمان — Luqman, “Luqman”. Surah 31 of 114, revealed in Makkah, 34 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/31/.

ONE

The surah in brief

The wise counsel of Luqman to his son forms the heart of the surah: shun shirk, honor parents, uphold prayer, enjoin good, and stay humble, framed by God's boundless knowledge and the futility of worshipping anything besides Him.

Luqman centers on wisdom (hikma) granted to a righteous man and the counsel he gives his son, making it a manual of faith and character across generations. Luqman's first advice is against shirk, called 'a tremendous wrong' (31:13); he then urges gratitude, teaches that kindness to parents stops short of obeying them in disobedience to God (31:14–15), warns that God sees even a mustard seed hidden in a rock, and commands prayer, enjoining good, forbidding wrong, and patient endurance. He closes with manners: do not turn your cheek to people in scorn, do not walk with conceit, be modest in gait and lower your voice (31:18–19). The surah frames this counsel with signs of creation and ends with the five matters known to God alone (31:34). Al-Sa'di reads Luqman's words as wisdom in its truest sense — right belief expressed in humble, upright conduct.

OCCASIONS OF REVELATION

Why it was revealed

These are the occasions (asbāb al-nuzūl) that the authentic collections narrate for verses of this surah. An occasion explains a verse; it does not limit its meaning.

Qur'an 31:13

When 6:82 (those who believe and do not mix their belief with wrong) was revealed, the companions asked who among them had not done wrong. In this chain, Allah revealed that joining others in worship with Allah is a great wrong.

"the companions of Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) asked, "Who is amongst us who had not done injustice (wrong)?" Allah revealed"

'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud · Sahih al-Bukhari 32

TWO

Its themes

- The gift of wisdom
- A father's counsel to his son
- Tawhid as freedom from shirk
- Kindness to parents within limits
- Humility in manner and speech

THREE

Key verses

Behold, Luqman said to his son by way of instruction: "O my son! join not in worship (others) with Allah: for false worship is indeed the highest wrong-doing."

Qur'an 31:13

'Do not associate anything with God; shirk is a tremendous wrong' — Ibn Kathir notes Luqman leads with the greatest matter, since all right conduct rests on right belief.

And We have enjoined on man (to be good) to his parents: in travail upon travail did his mother bear him, and in years twain was his weaning: (hear the command), "Show gratitude to Me and to thy parents: to Me is (thy final) Goal."

Qur'an 31:14

Gratitude to God is joined with gratitude to parents, especially the mother who bore hardship — al-Qurtubi reads the pairing as showing how heavily God weighs a parent's due.

"And swell not thy cheek (for pride) at men, nor walk in insolence through the earth; for Allah loveth not any arrogant boaster."

Qur'an 31:18

'Do not turn your cheek away from people in scorn, nor walk the earth exultantly' — al-Sa'di reads this as the outward sign of an inward humility that wisdom produces.

Verily the knowledge of the Hour is with Allah (alone). It is He Who sends down rain, and He Who knows what is in the wombs. Nor does any one know what it is that he will earn on the morrow: Nor does any one know in what land he is to die. Verily with Allah is full knowledge and He is acquainted (with all things).

Qur'an 31:34

Five matters lie with God alone, including the Hour and what a womb holds — the mufasssirun cite this as the boundary of human knowledge and a call to humility before the Unseen.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Surah Luqman is a Makkan surah of thirty-four verses, and it breathes the atmosphere of Makkah: an argument for the one true God addressed to a people who acknowledged Him as Creator yet clung to their idols. It opens with the disconnected letters Alif-Lam-Mim and calls itself the verses of the Wise Book (al-kitab al-hakim), a Book that is itself wisdom and that gives wisdom to those who receive it. Its guidance, the opening tells us, is for the muhsinun — those who worship with excellence, establish prayer, give zakat, and hold firm certainty about the Hereafter.

The surah takes its name from a striking figure: Luqman, a sage of deep piety whom Allah honoured with hikma — wisdom. The majority of the classical scholars, including Ibn Kathir, hold that he was a righteous wise man rather than a prophet, though a minority mentioned prophethood. He was, by the reports, a man of dark complexion, perhaps of Abyssinian or Nubian origin, known not for lineage or wealth but for the soundness of his heart and speech. The surah places at its centre the counsel this father gave his son — and by doing so it makes clear that true nobility is the nobility of wisdom and gratitude, available to anyone, not the pride of ancestry the Quraysh prized. The mood throughout is calm, warm, and instructive: less thunder than Surah al-An'am, more the tone of a wise elder drawing the listener gently toward his Lord.

How the surah unfolds

The surah opens by dividing humanity by their response to revelation. On one side stand the muhsinun who follow guidance and prosper (31:1–5). On the other stands a telling character: the man who buys lahw al-hadith — idle, diverting talk — to lead people astray from the path of Allah and who treats the verses with mockery (31:6–7). Many of the early scholars connected this to those who bought singing girls and amusements to pull people from the Qur'an, but the deeper point is the human tendency to trade the weighty word of God for entertainment that costs the soul. Against him the promise of Gardens is set for the believers (31:8–9).

The surah then turns to creation as evidence: Allah raised the heavens without pillars you can see, set firm mountains on the earth, scattered every kind of creature, sent down water and made pairs of noble plants grow (31:10–11). Look, it says, at what God has made — now show me what your idols have created. Nothing.

At this pivot the surah introduces Luqman, to whom Allah gave wisdom, and the first fruit of that wisdom is gratitude: whoever is grateful is grateful for his own good (31:12). Then comes the heart of the surah — Luqman's counsel to his son (31:13–19). He begins with the greatest matter: do not associate partners with Allah, for shirk is a monstrous wrong (zulm 'azim). The surah interjects, in Allah's own voice, the command to honour parents — carried in weakness, weaned over two years — yet with a firm boundary: if they strive to make you commit shirk, do not obey them, though keep their company in this world with kindness (31:14–15). Luqman resumes: nothing is too small or too hidden

for God — a deed the weight of a mustard seed, inside a rock, in the heavens or the earth, God will bring it forth (31:16). Establish prayer, enjoin good and forbid evil, and bear patiently what befalls you (31:17). Do not turn your cheek from people in scorn, do not walk the earth in self-delight, be moderate in your stride and lower your voice — the ugliest of voices is the braying of the donkey (31:18–19).

From this intimate counsel the surah widens again to the ingratitude of the people: Allah has subjected all that is in the heavens and earth for them, yet some dispute about God without knowledge, and when told to follow what God revealed they answer that they will follow what they found their fathers doing (31:20–21). It contrasts the one who surrenders his face to God, holding to the firmest handhold, with the one whose disbelief should not grieve the Prophet (31:22–24). It presses the famous concession: ask them who created the heavens and earth and they will say 'Allah' — so their own tongues convict their idolatry (31:25). Then a soaring image of God's boundless words: if every tree were a pen and the sea, replenished sevenfold, were ink, the words of God would not run dry (31:27).

The surah closes on the sovereignty and knowledge of God: He merges night into day, subjects sun and moon, and only He is the Truth while all they call upon is falsehood (31:28–30). Ships run on the sea by His grace; when waves overshadow them people call on God sincerely, then forget once safe (31:31–32). The final two verses ring like a bell: fear a Day when no parent avails his child nor child his parent; let not the deceiver deceive you about God (31:33). And the last verse names the five keys of

the unseen God keeps to Himself — knowledge of the Hour, the sending of rain, what is in the wombs, what a soul will earn tomorrow, and the land in which it will die (31:34).

The major themes, in depth

Wisdom as the fruit of gratitude and tawhid. The surah defines wisdom not as cleverness but as a rightly ordered heart. The very first thing said of Luqman's hikma is that he was grateful, and the first counsel he gives is to refuse shirk. This ordering is deliberate: to a wise person, the fact that everything one has is a gift makes gratitude the only sane response, and gratitude directed to anyone but the Giver is a lie — the 'great wrong' of associating partners. Everything else Luqman teaches, prayer, moral courage, patience, humility of gait and voice, grows from these two roots. The surah thus reframes the Makkan debate: the idolaters are not merely mistaken theologically, they are ungrateful, taking the gifts of the one Provider while bowing to stones that made nothing.

The transmission of faith across generations. Luqman's advice is a father speaking to a son he loves — ya bunayya, 'O my dear little son,' repeated tenderly. The surah models how iman is handed down: not by force but by heartfelt, patient counsel that begins with the creed, roots it in the constant awareness that God sees the mustard-seed deed, and expresses it in daily conduct and character. The insertion of the command about parents in the middle of the counsel is masterful — it teaches the son to honour the very father instructing him, while

drawing the one red line that even a beloved parent cannot cross: obedience stops where obedience to God is threatened. Faith is intimate and familial, yet God comes first.

God's knowledge and the smallness of nothing before Him. A thread runs from Luqman's mustard seed (31:16) to the closing five keys of the unseen (31:34): God's knowledge is total, exhaustive, and utterly beyond the reach of any creature. This is meant both to comfort and to sober. It comforts, because no good deed done in secret is ever lost. It sobers, because no wrong is ever truly hidden and no soul knows what tomorrow holds or where its own grave will be. The surah wants the listener to live inside that awareness — an-Sa'di notes that this constant sense of being seen is the soul of taqwa.

Points of reflection

Luqman's surah asks us to measure our lives by wisdom rather than by noise. In an age drowning in lahwa al-hadith — endless diverting talk and amusement — the surah's warning against buying entertainment that leads the heart away from God reads as freshly as ever. It calls us to guard what we let occupy our attention, because attention is the currency of the soul.

It calls the reader to become a certain kind of person: grateful before God, gentle and unhurried with people, moderate in bearing, brave enough to enjoin good and forbid evil, and patient under whatever comes. The details are small and human — do not turn your face away in contempt, do not swagger, lower your voice — but they add up to a portrait of dignity without arrogance, the outward form of a heart that knows it stands before God.

Finally, the surah leaves us with the discipline of humility before the unseen. We do not know tomorrow, we do not know the hour of our death, we do not know the fate of the child in the womb. The mature response is neither anxiety nor denial but trust: to plant good deeds, however small, knowing that the God who counts the mustard seed forgets nothing, and to let no deceiver — least of all our own ego — talk us out of that reverence.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Ground your children in tawhid first; character grows from correct belief.
2. Honor parents deeply, yet never obey any creature in disobedience to God.
3. Wisdom shows in humble carriage, gentle speech, and a face free of scorn.
4. Accept that some knowledge belongs to God alone, and rest in that humility.

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/.