

A GIFT FOR YOU · FROM DEEN2U.COM

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Surah Az-Zumar

The Troops · Makki · 75 ayat — reflections on surah 39
of the Qur'an

QURAN

deen2u.com

One-stop center for Islamic resources · free to share
September 2026 · v1.305.2

CONTENTS

Surah Az-Zumar

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	6 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

الزمر — Az-Zumar, "The Troops". Surah 39 of 114, revealed in Makkah, 75 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/39/.

ONE

The surah in brief

Tawhid al-ikhlas: worship must be devoted to Allah alone with sincerity. The surah contrasts the fate of two 'troops' driven to Paradise and Hell, and urges the sinner never to despair of Allah's mercy, for He forgives all sins.

Az-Zumar circles around a single command repeated in fresh forms: worship Allah with religion made purely His (39:2-3). It answers the polytheist excuse that idols merely bring one 'closer' to God, and contrasts the grateful with the ungrateful, the one who prostrates through the night with the one heedless of the Hereafter. The surah takes its name from its closing scenes, where humanity is driven in troops toward the Fire or toward the Garden (39:71, 73). Between warning and warning it plants one of the Qur'an's widest doors of hope: never despair of Allah's mercy (39:53).

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 39:53

The same pagans who asked about expiation for past murders and adultery were answered with 25:68, and with this verse: "O My slaves who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah."

"And there was also revealed:-- 'Say: O My slaves who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah"

Ibn 'Abbas · Sahih al-Bukhari 4810

TWO

Its themes

- Sincere devotion (ikhlas)
- Tawhid vs. shirk
- Hope and repentance
- Gratitude
- The two destinies
- Knowledge and reverence

THREE

Key verses

Is it not to Allah that sincere devotion is due? But those who take for protectors other than Allah (say): "We only serve them in order that they may bring us nearer to Allah." Truly Allah will judge between them in that wherein they differ. But Allah guides not such as are false and ungrateful.

Qur'an 39:3

The mushrikun did not deny Allah; they diluted Him, worshipping others 'only to bring us nearer.' Al-Sa'di notes the verse strips away that pretext: religion belongs to Allah alone, and any intercession must be by His leave, not by our invention.

Is one who worships devoutly during the hour of the night prostrating himself or standing (in adoration), who takes heed of the Hereafter, and who places his hope in the Mercy of his Lord – (like one who does not)? Say: "Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know? It is those who are endued with understanding that receive admonition.

Qur'an 39:9

Ibn Kathir reads the contrast between the one who stands in prayer through the night and the heedless as the difference between those who know and those who do not — reverence, not mere information, is the knowledge that counts.

Is one whose heart Allah has opened to Islam, so that he has received Enlightenment from Allah, (no better than one hard-hearted)? Woe to those whose hearts are hardened against celebrating the praises of Allah! they are manifestly wandering (in error)!

Qur'an 39:22

A chest opened to Islam is itself a light; Ibn Kathir cites the report that when the Prophet was asked about this, he said light entering the heart makes it expand, and its sign is turning from the abode of delusion to the eternal home.

Say: "O my Servants who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah: for Allah forgives all sins: for He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

Qur'an 39:53

Addressed to the servants who 'transgressed against themselves,' this is the widest mercy in the Book — Allah forgives all sins for the one who turns. The commentators stress it is tied to repentance, so despair and complacency are both cut off.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Az-Zumar, 'The Troops,' is a Makkan surah of seventy-five verses, and it is one of the Qur'an's great meditations on ikhlas — the sincere, exclusive devotion of religion to God alone. Its opening sets the theme immediately: the revelation of the Book is from God, the Mighty, the Wise, so worship God, making religion sincerely His (mukhlisan lahu al-din, 39:2–3). The surah returns to this word 'sincere' again and again, defining true faith as worship purified of every partner and every ulterior motive.

It takes its name from its climactic closing scene, in which the disbelievers are driven to Hell in 'troops' (zumar) and the God-fearing are led to Paradise in 'troops' — two great processions sorted by their sincerity toward God. Between its opening command and that final vision, the surah moves with a stately, hymn-like rhythm through the signs of creation, the parables that distinguish the pure worshipper from the confused one, the human tendency to call on God only in crisis, and one of the most beloved verses of hope in the entire Qur'an. Its character is at once tender and majestic, holding together the terror of the reckoning and the boundless mercy of the God who forgives all sins.

How the surah unfolds

The surah opens by grounding sincere worship in God's sole lordship over creation (39:5–6): He created the heavens and earth in truth, wraps night over day and day over night,

harnessed the sun and moon, and creates each of us in stages within our mothers, in 'three darknesses.' Against this it sets the idolaters, who admit God is the Creator yet worship others, excusing themselves that these bring them 'nearer to God' (39:3) — the very rationalisation the surah is written to refute. It notes God's independence: if you disbelieve, God has no need of you, though He is not pleased with ingratitude; and no bearer of burden bears another's load (39:7).

The surah then exposes the fickleness of the human heart: when distress touches a man, he calls on his Lord, turning to Him; but once granted a favour, he forgets the One he was calling and sets up rivals to God (39:8). Against this it holds up the true worshipper — one who is devout through the hours of the night, prostrating and standing, fearing the Hereafter and hoping for his Lord's mercy — and asks the famous question, 'Are those who know equal to those who do not know?' (39:9). It urges the believers to be conscious of God, reminding them that His earth is spacious and that those who are patient will be given their reward without measure (39:10) — a verse the classical scholars connected to the encouragement of emigration for the sake of faith.

The surah presses the demand for sincerity directly at the Prophet ﷺ and through him at all: 'Say: I am commanded to worship God, making religion sincerely His' (39:11–14), and it warns of the true losers on the Day of Resurrection — those who lose themselves and their families (39:15). It then offers a memorable parable of tawhid (39:29): a man owned by several quarrelling partners, pulled in every direction, compared to a

man belonging wholly to one master — are the two alike? So is the confusion of the polytheist against the peace of the one who serves God alone.

The surah reminds the Prophet ﷺ of his mortality — 'You will die, and they will die' (39:30) — and that all disputes will be settled before God. It condemns the one who lies against God and denies the truth when it comes, and praises the one who brought the truth and those who believe it as the truly God-fearing (39:32–33). It then describes the effect of revelation on living hearts: God has sent down the best of speech, a Book consistent within itself, oft-repeated, at which the skins of those who fear their Lord shiver, and then their skins and hearts soften to the remembrance of God (39:23).

A profound passage on the soul follows (39:42): God takes the souls at the time of their death, and the souls of the living during their sleep; He keeps those for whom He has decreed death and releases the others until an appointed term — sleep as a nightly rehearsal of death and resurrection. The surah then observes that when God alone is mentioned, the hearts of those who do not believe in the Hereafter shrink with aversion, but when others besides Him are mentioned, they rejoice (39:45) — a piercing diagnosis of the idolatrous heart.

Then comes the surah's summit of mercy (39:53–55): 'Say: O My servants who have transgressed against themselves, do not despair of the mercy of God — indeed, God forgives all sins; He is the Forgiving, the Merciful. Turn to your Lord and submit to Him before the punishment comes upon you.' The surah urges

people to follow the best of what has been revealed before the Day when a soul will cry out in regret for having neglected its duty to God and mocked the truth (39:56–59).

The surah closes with its two great processions and a vision of the Throne (39:67–75). On the Day of Resurrection the whole earth is in His grip and the heavens are rolled up in His right hand — glory to Him above all they associate. The Trumpet sounds; all in the heavens and earth swoon except whom God wills; it is sounded again and they rise, looking on. The earth shines with the light of its Lord, the record is laid open, the prophets and witnesses are brought, and all are judged in truth without injustice (39:69). Then the disbelievers are driven to Hell in troops; its gates open, its keepers reproach them — did not messengers come to you? — and they confess, but the word of punishment has come due (39:71–72). And the God-fearing are led to Paradise in troops; when they arrive its gates are opened and its keepers greet them, 'Peace be upon you; you have done well, so enter it to abide forever' (39:73). The saved praise God, who has fulfilled His promise and given them the earth of Paradise to settle where they please; and the surah ends with the angels encircling the Throne, glorifying the praise of their Lord, and the final judgement rendered in truth: 'All praise is due to God, the Lord of the worlds' (39:74–75).

The major themes, in depth

Ikhlas: religion purified for God alone. The surah's defining word is mukhlisan — sincerely, exclusively. Three times in its opening movement it commands worship of God with religion made purely His, and its whole argument is a sustained attack on the

divided heart. The idolaters' plea, that their intermediaries merely bring them 'closer to God,' is exposed as the very corruption that must be uprooted, because worship, by its nature, admits no partners. The parable of the slave owned by many quarrelling masters versus the slave devoted to one (39:29) captures the psychological truth beneath the theology: to serve many is to live torn and anxious, while to belong wholly to God is to find peace and coherence. Ikhlas, for az-Zumar, is not merely correct belief but a way of being unified and at rest.

The living heart before revelation: fear that melts into hope. The surah repeatedly measures people by how their hearts respond to God's word. The best of speech makes the skins of the God-fearing shiver and then softens their skins and hearts to His remembrance (39:23) — a beautiful description of awe that resolves into tenderness. By contrast, the hearts of the deniers recoil when God alone is named and light up when others are mentioned (39:45). The surah honours knowledge — 'are those who know equal to those who do not?' (39:9) — but the knowledge it means is the kind that produces night vigil, prostration, and a heart poised between fear of the Hereafter and hope in mercy. The whole surah is an education of the heart toward that balance.

The vast mercy that never contradicts the coming justice. Az-Zumar holds two truths in a single frame without letting either dissolve the other. On one side stands the most expansive promise of forgiveness in the Qur'an: 'Do not despair of the mercy of God — He forgives all sins' (39:53), addressed tenderly to servants who have wronged themselves, provided they turn back before it is too late. On the other side stands the surah's

unflinching finale, the two troops driven to their opposite ends, the gates of Hell and the gates of Paradise. Ibn Kathir notes that the mercy of verse 53 is bounded by the condition that follows it — 'turn to your Lord and submit' — so that hope never curdles into presumption. The surah thus keeps the believer walking between fear and hope, exactly the posture it praised in the night worshipper of verse 9.

Points of reflection

Az-Zumar calls us to purify our worship until it is wholly for God — to examine the subtle partners we set up beside Him: the craving for others' approval, the reliance on causes as though they were independent of the Creator, the religion practised for status or habit. The surah promises that the undivided heart finds a peace the divided heart never can, like the difference between serving one master and being torn among many.

It teaches us where to stand between fear and hope, and refuses to let us collapse into either. Verse 53 forbids despair even to those drowning in sin — no wrong is beyond God's forgiveness for the one who turns back — while the two processions at the surah's end forbid complacency. The mature believer, like the worshipper who spends the night 'fearing the Hereafter and hoping for the mercy of his Lord,' holds both, and the surah is designed to cultivate exactly that poise.

Finally, the surah asks us to hear God's word as a living voice that should move us — to be among those whose skin shivers and whose heart then softens at His remembrance, rather than among those whose hearts shrink when He alone is named. And it uses sleep itself as a nightly reminder: each time we

surrender our souls in sleep and are returned at dawn, we rehearse the death and resurrection to come. To wake each morning grateful for a returned soul is to live in readiness for the day we are led, we pray, among the troops whose greeting is 'Peace be upon you; you have done well.'

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Purify the intention behind worship — mixed motives quietly undo it.
2. No sin is too large for sincere repentance; despair is itself a wound to faith.
3. Let night prayer and quiet gratitude, not noise, mark the one who truly knows.
4. Every soul is moving in one of two 'troops' — choose the direction now.

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