

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Surah Al-Waqi'ah

The Inevitable · Makki · 96 ayat — reflections on surah
56 of the Qur'an

QURAN

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Surah Al-Waqi'ah

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الواقعة — Al-Waqi'ah, "The Inevitable". Surah 56 of 114, revealed in Makkah, 96 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/56/.

ONE

The surah in brief

The Inevitable Event sorts humanity into three ranks: the foremost near to Allah, the people of the right, and the wretched people of the left. Vividly portraying their destinies, it argues from creation, seed, water, and fire that the Resurrection is undeniable truth.

Al-Waqi'ah portrays the inevitable Event that will lower some and raise others, sorting humanity into three ranks: the foremost brought near, the companions of the right, and the wretched companions of the left (56:7–11). It details the delight of the first two and the boiling torment of the last, then argues for the resurrection from things people take for granted — the seed they plant, the water they drink, the fire they kindle (56:57–73). It honors the Qur'an as a hidden, protected Book touched only by the purified (56:79), and pictures the soul rising to the throat at death while onlookers stand helpless (56:83–87).

TWO

Its themes

- The three classes of humanity
- The foremost brought near
- Proofs of resurrection
- The honored Qur'an
- The moment of death
- Reward and torment

THREE

Key verses

And those Foremost (in Faith) will be Foremost (in the Hereafter).

Qur'an 56:10

'And the foremost are the foremost — those are the ones brought near' names a rank above the righteous of the right hand; al-Sa'di describes them as those who raced ahead in good, so they are drawn closest to Allah.

See ye the seed that ye sow in the ground?

Qur'an 56:63

'Do you plant it, or are We the planter?' turns the farmer's daily labor into an argument for resurrection — the One who brings life from a buried seed can raise the buried dead. Ibn Kathir highlights this everyday proof.

Which none shall touch but those who are clean:

Qur'an 56:79

'None touch it except the purified' is read by al-Qurtubi both of the angels who bear the Preserved Tablet and, in ruling, of the reverence due when handling the Qur'an.

Then why do ye not (intervene) when (the soul of the dying man) reaches the throat,-

Qur'an 56:83

'Then why, when the soul reaches the throat, and you are watching...' freezes the instant of death to expose human helplessness; al-Tabari notes that all the onlookers can do is witness what only Allah controls.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Al-Waqi'a (The Inevitable Event) is a vivid Makkan surah whose subject is the Day of Resurrection and the final sorting of humanity into three destinies. It is among the surahs said to have aged the Prophet ﷺ, and Ibn Mas'ud transmitted the counsel that whoever recites it each night will not be touched by poverty — a report whose chain is discussed by the scholars, but which reflects the esteem in which the surah was held.

Its character is dramatic and pictorial. The surah moves from the cataclysm of the Event, to three great tableaux of humanity's classes, to a set of pointed arguments drawn from ordinary life, and finally to the moment of death itself. Its language is concrete — couches and cups, thornless lote-trees and scalding water — so that the abstract certainty of the Hereafter is made almost tangible.

The name comes from its opening: 'When the Inevitable Event occurs' (56:1). It is a surah that refuses the listener any distance from the reckoning; by its end it has narrowed the whole of existence down to the soul rising in the throat of a dying man.

How the surah unfolds

It opens with the Event that 'none can deny' (56:2), abasing some and exalting others, when the earth is shaken and the mountains crumble to scattered dust (56:4–6). At that moment

humanity divides into three: the companions of the right, the companions of the left, and 'the foremost, the foremost' (as-sabiqun as-sabiqun), who are the near ones (56:7–11).

The foremost are described first: a great throng of the earlier generations and a few of the later, in gardens of delight, upon adorned couches, served by immortal youths with cups from a flowing spring that neither sickens the head nor intoxicates, with fruits and bird-meat and companions like hidden pearls — a reward for their deeds, in an assembly free of idle or sinful talk, where the only word heard is 'peace, peace' (56:12–26). Then the companions of the right, amid thornless lote and clustered fruit, spreading shade and flowing water, abundant produce unforbidden, upon raised couches, with companions God fashioned anew — a multitude of the earlier and a multitude of the later (56:27–40).

Against these stand the companions of the left, in a scorching wind and scalding water and the shadow of black smoke, neither cool nor good (56:41–44). Before this they lived in luxury and persisted in the great sin, denying resurrection with the sneer, 'when we have died and become dust and bones, are we truly to be raised — and our forefathers of old?' (56:47–48). They will eat from the tree of Zaqqum, fill their bellies with it, and drink scalding water like thirst-maddened camels (56:52–55).

The surah then argues its case from creation. 'We created you, so why do you not believe?' (56:57). Consider the drop you emit — do you create it, or do We (56:58–59)? We decreed death among you and are not to be outrun in replacing you and

reconstituting you in forms you do not know (56:60–61). You know the first creation; will you not then take heed? Consider the seed you sow — do you make it grow, or do We? Were We to will, We would make it dry debris (56:63–65). Consider the water you drink from the clouds — We could make it bitter (56:68–70). Consider the fire you kindle — We made its tree a reminder and a provision (56:71–73). ‘So glorify the name of your Lord, the Magnificent’ (56:74).

It rises to a great oath by the positions of the stars — a mighty oath, if only you knew — that this is a noble Qur'an, in a well-guarded Book, touched only by the purified, a revelation from the Lord of the worlds (56:75–80). Do you then treat this discourse with disdain, and make your denial your very livelihood (56:81–82)? At last the surah brings the reader to a deathbed: when the soul reaches the throat and you look on, and We are nearer than you though you do not see — if you are truly beyond judgment, why do you not return that soul (56:83–87)? Then the three destinies are named one final time: if the dying man is of the near ones, rest and fragrance and a garden of delight; if of the right, ‘peace to you’ from his fellows; but if of the deniers gone astray, a welcome of scalding water and burning. ‘Indeed, this is the certain truth; so glorify the name of your Lord, the Magnificent’ (56:95–96).

The major themes, in depth

The organizing theme is the three-fold sorting of humanity. The foremost and near (as-sabiqun, al-muqarrabun) are those who outran others toward the good and are drawn nearest to God; the companions of the right (ashab al-yamin) are the saved and

safe; the companions of the left (ashab al-shimal) are the ruined. This is not merely a scheme of reward and punishment but a map of the soul's possible ends — nearness, safety, or loss — measured by how one raced, or failed to race, toward faith and righteousness in this life. Tellingly, of the foremost the surah says a multitude are of the earlier generations and only a few of the later, a sobering note for those who come after.

A second theme is the proof of resurrection drawn from the everyday. The surah does not argue in the abstract; it points to semen, seed, rain, and fire — things the deniers handle daily — and asks who truly brings them about. The one who conceded the first creation cannot consistently deny the second, 'and the second creation' the surah says elsewhere is easier. Nature is turned into a standing argument against the denial of the Hereafter.

A third theme is certainty itself — haqq al-yaqin, 'the certain truth' (56:95). The deathbed scene strips away every illusion: the soul rising in the throat, the helpless onlookers, the nearness of God unseen. At that instant no one denies the Event. The surah forces the reader to that moment now, while there is still time to act on the certainty.

A fourth theme is arrogance versus gratitude in the face of provision. The people of the left 'lived in luxury before this' (56:45) and turned their comfort into pride and denial; the surah answers by tracing every comfort — food, drink, warmth — back to God and by ending each argument with the command to glorify Him. The right use of blessing is thankful worship, not self-satisfied denial.

Points of reflection

The surah asks each reader, in effect, which of the three you are laboring to be. It holds up the foremost — few, near, at peace — as the highest aspiration, and warns by the fewness of that class among later generations that ease and lateness are no excuse for coasting toward mere safety, let alone toward loss.

Its long argument from creation teaches a habit of mind: to read the ordinary — a raindrop, a sprouting seed, a struck flame — as evidence of the Creator and of the resurrection He promises. The believer walks through a world dense with proofs and is meant to let them renew his conviction.

And the deathbed passage reframes the whole of life as preparation of one's 'provision' for that moment. The rich denier's error was to make his denial his livelihood; the surah calls the reader instead to make faith and grateful worship his store, so that when the soul reaches the throat the welcome is rest and fragrance rather than scalding water.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Aim to be among the foremost, not content with the bare minimum of faith.
2. See in ordinary crops, water, and fire the daily evidence of a Lord who resurrects.
3. Approach and handle the Qur'an with the reverence its honor demands.
4. Keep the moment the soul reaches the throat before you; it recasts every priority.

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/.