

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Surah Abasa

He Frowned · Makki · 42 ayat — reflections on surah
80 of the Qur'an

QURAN

CONTENTS

Surah Abasa

1	The surah in brief	What it is, when it came, what it sets out to do
2	Its themes	6 threads running through the surah
3	Key verses	5 passages, with a reflection on each
4	Reading it closely	4 sections
5	Carrying it	3 things to take from it

عَبَسَ — Abasa, “He Frowned”. Surah 80 of 114, revealed in Makkah, 42 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/80/.

ONE

The surah in brief

After a gentle rebuke to the Prophet for turning from a blind seeker while courting the powerful, the surah teaches that guidance is what matters, then points to Allah's care in food and creation before the deafening Day when each person flees even their own family.

Abasa opens with a rare and startling rebuke: the Prophet frowned and turned aside when a blind seeker, Ibn Umm Maktum, came asking for guidance while he was busy courting the Meccan chiefs. Allah corrects the priority in the sharpest terms, teaching that the sincere heart hungry to learn outweighs the powerful who feel no need. The surah then turns on ungrateful man, tracing him from a drop through the provision of his food, and warns of the Deafening Blast when a person will flee from brother, mother, father, and child, each too consumed to help the other. It ends with faces that Day either bright and laughing or covered in dust and gloom.

TWO

Its themes

- Rebuke and correction
- Honoring the sincere seeker
- Human ingratitude
- The bounty of provision
- The Deafening Blast
- Faces of the two ends

THREE

Key verses

Because there came to him the blind man (interrupting).

Qur'an 80:2

That the correction concerns a blind man who came eager to learn fixes the lesson forever: no worldly rank outranks a heart seeking guidance.

Though it is no blame to thee if he grow not (in spiritual understanding).

Qur'an 80:7

The Prophet is reminded he is not answerable for the self-satisfied who will not purify themselves, freeing the caller from chasing the indifferent.

Woe to man! What hath made him reject Allah;

Qur'an 80:17

"Cursed is man, how ungrateful" names the disease directly; the same creature fed and formed by his Lord turns away denying Him.

Then let man look at his food, (and how We provide it):

Qur'an 80:24

He is told simply to look at his food, the grain, fruit, and grazing land, and see a whole chain of mercy he never arranged himself.

That Day shall a man flee from his own brother,

Qur'an 80:34

On the Day of the Blast a person flees his closest kin; the ties we lean on now dissolve when each soul is absorbed in its own account.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

'Abasa ("He Frowned") is a Makkan surah famous for the occasion that opens it. While the Prophet ﷺ was earnestly engaged in inviting a group of Quraysh notables, a blind Companion — 'Abd Allah ibn Umm Maktum — approached seeking to learn. The Prophet ﷺ, absorbed in the hoped-for conversion of the elite, frowned and turned away from him. The surah opens by gently correcting this, and God's naming of the incident in eternal scripture is itself a mark of the Prophet's ﷺ truthfulness and of the Qur'an's divine candour.

Its character is at first tender and corrective, then turns to sharp reproach of ungrateful humanity, and closes with the terror of the Day. The surah is treasured for its lesson in the equal dignity of the sincere seeker, however lowly, against the powerful who feel no need — a rebuke to every human instinct that courts status over sincerity.

How the surah unfolds

The opening (80:1–10) narrates and corrects the incident in the third person — a delicacy of address that softens the rebuke to the Prophet ﷺ. "He frowned and turned away, because the blind man came to him. And what would make you know — perhaps he would purify himself, or be reminded, so the reminder would benefit him?" Then the two attitudes are contrasted: "As for the one who considers himself self-sufficient, to him you give your attention — though it is not

upon you if he does not purify himself. But as for the one who came to you striving, and fearing God, from him you are distracted." The moral is set: eagerness for the influential must never eclipse the earnest seeker who comes in humility and reverence.

The surah then universalises the lesson (80:11-16): "No! Indeed, these are a reminder — so whoever wills may remember it — in honoured pages, exalted and purified, by the hands of scribes, noble and dutiful." The Qur'an's own nobility, borne by noble angel-scribes, stands in judgement over the pettiness of preferring rank to sincerity.

There follows a stern reproach of the human being's ingratitude (80:17-23): "Cursed be man, how ungrateful he is! From what did He create him? From a drop He created him and proportioned him; then the way He eased for him; then He causes him to die and buries him; then when He wills, He will resurrect him." The verse traces the whole arc of a life — conception, formation, the easing of birth and of the path, death, burial, resurrection — and pronounces the verdict: "No! He has not yet fulfilled what God commanded him." Despite all this care, the human being has not discharged his duty.

The surah then invites reflection on food as a sign (80:24-32): "So let man look at his food — how We poured down water in torrents, then split the earth in fissures, and caused to grow within it grain, and grapes and herbage, and olives and date-palms, and gardens dense with trees, and fruits and pasture — provision for you and for your grazing animals." The daily miracle of the meal is offered as evidence of the Provider and

Resurrector. Finally the Deafening Blast (al-sakhkhah) arrives (80:33–42): the Day a man flees from his brother, his mother and father, his wife and children — for each of them, that Day, has a concern to occupy him. Faces that Day are bright, laughing, rejoicing at good news; and other faces have dust upon them, covered in darkness — those are the disbelievers, the wicked.

The major themes, in depth

The first theme is the true worth of a soul, measured by sincerity rather than status. The whole opening turns on a reversal of ordinary human calculation: the Prophet ﷺ, out of zeal for the faith, leaned toward the influential man "who considers himself self-sufficient" and away from the blind seeker who "came striving and fearing." God's correction establishes a permanent principle — the one who truly seeks purification and comes in humility has the greater claim on attention, however poor or unremarkable, because it is his sincerity, not his social weight, that God values. That God preserved this correction of His own beloved Prophet ﷺ in the Qur'an is, as the classical scholars observe, among the strongest proofs of the revelation's honesty: a forger would never have recorded his leader's lapse.

A second theme is the ingratitude of the human being set against God's meticulous care. The passage "Cursed be man, how ungrateful he is!" (80:17) is immediately answered by a tender inventory of that care: created and proportioned from a mere drop, his birth and his life's path made easy, given death and the dignity of burial, destined for resurrection (80:18–22).

Against this cradle-to-grave attentiveness stands the flat charge, "He has not fulfilled what God commanded him" (80:23). The surah's argument is one of proportion: the more one grasps how carefully one was made and provided for, the more monstrous ingratitude appears — a theme it drives home with the everyday example of food (80:24–32), where a single meal is unpacked into an entire chain of divine acts, from rain to split earth to ripened fruit.

A third theme is the great levelling of the Day of Judgement (80:33–42). When the Deafening Blast comes, the very bonds that structure human life — brother, parents, spouse, children — dissolve into private terror, each person too consumed by his own account to spare a thought for another. This severance exposes the folly of the surah's opening scene: the Prophet ﷺ had inclined toward the powerful, but on that Day power and connection count for nothing, and humanity divides only into two — faces bright and laughing, and faces darkened with dust. The Day reveals what really matters, and it is precisely the sincerity the surah began by defending.

Points of reflection

'Abasa asks the reader to examine whom they honour and whom they overlook. It is natural to court the impressive and to neglect the humble seeker — yet God's own correction of His Prophet ﷺ teaches that the sincere heart outranks the influential name. In every gathering, classroom and community, the surah's principle stands: give your attention to the one who genuinely wants to grow, not merely to the one whose status flatters you.

It also calls for a daily audit of gratitude. "Let man look at his food" (80:24) is an invitation to see every meal as the visible end of a long chain of divine provision — and to let that seeing break the habit of ingratitude the surah so bluntly names. And its closing scene of the Deafening Blast, where even parents and children scatter into their own concern, urges the reader to prepare the only thing that will matter then: to be among the bright, laughing faces, having lived by the sincerity and reverence the blind seeker embodied.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Give your attention to the sincere seeker, not the impressive or well-connected; heaven measured worth by earnestness, not status.
2. Break ingratitude by contemplating something as plain as your next meal and the many hands and mercies behind it.
3. Invest now in the deeds that stand alone, since on that Day even parents and children cannot be relied upon.

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/.