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Surah Az-Zalzalah

The Earthquake · Madani · 8 ayat — reflections on
surah 99 of the Qur'an

QURAN

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الزلزلة — Az-Zalzalah, “The Earthquake”. Surah 99 of 114, revealed in Madinah, 8 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/99/.

ONE

The surah in brief

The Day the earth is shaken with its final quake and pours out its buried weight, mankind will come forth in scattered groups to be shown their deeds — for whoever does an atom's weight of good or evil will see it.

Az-Zalzalah depicts the earth convulsing in its final, ultimate quake, casting out its burdens as a bewildered mankind asks what has happened to it. On that Day the earth itself will testify to every deed done upon it, for its Lord commands it to speak. People will emerge in scattered groups to be shown their works. The surah ends with its famous scale of perfect justice: an atom's weight of good will be seen, and an atom's weight of evil will be seen — nothing is too small to count.

TWO

Its themes

- The final earthquake
- Earth's testimony
- Resurrection
- Exact reckoning
- Smallest deeds matter

THREE

Key verses

On that Day will she declare her tidings:

Qur'an 99:4

The earth will report its news — the very ground beneath your sins and acts of worship is a witness recording all.

On that Day will men proceed in companies sorted out, to be shown the deeds that they (had done).

Qur'an 99:6

People come forth in separated groups to be shown their deeds; the private ledger of a life becomes public and undeniable.

Then shall anyone who has done an atom's weight of good, see it!

Qur'an 99:7

An atom's weight of good is not lost — the smallest kindness you dismiss is preserved and returned to you.

And anyone who has done an atom's weight of evil, shall see it.

Qur'an 99:8

An atom's weight of evil is also seen; no sin is trivial enough to slip past the perfect scale, urging vigilance over little wrongs.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Az-Zalzalah — “The Earthquake” — is a short surah of eight verses, generally classed as Madani (though some held it Makkan). Its name is the great quaking of its opening, and it depicts the Day of Resurrection through the image of the earth convulsing, giving up its dead and its buried secrets, and testifying to all that was done upon it. It closes with one of the most quoted and beloved measures of divine justice in the whole Qur'an.

The character of the surah is vivid and swift — a rapid sequence of scenes that carries the reader from the shaking of the ground to the standing before God to the weighing of the smallest deeds. Despite its brevity, the Prophet ﷺ is reported to have said it equals a great portion of the Qur'an, so weighty is its message about accountability. Its mood is awe mixed with a piercing moral precision: nothing done is too small to count.

How the surah unfolds

The surah opens (99:1–3) with the convulsion: “When the earth is shaken with its (final) earthquake, and the earth throws out its burdens, and man says, ‘What is with it?’” The ground that swallowed the dead and held the secrets of every deed now heaves and casts everything out, and the terrified human being cries out in bewilderment at the earth's strange behaviour — the very earth he walked on, now unrecognisable and speaking.

The surah then gives the astonishing reason (99:4–5): “That Day it will report its news, because your Lord has inspired it.” The earth becomes a witness, telling all that was done on its surface — every deed, word, and act of obedience or sin performed upon it — because God commands it to speak. The silent ground of every human life turns out to have been recording, and now delivers its testimony.

The surah closes with the scene of judgment and its measure (99:6–8): “That Day people will proceed in scattered groups to be shown their deeds. So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it.” Humanity emerges in separated companies to be shown the record of their lives, and the surah's final, unforgettable principle is stated: not the smallest particle of good or evil escapes the reckoning.

The major themes, in depth

The first theme is the earth as witness. In an arresting reversal, the very ground beneath our feet — mute, trodden, taken for granted — is revealed to have been a recorder all along. “It will report its news, because your Lord has inspired it” (99:4–5). The Prophet ﷺ explained that the earth will testify to every deed done upon it. This transforms the believer's sense of the world: there is no truly private stage for our actions, for the place itself bears witness. It also underscores the totality of the reckoning — creation itself is enlisted as evidence, and nothing done anywhere is lost. The image sobers and steadies: live as one whose very ground is watching.

The second theme is the resurrection and exposure of deeds. “That Day people will proceed in scattered groups to be shown their deeds” (99:6). The dead are cast out of the earth and gathered, divided into groups — the commentators say according to their states, the wretched apart from the blessed — and each is “shown their deeds,” confronted with the full record of a life. The purpose of the whole cosmic upheaval is this moment of accountability: the shaking, the casting-out, the testimony all serve to bring every person face to face with what they did. Nothing in the surah is spectacle for its own sake; it all drives toward the individual standing before the truth of his own actions.

The third theme is the measure of the atom's weight — the surah's crowning principle of exact justice. “Whoever does an atom's weight (mithqāla dharrah) of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it” (99:7–8). The dharrah, the smallest speck imaginable to the first audience, becomes the unit of divine accounting. This teaches two lessons at once. First, it is an encouragement never to belittle any good deed: the smallest kindness, the briefest remembrance, the tiniest charity is recorded and will be seen and rewarded. Second, it is a warning never to belittle any sin: no wrong is too small to matter, for it too will be brought forth. The commentators note how this verse reshapes moral life entirely, dissolving the excuse “it is only a little.” In God's ledger, littleness is no escape; the scale registers the weight of a mote.

Points of reflection

The surah revolutionises the way we regard small deeds. It forbids the two great errors of moral laziness: dismissing a small good as not worth doing, and dismissing a small sin as not worth avoiding. If an atom's weight is seen, then every act matters, and a life is built or ruined not only by its large decisions but by the accumulation of its smallest ones. The reflection is to take the little things seriously — the passing kindness, the private wrong — because God does.

It also plants a healthy awareness that our actions are witnessed by the very world we inhabit. The ground itself will speak. Far from being oppressive, this can be a source of dignity and care: to walk gently upon an earth that remembers, to fill our places with deeds we would be glad to have testified. Nothing is unseen, and nothing good is wasted.

Finally, the surah offers hope alongside its warning. The one who fears his record of evil is also promised that his least good will not be overlooked. For the believer who feels his deeds are meagre, the atom's-weight promise is a mercy: keep doing the small goods, for every single one is registered and returned. The scattered groups of that Day are separated by exactly such particles, gathered over a lifetime.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Never dismiss a small good deed as insignificant — it is weighed and rewarded.
2. Guard against minor sins; they too are recorded and shown.
3. Live conscious that the earth itself witnesses your actions.
4. Let certainty of exact justice shape every private choice.

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