SAMPLE

Madinah: The City of the Prophet

Madinah (المدينة) in the Quran

Aira Aurora

Free sample: Introduction & Chapter 1

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Introduction

The Quran tells the story of a city — a city that was not the first, not the most ancient, not the site of the first House. But it was the city that received the Prophet when the first city rejected him. It was the city where the revelation became a society, where the message became a community, where the word of Allah became a way of life. That city is Madinah.

Madinah — originally called Yathrib — is the city of the Prophet Muhammad's migration, the city of his mosque, the city of his community, and the city of his burial. Where Makkah is the city of the Ka'bah and the revelation, Madinah is the city of the Prophet and the community. Makkah is the source; Madinah is the flowering. Makkah is where the message began; Madinah is where the message lived.

The Quran mentions Madinah by name: "And the people of Madinah and those around them" (9:120). The Quran also uses the old name — Yathrib — in the words of the hypocrites: "When a group of them said: O people of Yathrib, there is no stability for you here, so go back" (33:13). The two names — Yathrib and Madinah — mark the transformation: the city that was an ordinary settlement became the city of the Prophet, the city of the community, the city of the religion.

This book — the second in the Places in the Qur'an series — covers Madinah: its names, its migration, its mosque, its community, its trials, its revelation, its connections to the other sacred places, and the lessons it teaches. The book follows the same approach as the first book in the series — Makkah: The Holy City — exploring the place as the Quran presents it, not as a geographical survey but as a location where the human and the divine intersected.

The Places in the Qur'an series traces the sacred geography of the Quran. Where the first book explored Makkah — the center of worship — this second book explores Madinah — the center of community. The two cities are complementary: Makkah is the direction; Madinah is the destination. Makkah is the House; Madinah is the home. The person who faces Makkah prays; the person who visits Madinah learns. The Ka'bah is the center of the prayer; the Prophet's Mosque is the center of the community.

This book begins where the first book ended — with the Prophet leaving Makkah. The Hijra — the migration from Makkah to Madinah — is the bridge between the two books, the event that connects the two cities, the turning point that transformed the religion from a message into a movement.

Chapter 1: The Name — Yathrib and Madinah

The Quran uses the name "Yathrib" once — in the words of the hypocrites:

"When a group of them said: O people of Yathrib, there is no stability for you [here], so go back" (33:13).

The name "Yathrib" is the old name — the name of the city before the Hijra, before the Prophet, before the transformation. The city was an agricultural settlement inhabited by Jewish tribes (Banu Qaynuqa, Banu Nadir, Banu Qurayza) and Arab tribes (Aws and Khazraj). The city was known for its date palms, its forts, and its tribal conflicts. The name "Yathrib" was the name of the city before it became the city of the Prophet.

The significance of the name "Yathrib" in the Quran is the context: the name is used by the hypocrites — the people who wanted to abandon the Prophet at the Battle of Ahzab. The people who said "O people of Yathrib" were the people who rejected the new identity of the city. The person who calls Madinah "Yathrib" in the Quran is the person who resists the transformation — the person who prefers the old name to the new, the old identity to the new, the old city to the new. The name "Yathrib" in the Quran is the name of rejection; the name "Madinah" is the name of acceptance.

The Quran uses the name "Madinah" explicitly:

"And the people of Madinah and those around them, from the Bedouins, who remained behind [were not excused]" (9:120).

The name "Madinah" means simply "the city" — from madinah, a city or town. The name is the transformation: the city that was one settlement among many became the city — the city, the definitive city, the city that needed no further specification. The person who said "the city" meant Madinah, because Madinah was the city — the city of the Prophet, the city of the community, the city of the religion. The name is the elevation: the ordinary settlement became the extraordinary city when the Prophet made it his home.

The name "Madinah" is also associated with the title "Madinat an-Nabi" — the City of the Prophet. The Prophet is the one who gave the city its identity. Before the Prophet, the city was Yathrib — a place of date palms and tribal feuds. After the Prophet, the city was Madinah — the place of the mosque and the community. The name change is the identity change: the city that was named after its geography became the city that was named after its Prophet.

The Quran's use of the two names — "Yathrib" in the mouth of the hypocrites (33:13) and "Madinah" in the context of obligation (9:120) — is a deliberate

contrast. The hypocrites use the old name because they reject the new identity; the Quran uses the new name because it affirms the new identity. The contrast teaches a lesson about names and identity: the name a person uses for a thing reveals what the person believes about the thing. The person who calls Madinah "Yathrib" is the person who has not accepted the transformation; the person who calls it "Madinah" is the person who has.

The lesson extends beyond the city: the person who accepts the transformation of faith uses the new language of faith. The person who resists the transformation uses the old language of resistance. The names we use are not neutral; the names we use are confessions. The person who says "Madinah" confesses acceptance; the person who says "Yathrib" confesses rejection. The name is the faith.

The Prophet established Madinah as a sanctuary — a haram — like Makkah. According to Hadith, the Prophet said: "Ibrahim made Makkah a sanctuary, and I make Madinah a sanctuary" (Bukhari, Muslim). The sanctuary of Madinah is the protection: the city that was made sacred by the Prophet is the city that is protected by the sacred. The person who enters Madinah enters a city that is set apart — a city where the hunting of game is forbidden, where the cutting of trees is prohibited, where the sacred overrides the ordinary.

The sanctuary of Madinah teaches a lesson about the extension of the sacred. The sacred is not confined to one place; the sacred extends to wherever the Prophet establishes it. Makkah is the sanctuary of the Ka'bah; Madinah is the sanctuary of the Prophet. The two sanctuaries are the two centers — the center of worship and the center of community. The person who visits one should respect the other, because the God who made one sacred made the other sacred too.

The Prophet said, according to Hadith: "Madinah is pure" (Bukhari, Muslim). The purity is the spiritual quality: the city that was chosen by the Prophet is the city that is cleansed by his presence. The purity is the sign: the city that receives the Prophet receives a blessing that purifies. The person who lives in Madinah lives in a city that the Prophet prayed for — a city whose people he loved, whose dates he blessed, whose air he praised.

The purity of Madinah is the contrast with the impurity of the world. The person who enters Madinah from the world enters a city that is spiritually cleansed. The cleansing is not the absence of sin — the hypocrites lived in Madinah, and the trials occurred in Madinah. The cleansing is the presence of the Prophet — the spiritual quality that comes from the city being the home of the messenger. The purity is the barakah: the divine blessing that is placed in the city that the Prophet chose.

The Prophet said, according to Hadith: "Whoever eats seven dates of Madinah in the morning, no poison or magic will harm him that day" (Bukhari, Muslim). The dates of Madinah are the blessing: the city that was known for its date palms before the Prophet is the city whose dates are blessed after the Prophet. The dates are the provision: the agricultural city that fed the community produced the fruit that the Prophet praised. The dates are the connection: the person who eats the dates of Madinah is connected to the city of the Prophet, to the land that the Prophet blessed, and to the provision that Allah placed in that land.

The dates of Madinah teach a lesson about the ordinary and the sacred. The date is an ordinary fruit — common, unremarkable, the staple of a desert people. But the date of Madinah, blessed by the Prophet, becomes extraordinary. The elevation is the pattern: the ordinary thing that is connected to the Prophet becomes the sacred thing. The person who eats the date of Madinah with faith eats a blessed fruit. The person who eats the date of Madinah without faith eats only a fruit. The difference is not in the date; the difference is in the person.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aira Aurora is an independent researcher and writer specializing in Quranic studies. Her work focuses on close reading of the Quranic text, exploring its themes, narratives, and moral framework with attention to both the original Arabic and the broader human context.

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Her work is published under the pen name Aira Aurora.

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