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Surah Al-Muddaththir

The Cloaked One · Makki · 56 ayat — reflections on
surah 74 of the Qur'an

QURAN

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المُدَّثِّر — Al-Muddaththir, "The Cloaked One". Surah 74 of 114, revealed in Makkah, 56 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/74/.

ONE

The surah in brief

Rousing the cloaked Prophet to rise and warn, the surah launches his public mission—magnify your Lord, purify yourself, shun idols—recounts the scheming denier destined for Saqar with its nineteen keepers, and affirms every soul is held in pledge for its deeds.

Al-Muddaththir, among the earliest revelations after the pause in wahy, rouses the Prophet from his cloak with a stack of urgent commands: arise and warn, magnify your Lord, purify your garments, shun defilement, and give without expecting more in return. It warns of the Day the trumpet is blown, a day hard on the deniers, and singles out an arrogant Makkan who heard the Quran, was awed by it, then dismissed it as mere magic after calculating and scowling, condemning him to Saqar. It describes that Fire and the nineteen angels over it, testing hearts by that number, and affirms that every soul is held in pledge for its deeds. Its haunting close reports the people of the Fire confessing they were not of those who prayed nor fed the poor, and it asks what turns people away from a reminder as clear as this.

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 74:1-5

After a pause in revelation, the Prophet heard a voice and saw the angel from Hira' seated on a chair between the sky and the earth. Terrified, he went home and asked to be wrapped up, and Allah revealed "O you wrapped up! Arise and warn."

"They wrapped me, and then Allah revealed: "O you, (Muhammad) wrapped-up! Arise and warn...and desert the idols." (74.1-5)"

Jabir ibn 'Abdullah · Sahih al-Bukhari 4926

TWO

Its themes

- The call to arise and warn
- Purity and sincere giving
- The arrogant rejecter
- Saqar and its keepers
- Every soul held in pledge
- Why people flee the reminder

THREE

Key verses

Arise and deliver thy warning!

Qur'an 74:2

Arise and warn. Ibn Kathir marks this as the launch of the Prophet's public mission; the time for wrapping in a cloak was over.

And thy garments keep free from stain!

Qur'an 74:4

And purify your garments. The scholars read this on two levels: literal cleanliness and the deeper purification of one's deeds and self from sin.

Every soul will be (held) in pledge for its deeds.

Qur'an 74:38

Every soul is held in pledge for what it has earned. Al-Sa'di explains each person is detained by their own record until their deeds redeem them, a sobering measure of accountability.

"What led you into Hell Fire?"

Qur'an 74:42

What put you into Saqar? They will say, 'We were not of those who prayed, nor did we feed the poor.' The damned name their own causes: abandoned prayer and hardness toward the hungry.

Then what is the matter with them that they turn away from admonition?–

Qur'an 74:49

What is wrong with them that they turn away from the reminder, as if fleeing donkeys startled from a lion? A vivid image of hearts running from truth that should draw them near.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Al-Muddaththir ("The Cloaked One") is one of the earliest revelations — by many accounts the first after the initial pause (fatrah al-wahy) that followed the very first verses of al-'Alaq. The Prophet ﷺ, awestruck by the return of Gabriel, had wrapped himself in his cloak; God addresses him in that state — "O you who are covered up" — and issues the commission that launches the public mission: "Arise and warn!" (74:1–2). If al-'Alaq began the revelation, al-Muddaththir began the messengership.

Its character is one of ignition and confrontation. The opening verses are a compact charter for a prophet; the long middle passage is a searing case study of a proud denier; and the closing scene is a dialogue from within the Fire that lays bare exactly what damns a person. The mood is urgent, uncompromising, and morally precise.

How the surah unfolds

The commissioning verses (74:1–7) are terse commands, each a pillar of the calling: arise and warn; magnify your Lord alone; purify your garments; shun all defilement; give not, seeking to gain more; and for your Lord, be patient. In a handful of words the Prophet ﷺ is given his message (warning), his creed (God's greatness), his purity, his sincerity, and his stamina.

Then the Trumpet sounds (74:8-10): when the horn is blown, that will be a Day of hardship, far from easy, for the disbelievers. From here the surah turns to a specific man (74:11-30), traditionally al-Walid ibn al-Mughira, a Qurayshi chief whom God had lavished with wealth, sons ever-present before him, and smoothed ease — yet who greedily craves still more. The surah traces his inner deliberation with chilling detail: "he pondered and plotted... so may he be destroyed, how he plotted; then he looked, then frowned and scowled, then turned back and grew proud, and said: this is nothing but magic handed down, this is nothing but the speech of a mortal" (74:18-25). Having weighed the Qur'an and knowingly slandered it, he earns the sentence: "I will drive him into Saqar." And what is Saqar? — it spares nothing and leaves nothing, scorching the skin, and over it are nineteen.

The number nineteen becomes a point of trial (74:31). God explains that He made the wardens of the Fire angels, and made their number a test — a stumbling for those with disease in their hearts and a deepening of certainty for the believers and People of the Book — while affirming that none knows the armies of your Lord but He, and that all of this is but a reminder to mankind.

The surah then swears great oaths — by the moon, the departing night, the brightening dawn — that Saqar is one of the greatest of afflictions, a warning to humanity, to whoever among you wishes to advance or hold back; every soul is held in pledge for what it earned (74:32-38). Except the Companions of the Right (74:39-48): in gardens they will question one another, then ask the criminals, "What drove you into Saqar?" And the criminals give the answer that is the moral heart of the surah —

"We were not of those who prayed; we did not feed the poor; we used to plunge into vain talk with those who plunged; and we used to deny the Day of Recompense — until the certainty (death) came to us." For such, no intercession of any intercessor will avail.

The closing rebuke (74:49–56) marvels at their flight from the reminder: "What is wrong with them, that they turn away from the admonition as if they were frightened donkeys fleeing from a lion?" Each of them wants scriptures unrolled to him personally. No — they simply do not fear the Hereafter. "Indeed it is a reminder; so whoever wills may heed it. But they will not heed unless God wills — He is worthy of being feared and worthy of granting forgiveness."

The major themes, in depth

The first theme is the prophetic charter of verses 1–7 — the DNA of the mission compressed into commands. "Arise and warn" sets the task; "magnify your Lord" sets its purpose in tawhid; the purifying of garments and shunning of defilement set the messenger's inner and outer cleanliness; "do not give, seeking more in return" guards sincerity against self-interest; and "be patient for your Lord" arms the whole endeavour with endurance. Scholars have long read these verses as a complete summary of what it means to carry God's word: right message, right motive, right character, right stamina.

The second theme is the anatomy of arrogant rejection in the story of al-Walid. The surah does not present disbelief as honest confusion but as a deliberate, calculated crime: a man who considers the Qur'an carefully, half-recognises its truth,

and then — for the sake of his standing — manufactures the lie that it is mere sorcery or human speech (74:24–25). His prior blessings make his ingratitude worse. This is denial as an act of will and pride, and the surah's relentless "then he pondered, then he plotted..." exposes the effort that self-serving disbelief actually requires.

The third theme is the definition of the people of the Fire, given in their own confession (74:43–46). Four sins condemn them: they abandoned prayer, they left the poor unfed, they wasted themselves in idle mockery alongside the mockers, and they denied the Day of Judgement. Two are failures toward God (prayer, belief in the Reckoning) and two toward fellow creatures (feeding the poor, and their contribution to a culture of scoffing). The Qur'an here draws the ledger of ruin with great economy — and pairs neglect of worship with neglect of the needy exactly as al-Haqqah and al-Ma'un do — teaching that faith which does not pray and does not feed is no faith that saves.

Points of reflection

Al-Muddaththir turns the reader's gaze first to the self as a caller: even before we invite others, we are told to purify, to be sincere, and to be patient. The mission begins with "arise" — the end of comfortable wrapping-up and the start of responsibility. Every believer inherits a share of "arise and warn."

Its most searching gift is the criminals' own confession. The surah lets us read the verdict in advance, so we can audit our lives against it now: Am I of those who pray? Do I feed the poor? Do I keep company with mockery, or leave it? Do I truly live as

though the Day of Recompense is real? The four answers the damned give are the four questions the living are meant to ask themselves — while the certainty of death has not yet arrived.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Answer the call to convey good and warn, without delay.
2. Purify your outward and inward from what defiles.
3. Know that your own deeds hold your soul in pledge.
4. Guard prayer and feeding the poor; their neglect is named in the Fire.

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