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Surah Adh-Dhariyat

The Winnowing Winds · Makki · 60 ayat — reflections
on surah 51 of the Qur'an

QURAN

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الذاريات — Adh-Dhariyat, “The Winnowing Winds”. Surah 51 of 114, revealed in Makkah, 60 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/51/.

ONE

The surah in brief

Swearing by the scattering winds, it affirms the certainty of Allah's promise and the coming Judgment. It points to signs in the heavens and the earth and within ourselves, recalls the guests of Ibrahim and ruined nations, and states the purpose of jinn and mankind: to worship Allah.

Adh-Dhariyat opens with oaths by the scattering winds to swear that the promise and the recompense are true. It sketches the righteous who slept little at night, sought forgiveness before dawn, and honored the beggar's right in their wealth (51:15–19), then turns the eye inward — 'and in yourselves; do you not see?' (51:21). Signs march past: the honored guests of Ibrahim, the destruction of Lut's people, 'Ad, Thamud, and Nuh. It gathers everything into one purpose — that jinn and humanity were created only to worship Allah (51:56) — and commands, simply, to flee toward Him (51:50).

TWO

Its themes

- Certainty of the Hereafter
- The night worship of the righteous
- The right of the poor in wealth
- Signs in the self and creation
- The purpose of creation
- Fleeing to Allah

THREE

Key verses

They were in the habit of sleeping but little by night,

Qur'an 51:17

The righteous 'used to sleep but little of the night' and sought forgiveness in its last hours; al-Sa'di reads their pre-dawn istighfar as the seal on a night of devotion, humility crowning worship.

And in their wealth and possessions (was remembered) the right of the (needy,) him who asked, and him who (for some reason) was prevented (from asking).

Qur'an 51:19

'In their wealth was a right for the beggar and the deprived' makes charity a due, not a favor; Ibn Kathir notes it embraces both the one who asks and the one too dignified to ask.

As also in your own selves: Will ye not then see?

Qur'an 51:21

'And in yourselves — do you not see?' turns the argument from the cosmos to the human body and soul; al-Qurtubi lists this inward wonder as proof standing nearer than any distant sign.

I have only created Jinns and men, that they may serve Me.

Qur'an 51:56

'I did not create jinn and mankind except to worship Me' states the reason for existence itself; al-Tabari and al-Sa'di gloss worship broadly — to know, love, and obey Allah with the whole of life.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Adh-Dhariyat — “The Scattering Winds” — is a Makkan surah that opens with a run of oaths by driving winds, laden clouds, gliding ships or stars, and the angels who distribute God’s command (51:1–4). Its swift, oath-laden opening announces its two great certainties: the Recompense will surely come, and the Judgment will surely fall (51:5–6). Around these it weaves signs in the horizons and the self, a gallery of past prophets and destroyed nations, and, near its end, one of the most concise statements of human purpose in all of scripture.

Its character is vigorous and sweeping. It moves from cosmic oaths to an intimate portrait of the God-fearing at prayer in the depth of night, from Ibrahim’s honored guests to the ruins of ‘Ad and Thamud, and then to the great commands that crown it — “flee to God” (51:50) and the declaration that jinn and humankind were created only to worship Him (51:56). The surah reads like a summons: turn from all else and run toward your Lord.

It belongs to the middle Makkan period, when the Prophet ﷺ was consoled by being told that his role was only to remind, for the reminder benefits the believers (51:55), and that the deniers’ fate is as certain as the fate of those before them.

How the surah unfolds

The oaths open it — by the scattering winds, the clouds bearing their burden, the vessels running smoothly, and the angels apportioning affairs — swearing that what you are promised is true and the Reckoning will come to pass (51:1-6). By the sky full of orbits, the surah notes that the deniers are lost in contradictory speech, turned away from the truth by their own confusion, and it curses the “conjecturers” who ask mockingly when the Day of Judgment will be — the Day they are tried over the Fire (51:7-14).

Against them it sets a luminous picture of the God-fearing (51:15-19): they dwell amid gardens and springs, receiving what their Lord gives, for before this they were doers of good — they used to sleep but little of the night, and in the last hours before dawn they would seek forgiveness, and in their wealth there was a due share for the beggar and the deprived. It then turns the reader inward and outward: on the earth are signs for those who have certainty, and within your own selves — do you not see? And in the heaven is your provision and all that you are promised (51:20-22) — sworn upon by the Lord of the heaven and earth to be as true as the fact that you speak (51:23).

The surah then recounts Ibrahim’s honored guests — the angels who came with a greeting, to whom he brought a roasted calf; when they did not eat, he felt a fear of them, until they gave him glad tidings of a knowledgeable son and his aged wife cried out in astonishment (51:24-30). They then disclosed their mission to the guilty people of Lut, upon whom stones of clay were sent, marked by their Lord for the transgressors; and God brought out of that town whoever was among the believers,

finding only one household of Muslims (51:31–37). Briefer signs follow — Musa sent to Pharaoh, who turned away in his might; the barren, destroying wind sent upon 'Ad; the thunderbolt that seized Thamud as they looked on; and the people of Nuh before them, who were a defiantly disobedient people (51:38–46).

The surah rises to its cosmic and imperative close. God built the heaven with power and is its steady expander, spread out the earth, and created all things in pairs, that you may take heed (51:47–49). Then the ringing commands: “So flee to God — I am to you from Him a clear warner. And do not set up another god beside God — I am to you from Him a clear warner” (51:50–51). It consoles the Prophet ﷺ that no messenger came to those before but they called him a magician or a madman — as if they had bequeathed the taunt to one another (51:52–53) — and tells him to turn from them without blame, and to keep reminding, for the reminder benefits the believers (51:54–55). Finally comes the summit: “I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me; I want no provision from them, nor do I want them to feed Me — indeed God is the Provider, the Possessor of firm strength” (51:56–58). The deniers will get a portion of punishment like their fellows' before them, so let them not hasten it (51:59–60).

The major themes, in depth

A first theme is the certainty of the Recompense, sworn upon the whole moving cosmos. The surah begins by calling the winds, clouds, ships, and angels to witness that judgment is true (51:1–6), and later swears by the Lord of the heavens and the earth that our promised provision and reckoning are as

certain as the fact that we can speak (51:22-23). Al-Sa'di remarks on the force of this last comparison: no one doubts that he is speaking, and God makes the coming of the Hereafter just as sure. The surah thus grounds faith in the Day not in speculation but in an oath by everything that visibly runs by God's command.

A second theme is the portrait of the God-fearing (51:15-19), one of the most beloved character-sketches in the Qur'an. Three traits define them: they slept little at night, giving its hours to prayer; they sought forgiveness in the last dark before dawn; and they set aside, in their own wealth, a recognized right for the beggar and for the one too dignified to ask. The commentators note how this joins private worship (the night vigil, the pre-dawn istighfar) with public generosity (the poor's share), refusing to let devotion be merely inward. The Garden they inherit is presented as the natural fruit of a life quietly given to God and to others.

A third theme is signs in the horizons and the self (51:20-21). The surah presses the reader to find God both in the outer world — the earth's wonders — and in the intricacies of his own being, "and within your own selves; do you not see?" This pairing became a foundation for the Islamic contemplation of creation: the same evidence that fills the cosmos is written into the human body and soul, so that self-knowledge and knowledge of the world both lead back to the Maker. The provision "in the heaven" (51:22) then reminds us that our sustenance, like our destiny, is decreed from above and not ultimately in our own hands.

A fourth theme is the purpose of creation — worship (51:56). This single verse gives the human being his answer to the deepest question: why do I exist? To worship God — a worship the tradition reads broadly, as knowing Him, loving Him, obeying Him, and orienting one's whole life to Him. The surah immediately clears away any misunderstanding that God gains something from this: He needs no provision and no feeding from His creatures, for He is the sole Provider (51:57–58). Worship, then, is entirely for our benefit, not His. Set beside the command just before it — “flee to God” (51:50) — the verse turns worship from a burden into a homecoming: we were made for this, and running to it is running to the only refuge there is.

Points of reflection

The surah answers the question every heart eventually asks — what am I for — with startling clarity: we were created to worship God (51:56). It invites us to measure our days against that purpose, and to feel the relief of it, for a life aimed at the One who made us is a life that has found its center.

Its portrait of the righteous is a quiet program for the soul: to give some of the night to prayer, to seek forgiveness in the stillness before dawn, and to keep a real, recognized share of our wealth for those in need. It shows that nearness to God is built from small, repeated acts of devotion and generosity, not from grand gestures.

And its central command — “flee to God” (51:50) — reframes the whole of religious life as flight toward a refuge rather than flight from a burden. From every fear, distraction, and false god, the

surah tells us to run in one direction only, to the Provider who possesses all strength and asks nothing of us but that we turn to Him.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Give the night a share of worship and end it seeking forgiveness.
2. See charity as the poor's rightful claim on what you hold in trust.
3. Find God's signs in your own body and soul, not only in the sky.
4. Remember why you exist — to worship — and let it order everything else.

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/.