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Surah Az-Zukhruf

The Ornaments of Gold · Makki · 89 ayat — reflections
on surah 43 of the Qur'an

QURAN

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September 2026 · v1.304.1

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Surah Az-Zukhruf

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الزخرف — Az-Zukhruf, “The Ornaments of Gold”. Surah 43 of 114, revealed in Makkah, 89 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/43/.

ONE

The surah in brief

Worldly ornaments of gold and status are trivial next to the Hereafter, so people must not be deceived by wealth into rejecting the truth. It refutes idolatry and the claim that angels are Allah's daughters, and holds up Ibrahim and Isa as signs of pure tawhid.

Az-Zukhruf exposes how worldly glitter warps judgment: the Meccans measured prophethood by wealth, wishing the Qur'an had come to a 'great man' of the two cities (43:31). The surah answers that Allah apportions livelihood and even raises some above others precisely so life's ranks are His to assign, not a mark of favor (43:32). It sets Ibrahim's enduring word of tawhid and Isa as a mere honored servant against the pagans' claim that angels are God's daughters. On the Day, worldly friendships built on other than piety turn to enmity (43:67).

TWO

Its themes

- The deception of wealth
- Tawhid vs. inherited idolatry
- Isa as servant, not son
- Ibrahim's lasting legacy
- Companionship and its consequences
- The Hereafter's reversal

THREE

Key verses

Is it they who would portion out the Mercy of thy Lord? It is We Who portion out between them their livelihood in the life of this world: and We raise some of them above others in ranks, so that some may command work from others. But the Mercy of thy Lord is better than the (wealth) which they amass.

Qur'an 43:32

Allah, not human striving alone, distributes provision and rank so people may serve one another. Al-Sa'di reads the closing line — 'the mercy of your Lord is better than what they amass' — as the whole point: nearness to Allah outweighs gold.

If anyone withdraws himself from remembrance of (Allah) Most Gracious, We appoint for him an evil one, to be an intimate companion to him.

Qur'an 43:36

Turning blind to the Most Merciful's remembrance earns a devil as constant companion. Ibn Kathir notes the chilling detail that such a person believes he is rightly guided while being steadily led astray.

Friends on that day will be foes, one to another,- except the Righteous.

Qur'an 43:67

'Close friends that Day will be enemies to one another, except the righteous' warns that alliances in sin dissolve into blame. Al-Qurtubi draws the tadabbur that only friendship for Allah's sake survives death.

Behold! Abraham said to his father and his people: "I do indeed clear myself of what ye worship:

Qur'an 43:26

Ibrahim's disavowal of his people's idols became a 'word enduring among his descendants' — al-Tabari links this lasting call of tawhid to the mission of the Prophet from his line.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Az-Zukhruf — “The Ornaments of Gold” — is a Makkan surah and one of the Hawamim. Its name comes from verse 35, part of a passage that dismisses gold and its glitter as things so worthless in God’s sight that He would happily have given them to disbelievers. The surah takes aim squarely at the mindset of Quraysh’s elite, whose confidence in their own status and wealth had become the chief barrier between them and the truth.

Its temper is at once ironic and grave. It exposes the incoherence of the pagans — men who felt insulted at the birth of a daughter yet ascribed daughters to God, men who clung to their forefathers’ ways with no argument but inheritance, men who judged prophethood by bank balance and asked why the Qur’an had not been sent to some grandee of Makka or Ta’if. Against this, the surah keeps returning to the true worth of things: the world is a passing convenience, and the treasure worth measuring by is nearness to God and the Hereafter.

The surah is also notable for placing ‘Isa near its center. Because Quraysh sometimes threw the case of ‘Isa in the Prophet’s face — “if all worshipped besides God are fuel for Hell, what of the one the Christians worship?” — the surah takes care to state plainly that ‘Isa was only an honored servant on whom God bestowed favor, and a sign of the coming Hour, not a deity.

How the surah unfolds

It opens by honoring the Book: an Arabic Qur'an drawn from the "Mother of the Book" with God, exalted and wise (43:3-4). Would God simply withhold the Reminder from a people because they transgress? (43:5) — no; He keeps sending it, as He sent prophets to earlier peoples who also mocked (43:6-8). The surah then grounds gratitude in creation, listing the pairs, the ships and cattle made for humans to ride, and teaching the very supplication to say when mounting a beast or vessel — praise to the One who subjected this to us (43:12-14).

It turns to the pagans' theology and dismantles it with irony. They assign to God a "portion" of His own servants — the angels — as daughters, though when one of them is given news of a baby girl his own face darkens with grief (43:16-18). Their only real argument is ancestral: "we found our fathers upon a way, and we are following their footsteps" (43:22-23) — the same answer, the surah notes, that every doomed nation gave its warner. Against blind imitation it sets Ibrahim, who disowned all that his people worshipped and left behind him a lasting word of pure monotheism among his descendants (43:26-28).

Next comes the objection born of snobbery: why was this Qur'an not sent down to a great man of the two towns? (43:31). The answer is devastating: it is God, not they, who apportions even worldly rank — and worldly rank is so trivial that, were it not that people would then all rush to disbelief, He would have given the deniers houses roofed in silver and ladders and doors and couches of gold (43:33-35); all of that is mere enjoyment of this life, while the Hereafter with your Lord is for the God—

fearing. The surah then warns that whoever turns blind to the Reminder is assigned a devil as an inseparable companion (43:36-37).

A series of past examples follows — Musa sent to Pharaoh and his chiefs, and Pharaoh's arrogant boast, "Is the kingdom of Egypt not mine?" and "Am I not better than this contemptible man who can barely speak?" (43:51-52) — until God drowned him and made him a lesson for later peoples (43:55-56). Then 'Isa is raised as an example: when the son of Maryam is cited, the Prophet's people jeer and argue (43:57-58); yet he was only a servant God favored and made a sign, and had God willed He could have made angels succeed one another on the earth (43:59-61). The surah insists that 'Isa himself pointed to God as the straight path (43:63-64).

The final movement contrasts the two ends. On that Day, close friends turn into enemies — except the God-fearing (43:67). The muttaqin are welcomed into the Garden with their spouses, served on trays and cups of gold, given whatever their souls desire (43:70-73); the guilty abide in Hell's torment, begging its keeper Malik to have their Lord finish them off, and are told they must remain (43:74-78). The surah closes by refuting the very idea of a divine son — "Say: if the Most Merciful had a child, I would be the first to worship him" (43:81) — glorifying God far above what they ascribe, and telling the Prophet ﷺ to turn away with peace: "say salam — they will come to know" (43:88-89).

The major themes, in depth

The surah's signature theme is the true worth of the world. Its title, drawn from the "gold ornament" passage (43:33–35), makes the point unforgettable: God treats silver roofs and golden furnishings as so cheap that the only reason He does not lavish them on disbelievers is that people would then mistake wealth for a mark of divine favor and abandon faith en masse. Ibn Kathir and al-Qurtubi both draw the lesson that riches in this life are no sign of God's pleasure — often the reverse. The surah trains the reader to price things correctly: the ornaments are a fleeting convenience, and the Hereafter is the only estate worth calling wealth.

A second theme is the tyranny of ancestral imitation (taqlid). The pagans' recurring defense — "we found our fathers upon a way" (43:22–24) — is exposed as no argument at all but a refusal to think, the same reflex that ruined every previous nation. Over against it the surah sets Ibrahim, who broke with his whole society's worship on the strength of the truth alone (43:26–28), showing that faith sometimes requires the courage to leave the crowd, even the crowd of one's own forefathers. The point cuts at the root of Quraysh's stubbornness: they were not defending a reasoned position but an inherited habit.

A third theme is the misjudging of prophethood by worldly measures (43:31–32). The elites of Makka assumed revelation should come to a "great man" — meaning a rich or powerful one — and the surah answers that God, not human vanity, distributes both worldly rank and the far higher gift of His mercy. In fact He deliberately spreads out livelihoods so that people serve one another; worldly greatness is His to hand even

to those He does not love. This deflates the whole snobbish objection: the value of a messenger has nothing to do with his fortune.

A fourth theme is the corrective on 'Isa (43:57-65). The surah refuses to let the pagans use 'Isa as a rhetorical trap. It affirms his honored place — a servant graced by God, a sign of the Hour — while stripping away any notion of divinity, and it reports 'Isa's own testimony that God alone is Lord and the straight path leads only to Him. The surah's close returns to the same nerve: the very idea that the Most Merciful would take a child is answered by the Prophet ﷺ declaring that, were it true, he himself would be the first worshipper — a rhetorical way of saying it is simply not true.

Points of reflection

The surah retrains our sense of value. It asks whether we, like Quraysh, secretly read wealth and status as signs of God's approval — and it answers that the glittering things are so cheap to God that He hands them freely to those He does not love. The believer is left to seek the estate that lasts and to hold this world lightly.

It also warns against inherited falsehood. "This is how we found our people" is exposed as the excuse of the ruined. The surah honors Ibrahim precisely for daring to think against his whole society, and it invites us to hold even our traditions up to the light of revealed truth rather than following footprints for their own sake.

Finally, it makes companionship a matter of destiny. The one who turns from the Reminder is yoked to a devil-companion in this life (43:36), and on the Last Day every friendship built on other than God-consciousness curdles into enmity — except the bonds of the God-fearing, who enter the Garden together (43:67). It presses us to ask who and what we keep close, for our companions shape where we end.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Do not read wealth as a sign of divine approval; ranks are Allah's to set.
2. Neglecting remembrance opens the door to a corrupting companion.
3. Choose friends who draw you toward Allah — the rest turn hostile in the end.
4. A life anchored in tawhid, like Ibrahim's, outlasts the one who lives it.

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/.