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Surah Muhammad

Muhammad · Madani · 38 ayat — reflections on surah
47 of the Qur'an

QURAN

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September 2026 · v1.304.1

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محمد — Muhammad, “Muhammad”. Surah 47 of 114, revealed in Madinah, 38 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/47/.

ONE

The surah in brief

Set against jihad in Allah's cause, it contrasts those who believe and do good with those who disbelieve and bar others from Allah's path. It urges obedience, warns against apostasy and hypocrisy, and calls the believers not to weaken but to spend and strive.

Surah Muhammad, also called al-Qital, addresses a community now at war, setting the works of those who disbelieve and bar others from Allah's path against the deeds of the believers whose burdens He removes. It commands resolve in battle while keeping mercy and later release in view (47:4), and it exposes the hypocrites who hated what Allah revealed. Running through it is a covenant: support Allah's cause and He supports you and steadies your feet (47:7). It reproaches hearts locked against the Qur'an (47:24) and warns that a people who turn away will simply be replaced (47:38).

TWO

Its themes

- Struggle in Allah's cause
- Testing of believers
- Hypocrisy exposed
- Reflection on the Qur'an
- Divine support
- Warning against turning away

THREE

Key verses

O ye who believe! If ye will aid (the cause of) Allah, He will aid you, and plant your feet firmly.

Qur'an 47:7

'If you support Allah, He will support you and plant your feet firm' ties victory to sincerity, not numbers; al-Sa'di explains that aiding Allah means upholding His religion, and the promise of steadiness follows.

Know, therefore, that there is no god but Allah, and ask forgiveness for thy fault, and for the men and women who believe: for Allah knows how ye move about and how ye dwell in your homes.

Qur'an 47:19

'Know that there is no god but Allah, and ask forgiveness' joins knowledge of tawhid to ongoing repentance; Ibn Kathir notes the Prophet himself sought forgiveness constantly despite being sinless.

Do they not then earnestly seek to understand the Qur'an, or are their hearts locked up by them?

Qur'an 47:24

'Do they not reflect upon the Qur'an, or are there locks upon hearts?' turns the reader inward — al-Qurtubi warns that heedless recitation without pondering leaves the heart bolted shut.

Behold, ye are those invited to spend (of your substance) in the Way of Allah: But among you are some that are niggardly. But any who are niggardly are so at the expense of their own souls. But Allah is free of all wants, and it is ye that are needy. If ye turn back (from the Path), He will substitute in your stead another people; then they would not be like you!

Qur'an 47:38

The warning that a people who turn away will be replaced by others 'who will not be like you' cuts against complacency; al-Tabari reads it as a standing reminder that the cause does not depend on any generation.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Surah Muhammad is a Madinan surah, one of the few named after the Prophet ﷺ himself — from verse 2, which affirms faith in “what was sent down to Muhammad.” It is also known as al-Qital, “Fighting,” because it addresses the newly permitted armed struggle to defend the fledgling community. It belongs to the early Madinan period, when the believers had migrated, established themselves, and now faced the reality of open conflict with those who had driven them out and continued to bar people from God’s path.

Its character is decisive and testing. Where the Makkan suras argued with deniers, this surah draws a sharp line between two camps and follows each to its end: those who disbelieve and obstruct God’s way, whose deeds He renders void, and those who believe and do good, whose sins He wipes away and whose condition He sets right (47:1–3). Between these it exposes a third, unstable presence — the hypocrites of Madina, whose hearts recoil at the mention of sacrifice and who are unmasked by the surah as by a probe.

The surah is also, quietly, a meditation on the heart: on what makes hearts firm and what seals them, on the difference between reflecting upon the Qur’an and having a lock upon one’s heart (47:24), and on the generosity or stinginess that reveals where a person truly stands.

How the surah unfolds

It opens by weighing the two camps: God nullifies the deeds of those who disbelieve and turn others from His path, and He forgives and improves the state of those who believe, do good, and hold to the truth revealed to Muhammad ﷺ, because one party follows falsehood and the other follows the truth from their Lord (47:1-3). It then states the ruling of the hour: when you meet the disbelievers in battle, strike firmly, until war lays down its burdens; then hold the captives, to be freed by grace or by ransom (47:4). Those killed in God's cause are not lost — He will guide them, set right their state, and admit them to the Garden He has already made known to them (47:4-6). And the reciprocal promise: if you support God's cause, He will support you and make your footing firm (47:7).

The surah contrasts the ends of the two paths — ruin and misguided deeds for the deniers, God's guardianship for the believers, who have a Protector while the disbelievers have none (47:8-11). It notes how the disbelievers consume the world as cattle graze, heedless of what awaits (47:12), and recalls how many a town mightier than the one that expelled the Prophet ﷺ was destroyed (47:13). Then a luminous parable of the Garden — rivers of water never fouled, of milk unchanging in taste, of delicious wine, of purified honey, with every fruit and forgiveness — set against those who abide in the Fire and are given scalding water that tears their bowels (47:15).

The hypocrites now come into focus. Some sit in the Prophet's gathering and then, on leaving, ask the learned believers mockingly, "What did he just say?" — men whose hearts God has sealed and who follow their desires (47:16). The believers, by

contrast, are increased in guidance and granted God-consciousness (47:17). The surah warns that the signs of the Hour have already come (47:18), and directs the Prophet ﷺ — and through him every believer — to the enduring remedy: “Know that there is no god but God, and seek forgiveness for your sin” (47:19).

It then exposes the hypocrites’ dread of commitment. When a decisive surah mentioning fighting is revealed, those with sickness in their hearts look at the Prophet ﷺ with the glazed stare of one fainting at death (47:20); obedience and a fitting word would have been better for them (47:21). Would they, if they turned away, spread corruption in the land and sever the ties of kinship? (47:22) — such are the ones God has cursed and made deaf and blind. Here falls the surah’s most quoted line: “Do they not then reflect upon the Qur’an, or are there locks upon their hearts?” (47:24). Those who turned back after guidance were seduced by Satan (47:25); God knows their secret talk and will expose them by the slips of their tongues (47:29–30), and He will test the community until He makes evident the strivers and the steadfast (47:31).

The surah closes on cause and generosity. Do not weaken and sue for peace when you have the upper hand, for God is with you and will not deprive you of your deeds (47:35). This worldly life is but play and diversion; God does not even ask you for your wealth in full (47:36–37). And the final, searching appeal: here you are, invited to spend in God’s cause, yet some among you are miserly — and whoever is miserly is miserly only against

himself; God is the Free of need and you are the needy; and if you turn away, He will replace you with another people, and they will not be the likes of you (47:38).

The major themes, in depth

A first theme is struggle in God's cause and its purpose. The surah does not glamorize war; it presents fighting as a grim necessity "until war lays down its burdens" (47:4), aimed at ending the persecution and obstruction described in its opening verses. It surrounds the command with mercy and meaning — the option of freeing or ransoming captives, the unlost reward of the fallen, and above all the principle "if you help God, He will help you" (47:7). Al-Sa'di stresses that "helping God" means upholding His religion, and that divine support and firmness of footing are its promised fruit, so the whole matter is reframed from human strength to reliance on God.

A second theme is the anatomy of hypocrisy. More than most suras, this one lets us watch the hypocrites from the inside: their boredom in the assembly and mocking "what did he say?" (47:16), their faintness when sacrifice is mentioned (47:20), their secret conversations and the tongue-slips that betray them (47:29–30). Ibn Kathir observes that a surah of fighting acts like a sieve, separating those whose faith can bear cost from those whose faith is only words. The surah's diagnosis is spiritual: hearts sealed and desires followed, guidance withdrawn from those who first turned away.

A third theme is reflection upon the Qur'an versus the locked heart (47:24). This verse has become a touchstone for the whole tradition of tadabbur — pondering the meanings of revelation

rather than merely passing the eyes over it. The surah presents such reflection as the natural act of a living heart and its absence as a sign of a heart bolted shut. The two are causally linked: it is by neglecting to ponder that hearts harden, and by pondering that they soften and are guided. The verse thus indicts not ignorance of the words but refusal to let them work upon the soul.

A fourth theme is generosity as the true test, sealed by the surah's ending (47:36–38). Having tested the community with fighting, the surah tests it with spending — and calls miserliness a self-inflicted wound, since God is utterly independent of our wealth while we are wholly dependent on Him. Its closing warning, that God can replace a reluctant people with another that will not be like them, is among the most sobering in the Qur'an: our place in God's service is a privilege, not a favor we do Him, and it can be handed on if we shrink from its cost.

Points of reflection

The surah puts the promise of divine aid on a condition we control: "if you help God, He will help you" (47:7). It teaches that our part is to stand up for God's cause and hold firm, and that firmness of footing — inner steadiness as much as outward victory — is His response. Support flows to those who first give it.

Its verse on pondering the Qur'an (47:24) is a direct summons to a certain kind of reading. It warns that eyes over words are not enough; a heart can be locked even while reciting. The

remedy the surah offers is reflection — letting the meanings press upon us until they move us — and it is the very discipline this tadabbur seeks to practice.

Finally, the surah's ending reshapes how we hold our wealth and our role. To withhold in God's cause, it says, is only to harm ourselves, for He needs nothing from us. And the warning of replacement should keep us from complacency: serving God is an honor we can forfeit, so the fitting response is to give — of effort, courage, and wealth — while the invitation still stands.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Aid Allah's religion sincerely and trust Him to steady you in return.
2. Pair firm belief in tawhid with a habit of seeking forgiveness.
3. Read the Qur'an to reflect, not merely to finish — an unpondered heart hardens.
4. No community is indispensable; live worthy of the trust you have been given.

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/.