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Surah Al-Munafiqun

The Hypocrites · Madani · 11 ayat — reflections on
surah 63 of the Qur'an

QURAN

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المُنافِقُونَ — Al-Munafiqun, “The Hypocrites”. Surah 63 of 114, revealed in Madinah, 11 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/63/.

ONE

The surah in brief

Exposing the hypocrites of Madinah and their leader's scheming, the surah lays bare their false oaths and inner disbelief, and warns the believers not to let wealth or children distract them from remembering God, urging them to spend before death arrives.

Al-Munafiqun lays bare the hypocrites of Madinah, who swear oaths of belief as a shield while their hearts reject faith, connected in tradition to Abdullah ibn Ubayy and his threat to expel the Prophet from the city. It describes their impressive appearance and eloquence masking hollow interiors, like propped-up timber, and their refusal to seek the Prophet's forgiveness out of arrogance. Reassuring the believers that honor belongs to Allah, His Messenger, and the faithful, the surah then turns the mirror on believers themselves: do not let wealth and children distract you from the remembrance of Allah, and spend in charity before death arrives and the chance is gone.

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 63:1-8

On a campaign, Zaid heard 'Abdullah ibn Ubai say not to spend on the Prophet's companions and that on returning to Madinah the more honourable would expel the meaner. Zaid reported it; Ibn Ubai and his companions swore they had not said it, and Zaid was disbelieved. Allah then revealed Surat al-Munafiqun confirming Zaid.

"Then Allah revealed (Surat Al-Munafiqin): 'When the hypocrites come to you.....(63.1)'"

Zaid ibn Arqam · Sahih al-Bukhari 4901

TWO

Its themes

- Oaths as a shield
- Hollow appearances
- Arrogance and refusal to repent
- True honor belongs to Allah
- Wealth as distraction
- Spend before death

THREE

Key verses

When the Hypocrites come to thee, they say, "We bear witness that thou art indeed the Messenger of Allah." Yea, Allah knoweth that thou art indeed His Messenger, and Allah beareth witness that the Hypocrites are indeed liars.

Qur'an 63:1

They swear they testify the Prophet is Allah's messenger, yet Allah testifies the hypocrites are liars, because their tongues contradict their hearts. Al-Qurtubi notes the lie is not in the words but in the belief behind them.

When thou lookest at them, their exteriors please thee; and when they speak, thou listenest to their words. They are as (worthless as hollow) pieces of timber propped up, (unable to stand on their own). They think that every cry is against them. They are the enemies; so beware of them. The curse of Allah be on them! How are they deluded (away from the Truth)!

Qur'an 63:4

Their bodies impress you and you listen to their speech, but they are like propped-up timber, imposing yet lifeless within. A caution against being swayed by presence and eloquence over substance.

They say, "If we return to Medina, surely the more honourable (element) will expel therefrom the meaner." But honour belongs to Allah and His Messenger, and to the Believers; but the Hypocrites know not.

Qur'an 63:8

They plotted that the mighty would expel the weak, but honor belongs to Allah, His Messenger, and the believers. Ibn Kathir contrasts the hypocrites' worldly calculus with where true dignity actually lies.

O ye who believe! Let not your riches or your children divert you from the remembrance of Allah. If any act thus, the loss is their own.

Qur'an 63:9

Let not your wealth or children divert you from the remembrance of Allah, for whoever does so is among the losers. The surah aims this warning squarely at the believers, not the hypocrites.

and spend something (in charity) out of the substance which We have bestowed on you, before Death should come to any of you and he should say, "O my Lord! why didst Thou not give me respite for a little while? I should then have given (largely) in charity, and I should have been one of the doers of good".

Qur'an 63:10

Spend before death comes and one pleads for a little more time to give charity. Al-Sa'di reads it as the regret every soul risks, wanting to give when giving is no longer possible.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Al-Munafiqun (The Hypocrites) is a short Madinan surah devoted to the anatomy of hypocrisy. Its occasion was the expedition against Banu al-Mustaliq, when the chief of the Madinan hypocrites, 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy, was heard to say that on their return 'the mightier will surely expel the weaker,' sneering at the Emigrants. The young Companion Zayd ibn Arqam reported the words; 'Abdullah swore he had not said them, and some doubted the boy — until the surah descended and vindicated Zayd.

Its character is a portrait, drawn with unusual psychological precision. The surah lays bare the inner mechanics of nifaq: the smooth oaths, the impressive exterior, the hollow core, the cowardly suspicion, the arrogance when called to repent. Then it turns to warn the believers themselves against a subtler danger — letting wealth and children divert them from the remembrance of God.

The mood is exposing and cautionary. It strips the mask from the hypocrite and holds the lesson up to the believer as a mirror.

How the surah unfolds

It opens on the hypocrites' central lie: when they come to you they say, 'We bear witness that you are the Messenger of God' — and God knows you are His Messenger, but 'God bears

witness that the hypocrites are surely liars' (63:1); for their tongues affirm what their hearts deny. They have made their oaths a shield and turned people from the way of God (63:2); having believed and then disbelieved, their hearts were sealed, so they do not understand (63:3).

Then comes the striking image: 'when you see them, their bodies please you, and if they speak, you listen to their speech — but they are like propped-up timbers' (khushubun musannada) (63:4) — impressive in appearance, hollow and dead within. They start at every cry, imagining it aimed at them; they are the enemy, so beware them. And when told, 'come, that the Messenger of God may ask forgiveness for you,' they turn their heads away in arrogance (63:5–6). It is all one whether you seek forgiveness for them or not; God will not forgive them (63:6).

The surah reports their two schemes at Banu al-Mustaliq. They said, 'Do not spend on those who are with the Messenger of God until they disband' — as if the treasures of the heavens and the earth were not God's (63:7). And they said, 'If we return to Madina, the mightier will drive out the weaker' — but the surah overturns the boast: 'to God belongs the might, and to His Messenger and to the believers, but the hypocrites do not know' (63:8).

Finally it turns to the believers with a warning drawn from the hypocrites' failing: 'O you who believe, let not your wealth or your children divert you from the remembrance of God; whoever does so, those are the losers' (63:9). Spend from what We have provided you before death comes to one of you and

he says, 'My Lord, if only You would delay me a little, that I might give charity and be among the righteous' (63:10) — but God never delays a soul when its appointed term has come (63:11).

The major themes, in depth

The first theme is the anatomy of hypocrisy. The surah dissects the condition trait by trait: the split between tongue and heart, so that even a true statement ('you are the Messenger of God') becomes a lie in their mouths because they do not believe it; oaths used as camouflage; an outward impressiveness that conceals inner emptiness — 'propped-up timbers'; a guilty, jumpy suspicion; and, most tellingly, arrogance when offered the mercy of repentance. It is one of the Qur'an's fullest studies of the diseased heart.

The second theme is the sealing of the heart. 'They believed, then disbelieved, so their hearts were sealed, and they do not understand' (63:3). The surah presents hypocrisy not as a static state but as a hardening: repeated turning from the truth closes the heart until it can no longer comprehend, and even the Prophet's seeking forgiveness cannot avail one who refuses to turn back.

The third theme is the reversal of the hypocrite's boast. 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy imagined honor and might ('izza) belonged to the powerful of Madina, and that the poor Emigrants were the 'weaker' to be expelled. The surah snatches the word from his mouth: might belongs to God, His Messenger, and the believers (63:8). Real strength and honor are not what the schemer supposes.

The fourth theme turns the lesson inward. Having exposed the hypocrites' love of wealth and their stinginess, the surah warns the believers not to let their own wealth and children distract them from God's remembrance (63:9), and urges them to spend now — because the deathbed plea for 'a little delay' to give charity will be refused. Procrastinated good is the loser's regret.

Points of reflection

The surah calls the believer to sincerity of the heart over impressiveness of the exterior. It warns that a fine appearance and fluent speech can clothe an empty core, and it prizes instead the honest, if unremarkable, faith that matches inner conviction to outward word.

It cautions against the very things the hypocrites loved — wealth and status — not by condemning them, but by warning how easily they divert the heart from God. The believer is to hold them without letting them displace the remembrance that is his true wealth.

And it presses urgency in doing good: give while you can, for the door of 'if only You would delay me' does not open at death (63:10–11). Meanwhile it offers quiet comfort to the believer who feels weak or outnumbered — that true might belongs to God, His Messenger, and those who believe, whatever the schemers imagine.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Do not weaponize oaths to hide a faithless heart.
2. Look past charisma to what a person actually believes and does.
3. Seek honor from Allah, not from wealth or numbers.
4. Give now; the window for charity closes at death.

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