

Background and Meaning

Al-Zalzalah takes its name from the earth's mighty shaking. Ibn Kathir explains the surah as a description of the final upheaval, resurrection and the showing of human deeds. The earth on which people once lived securely becomes disturbed, brings out what it held and gives its testimony by Allah's command. The closing ayat make the lesson personal: even the smallest good and evil will be seen. The parent's reading should hold these two parts together, from the great event affecting the whole earth to the accounting of each person's actions.

Tafsir of the Surah

Ayat 1-2: The earth shakes and brings out its burdens. Ibn Kathir records Ibn 'Abbas's explanation of the shaking as movement from below. He explains the earth's burdens here as the dead whom it brings out. The place that had appeared settled and dependable is changed by Allah's command. Ibn Kathir connects this with other Qur'anic descriptions of the earth casting out what it contains, including al-Inshiqaaq 84:3-4.

Ayah 3: The human response. The question about what has happened to the earth expresses astonishment. Ibn Kathir explains that people had known it as still and stable beneath them. Its condition is now transformed, and the dead of earlier and later generations are brought out. The scene belongs to the final return before Allah, when the ordinary security of worldly life no longer remains.

Ayat 4-5: The earth tells its news. Ibn Kathir explains this as testimony about what people did upon its surface. The next ayah identifies why it speaks: its Lord has instructed or permitted it. He records explanations from the early commentators describing Allah commanding the earth to tell what it knows. The testimony therefore takes place through His authority. Actions once carried out on the earth are brought into the account of the Day of Judgement.

Ayah 6: People emerge in different groups. Ibn Kathir explains ashtatan as separate kinds or groups. He connects their differing outcomes with happiness or misery and the destinations appointed for them. They are shown their works and receive recompense for the good and evil they performed in worldly life. The distinction between the groups is therefore connected with accountability, rather than a return to the ordinary gatherings and divisions of earthly life.

Ayat 7-8: Even the smallest deed. The final pair of ayat includes an atom's weight of good and of evil. Ibn Kathir gathers reports emphasising that small acts of good should not be dismissed and small sins should not be treated as harmless. Among the authentic reports he cites is the Prophet's ﷺ encouragement to protect oneself from the Fire even through giving half a date. The conclusion gives both encouragement and warning: an apparently little action can matter before Allah.



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

إِذَا زُلْزِلَتِ الْأَرْضُ زُلْزَالَهَا

١

Memorised

When the earth is shaken with its quake.

وَأُخْرِجَتِ الْأَرْضُ أَثْقَالَهَا

٢

Memorised

And the earth brings out its loads.

وَقَالَ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا لَهَا

٣

Memorised

And man says, "What is the matter with it?"

يَوْمَئِذٍ تُحَدِّثُ أَخْبَارَهَا

٤

Memorised

On that Day, it will tell its tales.

بِأَنَّ رَبَّكَ أَوْحَىٰ لَهَا

٥

Memorised

For your Lord will have inspired it.

يَوْمَئِذٍ يَصْدُرُ النَّاسُ أَشْتَاتًا لِّيُرَوْا أَعْمَالُهُمْ

٦

Memorised

On that Day, the people will emerge in droves, to be shown their works.



فَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ



Whoever has done an atom's weight of good will see it.

وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ



And whoever has done an atom's weight of evil will see it.

Parent tafsir: adapted from Ibn Kathir, Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim, 99:1-8.

Arabic commentary: quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/katheer/sura99-aya1.html

Hadith example: Sahih al-Bukhari 1417, also cited in Ibn Kathir's commentary.

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