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Surah Al-Mursalat

The Emissaries · Makki · 50 ayat — reflections on
surah 77 of the Qur'an

QURAN

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September 2026 · v1.305.2

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المرسلات — Al-Mursalat, “The Emissaries”. Surah 77 of 114, revealed in Makkah, 50 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/77/.

ONE

The surah in brief

A solemn oath by the winds sent forth builds to the terror of Judgment Day, with the refrain 'Woe that Day to the deniers' driving home that those who reject the resurrection will find no escape from its reckoning.

Al-Mursalat opens with five oaths by winds and angels sent forth in succession, then swears that the Day of Decision is coming. The surah's engine is a single dread refrain, "Woe that Day to the deniers," repeated ten times as it walks through the ruin of past peoples, the wonders of a person's own creation from a despised drop, and the earth that gathers both the living and the dead. Each argument is a fresh proof followed by the same verdict, so that denial grows more indefensible with every cycle. It closes on the deniers who, called in this life to bow before their Lord, arrogantly refuse, and who are left asking after which word they will ever believe.

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 77

Surat al-Mursalat was revealed to the Prophet in a cave at Mina while companions were with him. As they learned it from him, a snake appeared and escaped them.

"We were with the Prophet (ﷺ) when Surat Wal-Mursalat was revealed to him."

'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud · Sahih al-Bukhari 4930

TWO

Its themes

- The Day of Decision
- Signs in creation
- The fate of past deniers
- Repeated warning
- Silence of the guilty
- Human ingratitude

THREE

Key verses

Ah woe, that Day, to the Rejecters of Truth!

Qur'an 77:15

The refrain lands like a hammer struck ten times; each repetition after a fresh proof leaves denial with less ground to stand on.

Have We not created you from a fluid (held) despicable?–

Qur'an 77:20

He asks us to trace ourselves back to a despised drop of fluid, so that the One who began us so lowly can hardly be doubted about raising us again.

Have We not made the earth (as a place) to draw together.

Qur'an 77:25

The earth is named a container gathering the living and the dead alike, a quiet reminder that the ground we walk is also the ground that will hold and return us.

That will be a Day when they shall not be able to speak.

Qur'an 77:35

On that Day the deniers neither speak nor are permitted excuse; the tongues so busy with denial now fall silent when it matters most.

And when it is said to them, "Prostrate yourselves!" they do not so.

Qur'an 77:48

Told to bow, they do not bow, an image of hearts that refused submission in life and cannot summon it when the truth stands bare before them.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Al-Mursalat ("The Emissaries") is a Makkan surah built around a haunting refrain: "Woe that Day to the deniers" (waylun yawma'idhin lil-mukadhibin), which tolls ten times through the surah like a bell of warning. It opens with a chain of oaths by things "sent forth" — most commentators take these as the winds, and secondarily the angels — sworn to establish that the promised Day of Decision is coming without fail.

Its character is rhythmic, insistent, and structured by that repeated refrain, which divides the surah into a series of movements, each closing on the same solemn note. It is a surah of warning above all — a sustained address to those who call the Reckoning a lie, showing them the ruin of past deniers, the evidence of God's power in their own creation, and the terrifying and blissful destinies that await.

How the surah unfolds

The opening oaths (77:1-7) swear by the emissaries sent in succession, the winds that storm violently, those that scatter and spread, those that separate distinctly, and those that deliver a reminder — as excuse or as warning — that "what you are promised is bound to occur." The oath then names the moment: when the stars are effaced, the sky is split, the mountains are scattered as dust, and the messengers are gathered for their appointed time (77:8-11). For what Day was all

this postponed? — "For the Day of Decision" (yawm al-fasl). And what will make you grasp the Day of Decision? Then falls the first refrain: "Woe that Day to the deniers."

The surah then argues from history and creation (77:16–28), each unit sealed by the refrain. Did We not destroy the former peoples, and make the later ones follow them? — thus We deal with the guilty. Woe that Day to the deniers. Did We not create you from a lowly fluid, lodged in a secure resting place for a known term? We determined it — and how excellent are We in determining. Woe that Day to the deniers. Did We not make the earth a container for the living and the dead, and set on it firm, towering mountains, and give you fresh water to drink? Woe that Day to the deniers. Each blessing and each act of power is offered as proof that the God who does all this can surely raise and judge.

The scene then shifts to the punishment of the deniers (77:29–40). "Proceed to that which you used to deny" — go to a shade of smoke in three columns, giving no cool shade and no shield from the flame; the Fire throws up sparks like great castles, like tawny camels. Woe that Day to the deniers. This is a Day they do not speak, nor are they permitted to offer excuses. Woe that Day to the deniers. "This is the Day of Decision; We have gathered you and the former peoples. So if you have any scheme, then scheme against Me." Woe that Day to the deniers.

Against this, the reward of the God-conscious (77:41–45): the muttaqin are amid shades and springs, and fruits of whatever they desire — "Eat and drink in health, for what you used to do." Thus do We reward the doers of good. Woe that Day to the

deniers. Then a final address to the deniers themselves (77:46–50): "Eat and enjoy a little — you are criminals." Woe that Day to the deniers. "And when it is said to them, Bow down (irka'u), they do not bow." Woe that Day to the deniers. The surah ends with a piercing rhetorical close: "Then in what statement after this will they believe?" — if the Qur'an itself does not move them, what possibly could?

The major themes, in depth

The central theme is the certainty and justice of the Day of Decision (yawm al-fasl), the Day on which truth and falsehood, and the truthful and the liars, are finally separated. The surah's entire architecture — the opening oaths, the cosmic unravelling, the destinies of the two groups — serves to nail down that this Day is "bound to occur" (77:7). And its refrain names the losers precisely: not "sinners" in general but the mukadhibin, those who called the truth a lie. Denial itself is the cardinal crime the surah prosecutes, because denial is the refusal to reckon with all the evidence God has laid out.

A second theme is the evidentiary reading of creation. The surah does not merely assert the Reckoning; it argues for it from the deniers' own bodies and world. You were made from a despised drop, kept safe in the womb for a measured term (77:20–23); the earth gathers your living and your dead and yields you fresh water and towering mountains (77:25–27). The One who so precisely "determined" your creation — and the surah pauses to praise His power, "how excellent are We in

determining" — is manifestly able to gather you again for judgement. The refrain following each proof turns every unacknowledged blessing into a witness against the ingrate.

A third theme, sharpened at the very end, is that denial finally hardens into an incapacity to submit. "When it is said to them, Bow down, they do not bow" (77:48) — the refusal is not only of belief but of humble worship; pride has calcified. The closing question, "In what statement after this will they believe?" (77:50), delivers the surah's verdict: the Qur'an is God's clearest and final address; to reject it is to place oneself beyond the reach of any further argument. Guidance has been given in full; what remains is only the choice to bow or refuse.

Points of reflection

Al-Mursalat works on the reader through repetition, and its refrain is meant to be internalised: ten times it warns "woe to the deniers," until the listener instinctively asks — am I among them? The surah defines the denier not as one who never heard the truth but as one who met it and waved it away. Its call, then, is to affirm rather than to explain away: to let the evidence of one's own creation, the water one drinks, the earth one walks, testify to the God who made and will judge.

Its final two verses are a quiet examination of the heart. When we are told to bow — in prayer, in obedience, in submission — do we bow? The surah warns that persistent denial ends in a soul that cannot lower itself before God even when commanded. And it leaves us with the sobering thought that

the Qur'an is God's ultimate word: if this does not soften us, nothing further will be sent. The time to respond is while its verses are still being recited to us.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Let repeated warning move you rather than dull you; the tenfold refrain is meant to break through, not to be tuned out.
2. Reflect on your own beginning from a lowly drop as the clearest personal proof that resurrection is easy for your Maker.
3. Speak and submit while speech and submission still count; the Day of Decision is a day of enforced silence for those who refused.

Where this reading draws from. Ibn Kathir, Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim, al-Tabari, Jami' al-Bayan, al-Sa'di, Taysir al-Karim al-Rahman. 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/.