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Surah An-Naba

The Tidings · Makki · 40 ayat — reflections on surah 78
of the Qur'an

QURAN

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Surah An-Naba

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النَّبَأُ — An-Naba, “The Tidings”. Surah 78 of 114, revealed in Makkah, 40 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/78/.

ONE

The surah in brief

The Meccans dispute 'the great tidings' of resurrection, so the surah answers with signs of Allah's power in creation, then vividly portrays Hell for the deniers and Paradise for the God-conscious, warning that the Day of Decision is certain.

An-Naba answers a question the Meccans were arguing over, "the great news" of resurrection, and does so not by argument alone but by parading the ordinary miracles they take for granted. The earth as a bed, mountains as pegs, sleep as rest, night as a garment, the day for livelihood, the seven firm heavens, the blazing lamp of the sun, and rain that draws out gardens are each offered as evidence that the One who arranged all this can surely raise the dead. Then comes the Day of Decision, with Hell lying in wait for the defiant and gardens, cool drink, and full contentment for the God-fearing. It ends on the denier's cry of regret, wishing he were mere dust.

TWO

Its themes

- The great news of resurrection
- Signs in creation
- The Day of Decision
- Reward of the God-fearing
- Punishment of the transgressors
- Regret too late

THREE

Key verses

Have We not made the earth as a wide expanse,

Qur'an 78:6

Before any threat, He points to the earth spread beneath our feet as a resting place, teaching that the proof of the Hereafter is under us all along.

And made your sleep for rest,

Qur'an 78:9

Sleep is named a rest, a small daily death and waking that rehearses the greater resurrection we find hard to believe.

Verily the Day of Sorting out is a thing appointed,

Qur'an 78:17

The Day of Decision is fixed and appointed, not vague; time is moving toward a settled meeting, not drifting nowhere.

Verily for the Righteous there will be a fulfilment of (the heart's) desires;

Qur'an 78:31

For the God-fearing there is attainment, gardens and full satisfaction; the surah balances every warning with a door held open.

Verily, We have warned you of a Penalty near, the Day when man will see (the deeds) which his hands have sent forth, and the Unbeliever will say, "Woe unto me! Would that I were (metre) dust!"

Qur'an 78:40

The denier's final wish, to be dust rather than face the reckoning, is the sharpest measure of how costly rejection proves.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

An-Naba' ("The Great News") is a Makkan surah and the opening chapter of the thirtieth juz', the section most Muslims first memorise. It begins with a question that captures the buzz of a society arguing about the message: "About what are they questioning one another? About the great news, concerning which they are in disagreement" (78:1-3). The "great news" (an-naba' al-'azim) is the Resurrection and Judgement — the matter that split Makka into believers and mockers.

Its character is one of majestic, patient persuasion. Rather than merely asserting the Day, the surah first walks the reader through a gallery of God's blessings and design in the world, building the case that a Maker so wise and generous must also be just — and then unveils the Day of Decision, with its terrors for the transgressors and its lush repose for the God-conscious. The rhythm is grand and reassuring, well suited to its role as the gateway to the last juz'.

How the surah unfolds

After posing its opening question about "the great news" (78:1-3), the surah answers the disputers with a firm double warning: "No! They will come to know. Then, no! They will come to know" (78:4-5) — certainty is coming whether they argue or not.

Then follows the great catalogue of blessings and design (78:6–16), each a sign of a purposeful Creator: Did We not make the earth a cradle and the mountains as pegs? And create you in pairs, and make your sleep a rest, and the night a covering, and the day for livelihood? And build above you seven mighty heavens, and set a blazing lamp (the sun)? And send down from the rain—clouds pouring water, to bring forth grain and plants and luxuriant gardens? Every item is a gift precisely fitted to human life — and every one is evidence that its Giver has a plan that does not end at death.

The pivot comes at verse 17: "Indeed, the Day of Decision is an appointed time." The Day is then unveiled (78:17–20): the Trumpet is blown and you come in crowds; the sky is opened and becomes gateways; the mountains are set moving and become a mirage. Hell lies in wait, an ambush (mirsad) — a home for the transgressors, who will linger there for ages, tasting no coolness and no drink, but only scalding water and foul discharge, a fitting recompense (78:21–26). For they did not expect any reckoning and denied Our signs utterly — while We had recorded everything in a book (78:27–29).

Against this, the reward of the God-conscious (78:31–36): for the muttaqin is triumph — gardens and vineyards, and companions of well-matched age, and a full cup. There they hear no idle talk and no lying — a reward from your Lord, a gift well-calculated. The surah then rises to its climax (78:37–40): the Lord of the heavens and the earth and all between, the Most Merciful, whom none can even address on that Day except by His permission. The Day the Spirit and the angels stand in rows, none speaking but the one the Merciful permits, and who

speaks what is right. "That is the True Day" — so whoever wills, let him take a path back to his Lord. And the final, sobering warning: "We have warned you of a punishment near at hand — the Day a man will look at what his own hands sent forth, and the disbeliever will say, Would that I were dust" (78:40).

The major themes, in depth

The central theme is the reasonableness of the Resurrection, argued from the wisdom and generosity displayed in creation. The surah's long middle passage (78:6–16) is not a digression but the argument itself: the earth spread like a cradle, mountains driven like tent-pegs to steady it, sleep given as rest, night as a garment, day for work, the sun as a lamp, rain drawn from clouds to raise gardens and grain. Al-Sa'di and others note that these blessings do double duty — they prove God's power (He who did all this can raise the dead) and His wisdom (a Maker this purposeful would not leave good and evil unaccounted). The Day of Decision is thus presented not as an arbitrary threat but as the natural completion of a wisely ordered world.

A second theme is the exact justice of the two recompenses. Hell is "a fitting recompense" (*jaza'an wifaqa*, 78:26) for those who "did not expect a reckoning" — the punishment answers precisely to the crime of denying accountability. Its horrors are drawn as the reversal of every comfort listed earlier: no coolness where the world gave shade, no drink but scalding water where the world gave pouring rain. The reward of the *muttaqin* mirrors this exactness — gardens against barrenness, a full cup against thirst, and, tellingly, an atmosphere free of "idle

talk and lying" (78:35), the peace of truthful company set against a world of dispute and falsehood. The gift is described as hisaban — a reckoned, well-measured grace.

A third theme is the absolute sovereignty and mercy of God on the Day (78:37–40). The surah's climax names Him "the Most Merciful" even as it depicts a Day so awesome that no one — not even the angels or the Spirit — may speak without His leave. The pairing is deliberate: the very God whose majesty silences all creation is ar-Rahman, so that the Day of overwhelming power is also the Day whose door of mercy is the only refuge. "Whoever wills, let him take a path to his Lord" (78:39) offers, right at the height of the terror, the open way home.

Points of reflection

An-Naba' teaches the reader to read the world as an argument. The cradle-earth, the peg-mountains, the rhythm of sleep and waking, the sun and the rain and the gardens — these are not a neutral backdrop but a case being made, daily, for a wise and generous God who will surely bring us to account. To live attentively among God's blessings is already to be answering the surah's opening question.

Its most piercing line is its last: the disbeliever, seeing what his own hands sent ahead, will cry, "Would that I were dust" (78:40) — wishing for the annihilation he once mockingly claimed was all death meant. The surah offers this now, while the wish can still be forestalled, alongside its open invitation: "whoever wills, let him take a path to his Lord." The warning is "of a punishment near at hand," and the door back to God is standing open in the very same breath.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Read the world as evidence: the bed of the earth, the peg of the mountain, the garment of night are daily sermons on your Lord's power to raise you.
2. Treat sleep and waking as a rehearsal for death and resurrection, so a nightly habit renews your certainty.
3. Aim to be among the God-fearing who attain the gardens, not the one who ends by wishing he had never been raised.

Where this reading draws from. Ibn Kathir, Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim, al-Sa'di, Taysir al-Karim al-Rahman, Amin Ahsan Islahi, Tadabbur-i-Qur'an. 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/.