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Surah Al-Hashr

The Exile · Madani · 24 ayat — reflections on surah 59
of the Qur'an

QURAN

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الحشر — Al-Hashr, "The Exile". Surah 59 of 114, revealed in Madinah, 24 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/59/.

ONE

The surah in brief

Drawn from the exile of the treacherous Banu al-Nadir, the surah shows Allah's power over those who defy Him, orders fair distribution of the spoils, praises the Ansar's selfless generosity, warns against imitating the hypocrites, and closes with the majestic names of God.

Al-Hashr recounts the exile of Banu Nadir, a Jewish tribe of Madinah that broke its covenant and plotted against the Prophet, and how Allah cast terror into their hearts so they were driven out with their own hands demolishing their homes. The surah uses their fall as a lesson for people of insight and lays down how the spoils gained without fighting (fay) are to be distributed to serve the community rather than circulate among the rich. It praises the Muhajirun and the Ansar, especially the Ansar who preferred others over themselves, and warns of the hypocrites who promised the Jews support but abandoned them like Satan abandons his follower. It closes with some of the most majestic verses naming Allah's attributes.

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 59

Asked about Surat al-Hashr, Ibn 'Abbas said it was revealed in connection with Banu an-Nadir.

"He replied, "It was revealed in connection with Bani an-Nadir"

Ibn 'Abbas (asked by Sa'id ibn Jubair) · Sahih al-Bukhari 4882

Qur'an 59:5

The Prophet burnt and cut down the palm trees of Banu an-Nadir at al-Buwaira. Allah revealed that whatever palm trees they cut down or left standing was by His leave.

"burnt and cut down the palm trees of Bani An-Nadir which were at Al-Buwaira (a place near Medina). There upon Allah revealed"

'Abdullah ibn 'Umar · Sahih al-Bukhari 4884

Qur'an 59:9

A hungry man came to the Prophet and an Ansari took him home as a guest. The couple put their children to sleep, put out the lamp and went to bed hungry so the guest could eat. The next morning Allah revealed the verse about preferring others over themselves though in need.

"Then Allah revealed: 'But give them preference over themselves even though they were in need of that'"

Abu Huraira · Sahih al-Bukhari 4889

TWO

Its themes

- Consequence of breaking covenant
- Lessons for people of vision
- Just distribution of wealth (fay)
- Selflessness of the Ansar
- The Quran's weight
- The Beautiful Names of Allah

THREE

Key verses

It is He Who got out the Unbelievers among the People of the Book from their homes at the first gathering (of the forces). Little did ye think that they would get out: And they thought that their fortresses would defend them from Allah! But the (Wrath of) Allah came to them from quarters from which they little expected (it), and cast terror into their hearts, so that they destroyed their dwellings by their own hands and the hands of the Believers, take warning, then, O ye with eyes (to see)!

Qur'an 59:2

'So take a lesson, O people of vision' is the surah's own instruction on how to read history. Al-Tabari notes the ruin of Banu Nadir is set before the believer as a mirror for any who trust their fortresses over Allah.

What Allah has bestowed on His Messenger (and taken away) from the people of the townships,- belongs to Allah,- to His Messenger and to kindred and orphans, the needy and the wayfarer; In order that it may not (merely) make a circuit between the wealthy among you. So take what the Messenger assigns to you, and deny yourselves that which he withholds from you. And fear Allah; for Allah is strict in Punishment.

Qur'an 59:7

Whatever the Messenger gives you, take it, and whatever he forbids, refrain. Classical scholars cite this as a foundation for following the Sunnah, and its immediate context is that wealth should not just cycle among the wealthy.

But those who before them, had homes (in Medina) and had adopted the Faith,- show their affection to such as came to them for refuge, and entertain no desire in their hearts for things given to the (latter), but give them preference over themselves, even though poverty was their (own lot). And those saved from the covetousness of their own souls,- they are the ones that achieve prosperity.

Qur'an 59:9

The Ansar loved those who emigrated to them and preferred them over their own needs though poverty was theirs. Ibn Kathir highlights this ithar (selflessness) as the height of brotherhood, freedom from the soul's stinginess.

Had We sent down this Qur'an on a mountain, verily, thou wouldst have seen it humble itself and cleave asunder for fear of Allah. Such are the similitudes which We propound to men, that they may reflect.

Qur'an 59:21

Had this Quran been sent down upon a mountain, you would see it humbled and split apart from awe of Allah. A summons to feel with your heart what a mountain would feel, when hardness of heart leaves us unmoved by it.

Allah is He, than Whom there is no other god;- Who knows (all things) both secret and open; He, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

Qur'an 59:22

The closing verses roll out Allah's names — the Knower of the unseen and seen, the Compassionate, the Sovereign, the Holy. Reciting them slowly, letting each name settle in the heart, is itself an act of tadabbur.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Al-Hashr (The Gathering, or The Exile) is a Madinan surah revealed after the expulsion of the Jewish tribe of Banu al-Nadir from Madina in the fourth year of the Hijra, when their treachery against the Prophet ﷺ and their plotting against his life broke the treaty that had protected them. Ibn 'Abbas indeed called it 'Surat Banu al-Nadir.' It is one of the musabbihat, framed by the glorification of God at its opening and its close.

Its character combines historical judgment with sublime devotion. It records God's humbling of a fortified enemy, sets down the ethics of the wealth thereby restored (the fay'), paints the ideal of the believing community in the mutual love of the Emigrants and Helpers, exposes the hollowness of the hypocrites, and rises at its end to one of the most majestic passages of divine names in the Qur'an. Few surahs travel so far in so short a space — from a besieged fortress to the Names of God.

The mood is one of awe at how God overturns the calculations of the mighty, sealed by the repeated call, 'so take heed, O people of vision' (fa-'tabiru ya uli al-absar) (59:2).

How the surah unfolds

After the opening glorification, it names the event: it was God who drove the disbelievers among the People of the Scripture from their homes at the first gathering (li-awwal al-hashr). 'You

did not think they would leave, and they thought their fortresses would protect them from God — but God came upon them from where they had not expected, and cast terror into their hearts, so that they destroyed their own houses with their hands and the hands of the believers' (59:2). Had God not decreed exile for them, He would have punished them in this world; and in the Hereafter theirs is the Fire.

The surah then addresses the fay' — the property gained without a war of horses and camels, which therefore belongs to God and His Messenger to distribute (59:6–7). It lays down a principle of lasting weight: the distribution is ordered 'so that it may not merely circulate among the rich among you' (59:7), and it commands, 'whatever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatever he forbids you, abstain from it.' The shares go to the poor Emigrants driven from their homes, 'seeking bounty from God and His good pleasure' (59:8), and the surah then praises the Helpers (the Ansar) who had settled in the home and in faith before them: they love those who emigrated to them, harbor no envy for what the Emigrants were given, and 'prefer others over themselves, even though poverty be their own lot' — and 'whoever is saved from the greed of his own soul (shuhh nafsihi), those are the successful' (59:9). It adds the prayer of those who came after: 'Our Lord, forgive us and our brothers who preceded us in faith, and put not in our hearts any rancor toward those who believe' (59:10).

Next it exposes the hypocrites, who had promised their disbelieving allies among the People of the Scripture that they would emigrate with them and fight beside them — promises God declares false: they will not leave with them, and if fought

they will not help them, and if they did help they would turn tail (59:11–12). The believers, the surah notes, strike more fear in their breasts than God, for they do not truly understand; they will not fight united except from within fortified towns or behind walls, for ‘their hearts are divided’ though you suppose them united (59:14). They are likened to Satan, who says to man ‘disbelieve,’ then when he does, declares, ‘I am free of you; I fear God, Lord of the worlds’ (59:16) — abandoning his victim to the Fire.

The surah then turns to exhort the believers: fear God, and ‘let every soul look to what it has sent ahead for tomorrow’ (59:18); be not like those who forgot God, so He made them forget their own selves (59:19). It presents its final parable: ‘Had We sent down this Qur’an upon a mountain, you would have seen it humbled and rent asunder from the fear of God’ (59:21). And it closes with the cascade of names — He is God, other than whom there is no god, Knower of the unseen and the witnessed, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful; the Sovereign, the Holy, the Peace, the Bestower of Security, the Overseer, the Mighty, the Compeller, the Supreme; the Creator, the Inventor, the Fashioner — ‘His are the most beautiful names; whatever is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Him’ (59:22–24).

The major themes, in depth

The first theme is that no strength shields against God. The Banu al-Nadir trusted their fortresses, and the surah's most quoted line is that God came upon them from where they did not reckon, so that they pulled down their own homes with their

own hands (59:2). Real security is not in walls or numbers but in being on God's side; and the believer is commanded, twice, to draw the lesson — 'take heed, O people of vision.'

The second theme is a divine economics of the fay'. The Qur'an legislates that gained wealth be spread among the needy — Emigrants, orphans, the poor, the wayfarer — 'so that it may not circulate only among the rich among you' (59:7). This single clause plants a principle of wealth-circulation and social justice at the heart of the community's finances, and pairs it with obedience to the Messenger's distribution.

The third theme is the portrait of the ideal believing society, drawn in three generations: the Emigrants who sacrificed home and property for God's pleasure; the Helpers whose defining virtue is *ithar* — preferring others over themselves even in their own need — and freedom from soul-greed (*shuhh*); and those who come after, whose mark is to pray for their predecessors and to keep their hearts free of rancor. Together these verses became the charter of Muslim brotherhood and a rebuke to sectarian bitterness.

The fourth theme is the majesty of God Himself, gathered in the closing names. After the drama of fortresses and hypocrites, the surah lifts the gaze to the Sovereign, the Holy, the Peace, the Compeller, the Fashioner. And its parable of the mountain — which would crumble in awe if the Qur'an were laid upon it — measures the human heart against stone and asks why we, who do receive the Qur'an, remain unmoved.

Points of reflection

The surah teaches i'tibar — the discipline of taking lessons from what God does in history. The fall of a mighty, entrenched enemy is not merely news but a sign, and the 'people of vision' are those who read it rightly and revise how they trust in worldly power.

Its ideal of ithar and its warning against shuhh (the grasping greed of the soul) set a high bar for generosity: to give not from surplus but even at the cost of one's own need, and to rejoice rather than envy at what others receive. 'Whoever is saved from the greed of his own soul, those are the successful' (59:9) is offered as a definition of true success.

And the surah's final movement turns the believer inward and upward: 'let every soul look to what it has sent ahead for tomorrow' (59:18), and then contemplate the Names of the God to whom that soul returns. To let the Qur'an humble a heart harder than a mountain, and to live by the awe of these Names, is the response the surah seeks.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Read the downfall of nations as a warning meant for you.
2. Take what the Messenger commands and leave what he forbids.
3. Guard against the soul's stinginess; give others preference.
4. Let the Quran soften a heart a mountain would break for.

Where this reading draws from. Ibn Kathir, al-Tabari, 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/.