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Surah Al-Qari'ah

The Calamity · Makki · 11 ayat — reflections on surah
101 of the Qur'an

QURAN

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القارعة — Al-Qari'ah, "The Calamity". Surah 101 of 114, revealed in Makkah, 11 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/101/.

ONE

The surah in brief

The Striking Calamity of the Day of Resurrection, when people scatter like moths and mountains become like carded wool, and every soul's deeds are weighed — the heavy scales earning a pleasant life, the light ones a plunge into a blazing Fire.

Al-Qari'ah names the Day of Judgment 'the Striking Calamity,' a sound that shocks the heart. It paints the scene with two unforgettable images: people scattered like moths driven about, and mountains reduced to tufts of carded wool. Then it turns to the decisive moment of the scales — whoever's good deeds weigh heavy enters a pleasing life, while whoever's are light falls to a bottomless pit. The surah ends by asking what that pit is, answering: a blazing fire.

TWO

Its themes

- The Striking Calamity
- Terror of the Hour
- Scattered mankind
- The scales of deeds
- Two final destinations

THREE

Key verses

(It is) a Day whereon men will be like moths scattered about,

Qur'an 101:4

People become like scattered moths — drawn helplessly toward destruction, an image of confusion when all worldly order collapses.

And the mountains will be like carded wool.

Qur'an 101:5

Solid mountains turn to fluffed wool; if the firmest things dissolve, how misplaced is our sense of security in this world.

Then, he whose balance (of good deeds) will be (found) heavy,

Qur'an 101:6

Salvation hinges on scales that weigh heavy with good — a call to accumulate deeds of real substance, not empty show.

But he whose balance (of good deeds) will be (found) light,-

Qur'an 101:8

Whoever's good deeds are found light has nothing of true weight to save him; the very next verse names his refuge 'Hawiyah,' the abyss that receives him as a mother receives her child — a chilling reversal of comfort.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Al-Qari'ah is an early Makkan surah, from the phase when the Qur'an was pressing the reality of the Resurrection onto a society that treated death as a full stop. Its name is its opening word — al-Qari'ah, from a root meaning to strike, to knock, to hammer. The Arabs used qari'ah for a sudden catastrophe that comes crashing down on people; here it becomes a proper name for the Day of Judgment itself, the calamity that strikes creation the way a hammer strikes an anvil.

The mood is set entirely by sound and dread. Like its sister al-Haqqah, the surah opens by naming the Day and then asking, in a tone of awed dread, what it even is — as if the reality overflows the words available to describe it. The short, drumming rhyme (in the Arabic every verse ends on the same beat) reproduces the pounding sense of the name. This is a surah you feel before you analyse it.

How the surah unfolds

The surah moves in three clean stages. First, the naming and the awe: al-Qari'ah — what is al-Qari'ah? — and what will make you grasp what al-Qari'ah is? (101:1-3). The triple repetition is not filler; it slows the reader down and admits that the human imagination cannot reach the thing. The question 'what will make you know?' is the Qur'an's own signal that a description is coming which we could never have supplied ourselves.

Second, two images of a world unmade (101:4–5). Humanity on that Day becomes like scattered moths — *al-farash al-mabthuth* — the small winged creatures that swarm dazed and directionless around a flame. Mankind, for all its pride, is reduced to a bewildered, driven cloud. And the mountains, the very emblem of permanence, become like carded wool — *al-ihn al-manfush* — tufts of dyed wool teased apart and blown loose. The two images pair the fate of living things and of solid matter: nothing that seemed fixed stays fixed.

Third, the surah turns from cosmic collapse to personal accounting (101:6–11). Everything narrows to a single balance. Whoever's scales are heavy will be in a pleasing life; whoever's scales are light — his mother, his refuge, will be Hawiyah. And then, once more, the same awed question: what will make you grasp what it is? A blazing fire. The surah that opened by refusing to describe the Day closes by finally naming the destination of the ruined, and the last word left ringing is *nar* — fire.

The major themes, in depth

The weighing of deeds. The heart of the surah is the *mawazin* — the scales (101:6–9). Classical scholars differ on the exact mechanism, but the mainstream understanding, following Ibn Kathir and others, is that on that Day deeds are genuinely weighed and the balance is real, whether one pictures literal scales or the decisive assessment they represent. What the surah insists on is that the criterion is weight, not appearance or quantity of noise made in the world. A life is set on a balance and either has substance — real faith and righteous action that

carry weight with Allah — or is found light, hollow, blown away like the moths and the wool of the preceding verses. The imagery of the first half and the judgment of the second are deliberately matched: the weightless soul shares the fate of weightless things.

The two destinations. The surah gives the two outcomes in tightly parallel language but breaks the parallel in a haunting way. The successful are 'in a pleasing life' (fi 'ishatin radiyah) — a life that pleases and satisfies. The failed are described not as going to Hawiyah but as having Hawiyah for a mother (fa-ummuhu Hawiyah, 101:9). Commentators read this with two complementary senses: that the Fire enfolds and 'takes in' the one who has no other refuge, the way a mother receives her child — a bitter inversion of shelter; and that, as the Arabs said of a ruined man 'may his mother be bereft,' the phrase evokes a person left with nothing and nowhere. Hawiyah itself is from a root meaning to fall, to plunge — the abyss into which the light soul drops.

The limits of human knowing. Twice the surah stops to say, in effect, 'and how could you possibly know?' (101:3, 101:10). This is a theme in its own right. The Day of Judgment is not an extension of ordinary experience that we can extrapolate toward; it is a rupture that only revelation can disclose. The surah models the correct posture before the unseen: not confident speculation, but receptive awe waiting to be told.

Points of reflection

Al-Qari'ah asks a person to imagine, honestly, being weighed. Not admired, not counted, not remembered — weighed. It quietly dismantles every standard by which people rank themselves in this life: crowds, noise, wealth, reputation. All of that is precisely the moth-cloud and the loosened wool, impressive in motion and gone in an instant. The only question the surah leaves you with is whether your deeds have any actual density to them.

There is also mercy folded into the terror. The surah tells you the criterion in advance. It does not spring the scales on you; it warns you while the balance can still be filled. To live in the light of al-Qari'ah is to keep adding weight — sincere faith, prayer, honest dealing, kindness that costs something — to the pan that will one day be lifted before Allah, so that when the hammer of the Day finally falls, you are found to be someone of substance and not chaff on the wind.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Build up weighty good deeds now, before the Day the scales are set.
2. Let the images of scattered moths and crushed mountains break false attachment to the world.
3. Take the terror of the Hour seriously as a spur to preparation.
4. Understand that final outcomes rest on the true weight of a life, known only to God.

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/.