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Surah Ad-Dukhan

The Smoke · Makki · 59 ayat — reflections on surah 44
of the Qur'an

QURAN

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September 2026 · v1.305.2

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الدخان — Ad-Dukhan, “The Smoke”. Surah 44 of 114, revealed in Makkah, 59 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/44/.

ONE

The surah in brief

A warning of the Day when the sky brings a visible smoke and the deniers beg for relief. Sent down on a blessed night, the Qur'an guides; the surah recounts Pharaoh's destruction and contrasts the torment of the sinful with the secure delight of the righteous.

Ad-Dukhan announces that the Qur'an descended on a blessed night in which every wise matter is apportioned (44:3-4). It warns of a 'smoke' that will cover people — read by many companions as the famine that gripped Quraysh, and by others as a sign near the Hour (44:10-11). The story of Musa and a drowning Pharaoh underlines that Allah's decree overtakes the arrogant. The surah then draws its sharp closing contrast: the tree of Zaqqum and boiling punishment for the sinful, secure gardens and pure companions for the God-fearing, sealing the truth that creation was never made in vain (44:38-39).

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 44:10-16

When Quraysh rejected the Prophet, he prayed for years of famine; they grew so hungry they saw something like smoke in the sky, and 44:10-11 was revealed. When he prayed for rain for them they recovered and reverted, and 44:15-16 was revealed. The narrator adds that the "mighty grasp" was the Battle of Badr.

"A man would look towards the sky and imagine seeing something like smoke between him and the sky because of extreme fatigue. So Allah revealed"

'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud · Sahih al-Bukhari 4821

TWO

Its themes

- The blessed night of revelation
- Warning signs before the Hour
- Musa and Pharaoh
- Purpose in creation
- Reward and punishment
- The Day of Decision

THREE

Key verses

We sent it down during a Blessed Night: for We (ever) wish to warn (against Evil).

Qur'an 44:3

Revelation on a 'blessed night' — Laylat al-Qadr per the stronger view of Ibn Kathir — frames the whole Qur'an as an act of mercy sent at a moment of decree, when affairs are wisely divided.

Then watch thou for the Day that the sky will bring forth a kind of smoke (or mist) plainly visible,

Qur'an 44:10

The 'clear smoke' is famously tied by Ibn Mas'ud to the hunger that made Quraysh see haze between them and the sky; al-Tabari records the companions' debate over whether it also names a sign still to come.

We created not the heavens, the earth, and all between them, merely in (idle) sport:

Qur'an 44:38

'We did not create the heavens and earth and all between them in play' answers every denial of the Hereafter — a purposeful Creator does not leave justice unfinished. Al-Sa'di makes this the surah's pivot.

"Taste thou (this)! Truly wast thou mighty, full of honour!

Qur'an 44:49

'Taste — you were the mighty, the honorable' turns the sinner's worldly pride into the very words of his rebuke; al-Qurtubi notes the bitterness of hearing one's former arrogance quoted back.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Ad-Dukhan — “The Smoke” — is a short, intense Makkan surah, one of the Hawamim, taking its name from verse 10, where a visible smoke is foretold to envelop the people. It opens by declaring that the Qur’an was sent down on a blessed night (44:3), understood by the majority of commentators to be the Night of Decree (Laylat al-Qadr) in Ramadan, on which every wise affair is apportioned and made distinct.

The “smoke” itself is a point of long-standing interpretive difference. Ibn Mas’ud and a group of the early scholars held it to be the severe famine that gripped Quraysh when, in the Prophet’s prayer against them, they were so starved that men seemed to see smoke between themselves and the sky — a punishment lifted when they pleaded and then relapsed. Ibn ‘Abbas and others held it to be a still-future sign of the Hour, a real smoke that will cover the earth. Ibn Kathir lays out both readings; the surah’s language — the plea “remove the punishment, we believe,” followed by the certainty that they will turn back (44:12–15) — fits the first, while the scale of the imagery leaves room for the second.

The surah’s character is urgent and admonitory. Against the disbelievers’ mockery of resurrection it presses one insistent claim: creation is not a game (44:38), there is a fixed Day of Decision, and the accounts of tyrants and nations gone by prove that God’s warning is real.

How the surah unfolds

It opens with an oath by the clear Book, sent down on a blessed night as a warning, on which every matter of wisdom is decreed by God's command (44:1-6) — establishing that revelation is deliberate mercy, not accident. It affirms God's lordship over the heavens, the earth, and all between, then confronts a people who "play in doubt" (44:9): await the Day when the sky brings a plain smoke that envelops them, a painful torment, so that they cry out for it to be lifted, promising faith — yet how could the reminder now benefit them, when a clear messenger already came and they turned away, calling him a taught madman? (44:10-14). God will lift the affliction a little, but they will relapse (44:15).

To show that this is God's pattern, the surah recounts Pharaoh and his people. Musa is sent to demand that the enslaved children of Israel be released to him, and Pharaoh's arrogance meets its end: the sea is left parted, Pharaoh's host is drowned, and the surah notes with quiet force that neither the sky nor the earth wept for them, and they were granted no respite (44:17-29). The gardens, springs, crops, and gracious estates the tyrants left behind passed to other hands (44:25-28) — the whole scene a rebuke to any power that thinks itself untouchable.

The surah turns back to Quraysh's core denial: they say there is nothing but our first death and we will not be raised — so "bring back our forefathers if you are truthful" (44:34-36). Are they better, the surah asks, than the people of Tubba' and those before them, whom God destroyed for their crimes? (44:37). Then the decisive statement of purpose: We did not create the

heavens and the earth and all between them in play; We created them only in truth — but most do not know (44:38–39). The Day of Decision (yawm al-fasl) is the appointed meeting for all (44:40).

It closes on the two destinies. For the guilty there is the tree of Zaqqum, like molten metal boiling in the bellies, and the command to drag them into the blazing midst and pour scalding torment over their heads (44:43–50). For the God-fearing there is a secure station — gardens and springs, fine silk, facing one another, wedded to pure companions, calling for every fruit in safety, tasting no death after the first, saved by their Lord's grace from the Fire (44:51–57). The surah ends by noting that the Qur'an was made easy in the Prophet's tongue that they might take heed — so wait and watch, as they too are waiting (44:58–59).

The major themes, in depth

A first theme is the deliberateness of revelation, set by the "blessed night." By opening with the sending down of the Qur'an on a night in which every wise decree is apportioned (44:3–5), the surah frames scripture as the centerpiece of a purposeful cosmic order. Al-Sa'di draws out the contrast that structures the whole surah: on the one hand a God who plans, decrees, warns, and sends mercy on an appointed night; on the other hand a people who treat all of it as a game. The night of the Qur'an's descent is the answer to their frivolity — proof that history is administered, not adrift.

A second theme is the certainty of the Day of Decision against the deniers of resurrection. The pagans' creed is quoted flatly — one death, no raising, and a taunt to bring their ancestors back (44:35–36) — and the surah answers it with the seriousness of creation itself: “We did not create the heavens and the earth in play” (44:38). If the universe is made in truth and for a purpose, then a reckoning is not an add-on but the necessary completion of that purpose. The yawm al-fasl (44:40) is where truth and falsehood are finally separated.

A third theme is the fragility of worldly power, carried by the Pharaoh narrative. The surah's most haunting line is that when Pharaoh and his armies were destroyed, “neither the heaven nor the earth wept over them” (44:29) — the classical commentators note how it strips a tyrant of all the grandeur he thought inescapable. The gardens and treasures he hoarded simply changed hands (44:25–28). Set beside the reference to the once-mighty people of Tubba' (44:37), the passage tells Quraysh — and every reader — that no worldly strength has ever bought exemption from God's decree.

A fourth theme is the sharp two-way ending: Zaqqum versus the secure garden (44:43–57). The surah does not soften the alternatives. The tree of the sinful, boiling like molten brass, and the scalding poured over the head, stand against the settled peace of the muttaqin — the security, the fine garments, the companionship, and above all the words “they will taste no death therein after the first death” (44:56). Ibn Kathir highlights that final mercy — the removal of death — as the crown of the believers' reward, the end of every fear.

Points of reflection

The surah confronts us with the seriousness of existence. “We did not create the heavens and the earth in play” is a rebuke to every life lived as if nothing were finally at stake. If the universe is purposeful, so is my life within it, and the Day of Decision is where that purpose is settled.

It also cautions against waiting for the warning to become visible before we heed it. The people of the smoke plead and promise faith only when the punishment is upon them — and are told it is too late. The reminder is meant to move us now, while it can still benefit, not at the moment of dread.

And in Pharaoh it holds up a mirror to power and pride. The tyrant who asked whether Egypt was not his kingdom left behind gardens that wept for no one and passed to strangers. The surah invites us to measure our own security not by what we command in this world but by whether we stand among the God-fearing whom grace delivers.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Honor the blessed nights of revelation with worship and reflection.
2. Read hardship and warning signs as calls to turn back, as Quraysh's famine was.
3. Creation has a purpose, so life has an accounting — live accordingly.
4. Worldly might and honor mean nothing at the reckoning; only faith carries over.

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/.