

Sura 22: Al-Hajj (The Pilgrimage)

In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy

Verses 1 to 24:

1. *People, be conscious of your Lord, for the earthquake of the Hour (of Doom) is a tremendous thing.*
2. *On the Day when you see it, every nursing mother will forget her nursling and every pregnant one will be delivered of her burden, and you will think people are drunk, yet they will not be drunk, but the torment of God will be severe.*
3. *Yet there is he who still disputes about God, without knowledge, and follow every rebellious Satan.*
4. *For him, it is decreed that whoso takes him for a friend, he will mislead him and will guide him to the torment of the blazing Fire.*
5. *People, if you have a doubt about the Resurrection, (consider) that We created you out of dust, then out of a drop of sperm, then out of a leech-like clot, then out of a lump of flesh, partly formed and partly unformed, in order that We may manifest (our power) to you; and We cause what We will to remain in the wombs for an appointed time, and afterward We bring you forth as infants, then (make you grow) until you attain your full strength. And among you there is he who dies (young), and among you there is he who is brought back to the most abject time of life, so that, after knowledge, he will know nothing. And you see the earth barren, but when We send down water thereon, it quivers and swells and puts forth every lovely kind (of growth).*
6. *That is because God is the Truth and because He brings back the dead to life; and because He has power over all things;*
7. *And because there is no doubt that the Hour will come; and because God will raise those who are in the graves.*
8. *Yet among people is he who still disputes about God, without knowledge, without guidance, and without a book of enlightenment;*
9. *Turning away in pride to beguile (people) from the way of God. For him, in this world is ignominy, and on the Day of Resurrection We make him taste the torment of burning.*
10. *(It will be said), "This is because of the deeds which your hands sent forth, for verily God is not unjust to His servants."*
11. *And among humankind is he who worships God (sitting) on a verge so that if good befalls him he is content therewith, but if a trial befalls him, he falls away utterly. He loses both this world and the Hereafter. That is the sheer loss.*
12. *They call on such deities, besides God, as can neither hurt nor profit them, that is straying far indeed (from the Way).*
13. *(Perhaps) they call on one whose hurt is nearer than his benefit; evil, indeed, is the patron, and evil is the associate.*
14. *Verily God will admit those who believe and do good deeds, to Gardens, beneath which rivers flow, for God does what He pleases.*
15. *If any think that God will not help him (His Messenger) in this world and the Hereafter, let him stretch out a rope to the sky and climb all the way up; then let him see whether his plan will remove that which enrages (him).*
16. *Thus, have We sent down (the Quran) as plain revelation, and verily God guides whom He wills.*

17. *Those who believe (in the Qur'an), those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), the Sabians, the Christians, the Magians, and the idolaters, God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection. God is a Witness over all things.*
18. *Do you not see that all things that are in the heavens and on earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the hills, the trees, the animals, and a great number among humankind do prostrate themselves to God? while there are many for whom the torment is justly deserved. He whom God scorns, there is none to give him honor. God does what He pleases.*
19. *These two antagonists disputed with each other about their Lord. But those who deny (their Lord), for them will be cut out garments of Fire and boiling water will be poured down on their heads.*
20. *Whereby that which is in their bellies, and their skins too, will be melted;*
21. *In addition, there will be maces of iron (to punish) them.*
22. *Every time they wish to get away therefrom, they will be forced back therein; and (it will be said), "Taste the torment of Fire."*
23. *God will admit those who believe and do good deeds into Gardens beneath which rivers flow. They shall be adorned therein with bracelets of gold and pearls; and their garments there will be of silk.*
24. *For they have been guided (in this life) to the purest of speeches; they have been guided to the path of the Praised. (22: 1 – 24)*

Some of the verses of this Sura were revealed in Mecca while some were revealed in Medina. We know that Muslims were not granted permission to fight back until they migrated to Medina. We know that when the people of Medina pledged their allegiance to the Prophet (PBUH), they offered to fight the disbelievers of Mecca, he declined their offer saying, "I was not commanded to do so." When the Islamic state was established in Medina, Muslims were granted the permission to fight back to protect themselves against the attacks of the disbelievers and to provide an environment which guarantees the freedom of religion. However, the general atmosphere of the Sura reflects the Meccan themes. The Sura emphasizes the concepts of the Oneness of God, the Resurrection, the accountability, the horrifying scenes of the Day of Judgment, and God's signs in the universe. However, the Sura also includes the themes of the permission to fight back, the sanctity of God's rituals, and the promise of God's help to the believers. These themes appeared only in the Quran revealed after the migration to Medina.

"People, be conscious of your Lord, for the earthquake of the Hour (of Doom) is a tremendous thing. On the Day when you see it, every nursing mother will forget her nursling and every pregnant one will be delivered of her burden, and you will think people are drunk, yet they will not be drunk, but the torment of God will be severe." The Sura starts with a horrifying statement depicting a scene which makes the hearts tremble. The Sura starts with a call to all people to be conscious of their Lord and alerts them to the horror of the Day of Judgment. Some of the details of this terrifying scene are mentioned in the second verse. Nursing women will forget about their nursing babies and pregnant women will be delivered of their babies prematurely. The shock will make people appear drunk, though they are perfectly sober; it is the severity of the shock that overwhelms them. These two verses are mentioned to warn those who argue about God without knowledge of the consequences of their deeds, *"Yet there is he who still disputes about God, without knowledge, and follow every rebellious Satan. For him, it is decreed that whoso takes him for a friend, he will mislead him and will guide him to the torment of the blazing Fire."* This

includes people who argue about the existence of God, the Oneness of God, His power, His knowledge, or His attributes. These people argue without true knowledge. They argue because they were deluded by Satan, who tempted them to adopt such an attitude. God has decreed that the fate of these people is the torment of Fire. They will be led to it by Satan who seduced them in the first place. They may have thought that Satan was guiding them while in true fact they were being misled by Satan.

Are people in doubt that there will be Resurrection after death? They should then reflect on the beginning of life in the first place. They should look around for the signs of God which support the concept of Resurrection, *“People, if you have a doubt about the Resurrection, (consider) that We created you out of dust, then out of a drop of sperm, then out of a leech-like clot, then out of a lump of flesh, partly formed and partly unformed, in order that We may manifest (our power) to you; and We cause what We will to remain in the wombs for an appointed time, and afterward We bring you forth as infants, then (make you grow) until you attain your full strength. And among you there is he who dies (young), and among you there is he who is brought back to the most abject time of life, so that, after knowledge, he will know nothing. And you see the earth barren, but when We send down water thereon, it quivers and swells and puts forth every lovely kind (of growth).”* The concept of Resurrection may seem easier than the concept of starting the life of a human being from nothing. But both concepts are easy for God, because He only says, “Be,” and it is. However, the Quran uses arguments that appeal to the limited human imagination. The verse reminds people that they were created from the dust of this earth. The human body has the same elements that constitute the earthly dust. When God breathed His spirit into the dust it became a human being. It is a great leap from dust to a human being, a leap that attests to the power of God. The verses then continued to describe the process of the creation of the human being. First there is the sperm, then the leech-like clot, then a morsel of flesh. These transformations have been happening for millions of years, yet we are still unable to discover the secret behind them. The process starts with a sperm from the male which unites with an egg from the female to form a leech-like clot which attaches itself to the wall of the womb. The leech-like clot is transformed into a little lump of flesh. The lump is then transformed into a skeleton. The skeleton may then become covered with flesh or it may be discharged prematurely when a miscarriage occurs. The statement, *“in order that We may manifest (our power) to you,”* is interjected between the stages of the clot and the formation of the baby in the womb. It is a reminder of the miraculous transformation from a clot to a fully formed baby. The process of formation of the baby continues for a period of time, usually nine months. However, the changes that occur during this relatively short period are huge. Another huge period of development between the little baby and the mature human being, *“We bring you forth as infants, then (make you grow) until you attain your full strength.”* Some may die early, and some may grow to be old. Death is the ultimate end for each mortal. However, the aging process offers another opportunity for reflection on the miracle of creation. Aging brings the human being a full circle back to the state of early childhood. People lose the knowledge and the skills that they gained during their lives. The verse then moves from the miracle of human creation to the miracle of plant creation, *“And you see the earth barren, but when We send down water thereon, it quivers and swells and puts forth every lovely kind (of growth).”* A barren land is in a state between life and death. This is the state of a piece of land before it is being watered. Water brings life to a barren land. When the land is watered it quivers and swells. This is an observation that the Quran described more than fourteen hundred years ago but became only known recently. The verse

describes the miracles of human life and plant life in the same verse to indicate the relationship between the two. It is also an indication that there is only one power behind the two miracles.

“That is because God is the Truth and because He brings back the dead to life; and because He has power over all things; and because there is no doubt that the Hour will come; and because God will raise those who are in the graves.” Creating a human being from dust and changing the land from a barren state to a state capable of producing plants are rooted in the fact that God is the Truth. God created the laws that regulate the continuation of human life and plant production and growth. These laws function continuously without interruption. It is God who will raise the dead and He will resurrect those who died and are buried in their graves. The phases of the creation of the embryo, the development of the fetus, and the complete cycle of the development of the human being until he/she returns back to a state of childhood, indicate that there must be another life where the human being is allowed to reach perfection. This will only happen in the Hereafter. These phases give dual evidence that the Resurrection will happen. The phases show God’s power as a Creator and His ability to re-create since He was the One who created in the first instance. They also show the inevitability of the Resurrection because the perfection that the mortals are destined for cannot happen during their life on earth.

Yet, there are those who still argue about the power of God, *“Yet among people is he who still disputes about God, without knowledge, without guidance, and without a book of enlightenment; turning away in pride to beguile (people) from the way of God. For him, in this world is ignominy, and on the Day of Resurrection We make him taste the torment of burning.”* The reflection on the issues of the creation renders disputing God’s power illogical. In addition, those who dispute God’s power have no knowledge, nor do they have a book that supports their claim. Their argument is baseless. The verse depicts an image of an arrogant person, *“turning away in pride,”* who uses his arrogance to mislead people away from the right path. His recompense will be ignominy in the life on earth and severe torment of fire in the Hereafter. This will be his well-deserved recompense because God never treats any of His servants unjustly, *“(It will be said), ‘This is because of the deeds which your hands sent forth, for verily God is not unjust to His servants.’”*

“And among humankind is he who worships God (sitting) on a verge so that if good befalls him he is content therewith, but if a trial befalls him, he falls away utterly. He loses both this world and the Hereafter. That is the sheer loss. They call on such deities, besides God, as can neither hurt nor profit them, that is straying far indeed (from the Way). (Perhaps) they call on one whose hurt is nearer than his benefit; evil, indeed, is the patron, and evil is the associate.” This is another kind of people. People who consider faith as a business deal. They think that faith is only good as long as it leads them to material gain in this life. They do not understand that faith is the strong foundation that holds the believers' life firm in face of the turbulent events that impact human life. Faith should be the source of support in face of calamities and the source of light that guides the believers to the shore of security when the darkness of doubt surrounds them. Faith is the link between God and the believers. It is a two-way channel through which the believer seeks God’s guidance and then receives God’s support. The expression used in the verse, to describe those who are content with their faith as long as faith brings them material benefits and they turn away if life becomes difficult, reflects the doubts in their hearts and the hesitation in their intention as if they are sitting on the edge of an abyss. They only need a slight

push to throw them off balance. This is a true loss. They suffer the material loss which caused them to lose their faith and in addition, they lose the security and the contentment which faith brings to the heart of the believer. They lose the way that can bring them salvation and they seek help from patrons or associates other than God. They do not know that those will cause them harm and will not benefit them.

But God has something better for the believers, even if they suffer a great material loss in this life, *“Verily God will admit those who believe and do good deeds, to Gardens, beneath which rivers flow, for God does what He pleases.”* Believers should stand firm in the face of trials and adversity. They should rely on their faith in God to get them through these difficult times. Only God can remove the afflictions. Those who cannot stand this test will realize that there is no alternative, *“If any think that God will not help him (His Messenger) in this world and the Hereafter, let him stretch out a rope to the sky and climb all the way up; then let him see whether his plan will remove that which enrages (him).”* Believers should never despair of the mercy and help of God.

God revealed His Quran to guide people to the straight path, *“Thus, have We sent down (the Quran) as plain revelation, and verily God guides whom He wills.”* God will guide those who want God’s guidance and strive for it. Those who follow different ways will be judged by God on the Day of Judgment, *“Those who believe (in the Qur'an), those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), the Sabians, the Christians, the Magians, and the idolaters, God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection. God is a Witness over all things.”*

Human beings were given the freedom to choose, but the universe has been created to worship God, *“Do you not see that all things that are in the heavens and on earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the hills, the trees, the animals, and a great number among humankind do prostrate themselves to God? while there are many for whom the torment is justly deserved. He whom God scorns, there is none to give him honor. God does what He pleases.”* Those who reject God’s guidance will receive their share of ignominy.

The following verses describe one of the scenes of the Day of Judgment which depicts examples of those honored by God and those who will be disgraced by God, *“These two antagonists disputed with each other about their Lord. But those who deny (their Lord), for them will be cut out garments of Fire and boiling water will be poured down on their heads. Whereby that which is in their bellies, and their skins too, will be melted; in addition, there will be maces of iron (to punish) them. Every time they wish to get away therefrom, they will be forced back therein; and (it will be said), ‘Taste the torment of Fire.’”* The verses describe a horrific scene: garments made out of fire, boiling water is poured over the heads, and rods of hot iron are used to strike people. The disbelievers will wish to leave, however they will only get rebuke, *“Taste the torment of Fire.”*

On the other hand, those who believed will get a different treatment, *“God will admit those who believe and do good deeds into Gardens beneath which rivers flow. They shall be adorned therein with bracelets of gold and pearls; and their garments there will be of silk.”* They will be guided to say the purest of speech, *“For they have been guided (in this life) to the purest of speeches; they have been guided to the path of the Praised.”*

Verses 25 to 41:

25. *Those who disbelieve and bar (people) from the way of God and from the Sacred Mosque, which We have appointed for all people together, its residents and its visitors. Whosoever tries to violate its sanctity with wrongdoing, We shall make him taste a painful torment.*
26. *We showed the site of the (Sacred) House, to Abraham, (saying), "Do not associate anything with Me; and purify My House for those who circle around it, or stand up, or bow, or prostrate themselves (therein in prayer).*
27. *And proclaim the pilgrimage to people. They will come to you on foot and on every lean camel; they will come from every deep ravine.*
28. *That they may witness the benefits (provided) for them, and celebrate the name of God, through the appointed Days, over the cattle which He has provided for them (for sacrifice). Then, eat of them and feed the distressed and the needy.*
29. *Then, let them complete the rites prescribed for them, perform their vows, and (again) circumambulate the Ancient House.*
30. *That (is the command). And whoso respects the sacred ordinances of God, it will be well for him in the sight of his Lord. The cattle are lawful to you save that which has been recited to you. So shun the filth of idols, and shun false statements;*
31. *Being true in faith to God, and never associating partners with Him. Whoso associates partners with God is as if he had fallen from the sky and the birds had snatched him or the wind had blown him to a far-off place.*
32. *All this (is ordained by God); and whoever respects the rites of God, this is surely (the outcome) of the piety of the hearts.*
33. *In them you have benefits for an appointed term; and afterward they are brought for sacrifice near the Ancient House.*
34. *And for every nation have We appointed a ritual, that they may mention the name of God over the beast of cattle that He has given them for food; and your god is One God, therefore surrender to Him. And give glad tidings (Muhammad) to the humble;*
35. *Whose hearts are filled with awe when God is mentioned; and who endure whatever may befall them; and those who establish worship; and who spend of that We have bestowed on them.*
36. *And the camels We have designated to be part of God's sacred rites. Therein you have much good. So mention the name of God over them as they are lined up for sacrifice. Then when their flanks fall (dead), eat thereof and feed the beggar and the suppliant. Thus, We have subjected them to you, that haply you may give thanks.*
37. *It is neither their meat nor their blood that reaches God. It is your piety that reaches Him. He has thus subjected them to you, that you may glorify God for having guided you and to give glad tidings to the doers of good.*
38. *Verily, God will defend those who believe; verily, God does not love the treacherous, the ungrateful.*
39. *Sanction is given to those who fight because they have been wronged; and God is indeed able to give them victory;*
40. *Those who have been driven from their homes unjustly only because they said, "Our Lord is God." If God did not repel some people by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, wherein the name of God is oft mentioned, would assuredly have been pulled down. Verily God helps those who help Him. God is Strong, Eminent.*

41. *Those who, if We give them power in the land, establish worship and pay the poor-due and enjoin kindness and forbid iniquity; and God controls the outcome of all events. (22: 25 – 41)*

“Those who disbelieve and bar (people) from the way of God and from the Sacred Mosque, which We have appointed for all people together, its residents and its visitors. Whosoever tries to violate its sanctity with wrongdoing, We shall make him taste a painful torment.” This verse refers to what Quraish was doing; they barred the Muslims who wanted to visit the Sacred Mosque and did not allow them to perform the rites of pilgrimage and Umra. This incident took place during the 6th year (H). God made the Sacred Mosque a safe ground. No fight was allowed within the precinct of the Sacred Mosque. All people have the right to feel safe and are able to freely perform their worship without a threat or disturbance. All people whether they were residents of Mecca or visiting from outside have equal rights. The precinct of the Sacred Mosque remained an oasis for peace since it was established until now. The Quran threatens anyone who dares to violate its sanctity, *“whosoever tries to violate its sanctity with wrongdoing, We shall make him taste a painful torment.”* The threat is directed to those who may want to “try,” which indicates the seriousness of the crime.

“We showed the site of the (Sacred) House, to Abraham, (saying), ‘Do not associate anything with Me; and purify My House for those who circle around it, or stand up, or bow, or prostrate themselves (therein in prayer). And proclaim the pilgrimage to people. They will come to you on foot and on every lean camel; they will come from every deep ravine, that they may witness the benefits (provided) for them, and celebrate the name of God, through the appointed Days, over the cattle which He has provided for them (for sacrifice). Then eat of them and feed the distressed and the needy. Then let them complete the rites prescribed for them, perform their vows, and (again) circumambulate the Ancient House.’” The Sacred House was established to be the symbol of the Oneness of God on earth. God guided Prophet Abraham (PBUH) to its place to rebuild and take care of it, on one condition, *“Do not associate anything with Me.”* God commanded Prophet Abraham (PBUH) to purify the House and prepare it for the rituals of pilgrimage. When he completed his task, God commanded him to proclaim pilgrimage to people. God promised Prophet Abraham (PBUH) that people will respond to his proclamation and will come to perform pilgrimage from far and wide. That promise was kept and people still come to the Sacred Mosque to perform pilgrimage to this day. Millions of people, rich and poor, come to perform pilgrimage every year. The verse mentions some of the objectives of pilgrimage, *“that they may witness the benefits (provided) for them, and celebrate the name of God, through the appointed Days, over the cattle which He has provided for them (for sacrifice).”* The benefits that people find in pilgrimage are many. Pilgrimage is an event which combines both spiritual and material benefits for Muslims. Pilgrimage is a conference for Muslims to meet, discuss common issues, and coordinate major initiatives. It is a business opportunity for people. It is a huge market place. Pilgrimage is a major religious event in the life of a believer. It is a time for purification of the soul. Believers experience their nearness to God in His Sacred Mosque. Believers circulate around the House and remember Prophet Abraham (PBUH) when he had to leave his spouse and his baby boy in this barren place, praying to God to protect them and to provide for them. They remember Lady Hajer running between the two hills of Safa and Marwah looking for water for her baby boy. They imagine her having gone back and forth seven times then she saw the water gushing from under the tiny feet of her son. Then they remember Prophet

Abraham (PBUH) ready to sacrifice his son in response to the command he received from God in his dream. They remember the submission and perseverance of Prophet Ishmael (PBUH) in obeying God's command. Many memories come back to the minds of the believers as they spend time seeking God's nearness in His House. These memories remind them of their identity as Muslims having one God, raising one banner, and looking towards one Qibla.

"That (is the command). And whoso respects the sacred ordinances of God, it will be well for him in the sight of his Lord. The cattle are lawful to you save that which has been recited to you. So shun the filth of idols, and shun false statements; being true in faith to God, and never associating partners with Him. Whoso associates partners with God is as if he had fallen from the sky and the birds had snatched him or the wind had blown him to a far-off place." Those who respect the things which have been decreed sacred by God, refrain from breaking God's rules. This purifies their souls and creates a world that is safe for people to live in. The verse emphasizes that only God has the right to determine what is sacred. The Arabs used to sanctify certain animals claiming that these were God's commands. The verse came to refute this claim explaining that only God has the right to determine what things are sacred. In addition, the verse stated that the filth of idols and false talk should be shunned. Associating partners with God is a filth that spoils the souls. Associating partners with God is a false statement but false statements are wider in scope than associating partners with God. The verse stated clearly that false statements in general are completely forbidden. Making a false statement is extremely abhorred in Islam, a fact that is portrayed by linking it to associating partners with God. This has been emphasized by prophetic traditions. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *"Making false statements is as bad as association partners with God."* God wants people to avoid all forms of associating partners with God as well as making false statements. God wants people to follow the straight path to God. The verse paints a horrifying picture for those who wander away from the true path of God, *"Whoso associates partners with God is as if he had fallen from the sky and the birds had snatched him or the wind had blown him to a far-off place."* It is a true depiction of those who associate partners with God. They fall from the heaven of faith to the abyss of disbelief. They lose the solid foundation of faith which provides security and balance in life, and fall into an unbounded space of insecurity and imbalance.

"All this (is ordained by God); and whoever respects the rites of God, this is surely (the outcome) of the piety of the hearts. In them you have benefits for an appointed term; and afterward they are brought for sacrifice near the Ancient House." The verse links piety of the hearts to the pilgrimage's ritual of sacrifice. Attaining piety of the hearts is the ultimate goal of pilgrimage. The rituals are symbols of the believer's obedience and submission to God. Thus, performing the rituals is an expression of the believer's willingness to obey and submit to God's commands following the example that has been set before by Prophet Abraham (PBUH).

The pilgrims are allowed to make use of the sacrificial animals on their way to the Sacred House, if there was a need. They can ride the animals and drink their milk until they reach the Sacred House. At the sacred House, the animals are slaughtered and their meat is distributed to the poor and needy.

"And for every nation have We appointed a ritual, that they may mention the name of God over the beast of cattle that He has given them for food; and your god is One God, therefore surrender to Him. And give glad tidings (Muhammad) to the humble, whose hearts are filled with awe when God is mentioned, and who endure whatever may befall them, and those who establish worship and who spend of that We have bestowed on them." The ritual of animal

sacrifice has been known to various nations, Islam makes it clear that sacrifice has to be made with the intent that it is a symbol of obedience to God. Sacrificing animals for another cause is prohibited. The verse reiterates this fact again, *“your god is One God, therefore submit to Him.”* This is a voluntary submission to God. It is a submission of those who are seeking security in submitting to God, whose hearts tremble in awe when the name of God is mentioned. Those who endure with patience whatever befall them. They are content with whatever God decrees. They continue to establish prayer and spend in the way of God. Rituals and doctrine are intertwined together. The doctrine provides a foundation for the rituals and the rituals are symbols of the doctrine.

“And the camels We have designated to be part of God’s sacred rites. Therein you have much good. So mention the name of God over them as they are lined up for sacrifice. Then when their flanks fall (dead), eat thereof and feed the beggar and the suppliant. Thus We have subjected them to you, that haply you may give thanks. It is neither their meat nor their blood that reaches God. It is your piety that reaches Him. He has thus subjected them to you, that you may glorify God for having guided you and to give glad tidings to the doers of good.” Among the animals to be sacrificed, camels are mentioned explicitly because they represent the greatest sacrifice. God created them to be used for riding, for their milk to be drunk, and for their meat to be eaten. God has no use for their meat but the sacrifice is a way for the attainment of piety of the hearts.

Believers should protect the sanctity of God’s rituals and places of worship. They should protect the freedom of faith and freedom of worship. That is why permission was granted to fight back those who try to oppress the believers, *“Verily God will defend those who believe; verily, God does not love the treacherous, the ungrateful. Sanction is given to those who fight because they have been wronged; and God is indeed able to give them victory; those who have been driven from their homes unjustly only because they said, ‘Our Lord is God.’ If God did not repel some people by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, wherein the name of God is oft mentioned, would assuredly have been pulled down. Verily God helps those who help Him. God is Strong, Eminent. Those who, if We give them power in the land, establish worship and pay the poor-due and enjoin kindness and forbid iniquity. And God controls the outcome of all events.”* The battle between good and evil is an ever continuous battle. It started with the creation of Adam (PBUH) and will continue till the end of time. The forces of evil are always well equipped, they are ready to oppress and persecute the believers. The forces of evil have no scruples. They use whatever means available to seduce people and turn them away from the right path. God wanted the believers to be well equipped to be able to resist the forces of evil. Material preparation is important. Before granting the permission to fight back, the believers were reassured that God will protect them, *“Verily, God will defend those who believe.”* They were told that God does not like their enemies because they were treacherous. The believers had the right to defend themselves because they were wronged, *“Sanction is given to those who fight because they have been wronged;”* They should feel reassured because God will support and protect them, *“God is indeed able to give them victory.”* The believers were fighting for a noble cause: they were defending the principle of freedom of faith for themselves and for all people. The verse then stated a fundamental principle, the principle of the need to defend freedom of faith. The example was given for the need to protect places of worship for Jews, Christians and Muslims. These places can be easily demolished by the forces of evil if the believers do not stand up to defend them. There are times when the truth needs to be protected and defended against the

onslaught of falsehood. The believers were commanded to use whatever material means to defend these places of worship and to defend the freedom of faith against the oppression of falsehood.

One needs to reflect on the message that these verses state. God promised to protect and defend the believers against the onslaught of falsehood. So, why is He commanding the believers to fight back? Why should the believers fight, and suffer? The answer to this question is that this is God's will. There is divine wisdom behind this course of action. Victory should be earned not granted. For the believers to earn victory they should satisfy two main requirements. The first requirement is the preparation of all material means available for them. The second requirement is the spiritual preparation through prayers, recitation of Quran, and praying for God's victory. The believers should remain conscious of God.

The believers are entrusted to the task of carrying the banner of the divine project. Those who carry the banner should be willing to strive, work hard, and sacrifice for the sake of God. This is the way for people to mature and for human talents and skills to be discovered. It is also a training opportunity for the community to unite around a cause and to work together towards a goal.

Sometimes the believers feel that victory is slow in coming. It is important to understand that for victory to be effective it has to be well timed. Premature victory is as dangerous as losing the battle. Victory can be achieved only when the environment is suitable. The delay in achieving victory may be an indication that the community is lacking in one or more of the aspects needed to attain victory; or it may be that the community did not reach the required maturity to receive victory and to appreciate it. Premature victory can be easily lost and it may be difficult to regain victory after it has been lost. God's promise will be fulfilled when all conditions for achieving victory have been realized, *"Verily God helps those who help Him. God is Strong, Eminent. Those who, if We give them power in the land, establish worship and pay the poor-due and enjoin kindness and forbid iniquity. And God controls the outcome of all events."* God will never let the believers down. But who are those who deserve God's support? Those who will use God's support to establish prayers, pay the poor-dues, and enjoin kindness and forbid iniquity. They will establish goodness and will fight evil and corruption. They will strive to fulfill the divine project on earth, the divine project which guarantees justice and freedom for people.

Verses 42 to 57:

42. *If they deny you (Muhammad), so did the people of Noah, and (the tribes of) 'Aad and Thamud, before you, denied (Our messengers);*
43. *And the people of Abraham and the people of Lot;*
44. *(and) The dwellers of Midian. And Moses was denied; but I granted respite to the disbelievers for a long while, then I seized them, and how (terrible) was My reproach.*
45. *How many a township have We destroyed while it was sinful, so that it lies (to this day) in ruins, and (how many) a deserted well and lofty tower.*
46. *Have they not travelled in the land, and do they not have hearts to feel with and ears to hear with? For indeed it is not the eyes that grow blind, but it is the hearts, which are within the bosoms, that grow blind.*
47. *And they ask you to hasten on the torment, and God will by no means fail in His promise, and surely a day with your Lord is as a thousand years of what you count.*
48. *And how many a township did I give respite while it was unjust, then I overtook it, and to Me is the return.*

49. Say, "People, I am only a plain warner to you."
50. Those who believe and do good deeds, they shall have forgiveness and an honorable provision.
51. But those who strive to oppose Our revelations, they will be the rightful owners of the Fire.
52. And We did not send before you any messenger or prophet except that when he wished something Satan did insinuate something, into these wishes, but God removes that which the Satan insinuates then does God affirms His revelations, and God is Omniscient, Wise.
53. He makes Satan's insinuations a temptation only for the sick at heart and those whose hearts are hardened. Indeed, the wrongdoers are in profound discord.
54. And that those who have been given knowledge may know that it is the truth from your Lord, so that they believe therein and their hearts submit humbly to Him. God will certainly guide those who believe to a straight path.
55. And those who disbelieve will not cease to be in doubt thereof until the Hour overtakes them suddenly, or there comes to them the torment of a disastrous day.
56. On that day the Dominion will be God's. He will judge between them, so those who believe and do good deeds will be in Gardens of bliss.
57. While those who disbelieved and denied Our revelations, for them will be a humiliating torment. (22: 42 – 57)

"If they deny you (Muhammad), so did the people of Noah, and (the tribes of) 'Aad and Thamud, before you, denied (Our messengers); and the people of Abraham and the people of Lot; (and) the dwellers of Midian. And Moses was denied; but I granted respite to the disbelievers for a long while, then I seized them, and how (terrible) was My reproach." Muhammad (PBUH) was not the first messenger to be rejected by the people to whom he was sent, all the previous messengers were rejected by their people. God's rule was applied to those who rejected guidance before, they were all destroyed. Note that Prophet Moses (PBUH) was mentioned separately because it was Pharaoh, rather than his own people, who rejected him. God gave them all respite then He seized them. How hard was God's seizure? The following verse gives an indication of God's seizure, "How many a township have We destroyed while it was sinful, so that it lies (to this day) in ruins, and (how many) a deserted well and lofty tower." The ruins of empty palaces, deserted wells, and demolished towers are testaments of God's seizure. One does not need to travel very far to see these ruins, "Have they not travelled in the land, and do they not have hearts to feel with and ears to hear with? For indeed it is not the eyes that grow blind, but it is the hearts, which are within the bosoms, that grow blind." The fate that people who denied their messengers met before, whose traces could be clearly seen around, should have been a lesson for the idolaters of Mecca. The verse poses a rhetorical question, "do they not have hearts to feel with and ears to hear with." Their ears did not listen and their hearts did not understand the lesson. Instead, they became stubborn in their rejection, "And they ask you to hasten on the torment, and God will by no means fail in His promise, and surely a day with your Lord is as a thousand years of what you count." The wrongdoers do not benefit from the experience of the others. They always think that they are different. The idolaters of Mecca had the audacity to ridicule the Prophet (PBUH) and to dare him to hasten the punishment. God's promise will never fail. However, God has a different scale for time other than that which is used by humans. So, never doubt God's promise, "And how many a township did I give respite while it was unjust, then I overtook it, and to Me is the return."

The following verse starts a new theme. The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to, “Say, ‘People, I am only a plain warner to you.’” This statement outlines the task of the Prophet (PBUH). God sent him to warn people, telling them the alternative fates for those who believe and those who reject, “*Those who believe and do good deeds, they shall have forgiveness and an honorable provision. But those who strive to oppose Our revelations, they will be the rightful owners of the Fire.*” God will forgive those who believed and did good deeds and will give them honorable provision. But those who were stubborn and tried to prevent guidance to reach people will become the dwellers of Hell.

God protects the integrity of His Message; no one can change the message. Satan would like to change the Message. He tries to get to his objective through the wishes that the Messengers have as human beings. The messengers were human beings they had human feelings, anxieties, and ambitions; but God protected the messengers from Satan’s attacks. The messengers wanted to succeed in spreading the Message. They were anxious to remove the obstacles that kept the message from reaching people. They were eager to see all people become guided. Satan tried to penetrate these feelings and desires to change the message, but God protected the integrity of His message and destroyed Satan’s plans, “*And We did not send before you any messenger or prophet except that when he wished something Satan did insinuate something, into these wishes, but God removes that which the Satan insinuates then does God affirms His revelations, and God is Omniscient, Wise. He makes Satan’s insinuations a temptation only for the sick at heart and those whose hearts are hardened. Indeed, the wrongdoers are in profound discord. And that those who have been given knowledge may know that it is the truth from your Lord, so that they believe therein, and their hearts submit humbly to Him. God will certainly guide those who believe to a straight path.*” There are many narrations that explain the reason for the revelation of these verses. However, all these narrations lack authenticity, according to Ibn Katheer and the scholars of Hadeeth.

We can attempt to explain the words of God according to our limited understanding, God knows best what He meant by these verses. These verses provide a general statement that applies to all messengers of God, not only to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The verses may refer to incidents where the messenger may have wanted to take an action that he thought would be in the best interest of spreading the message, but his action could have created a doubt about the application of a certain fundamental principle of the message. God intervened and clarified the true application of the principle so that there would be no doubt. There are several examples in the life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) which may explain this. One of these examples is the incident which involved a companion of the Prophet (PBUH) by the name of Ibn Um Maktoom (RA). Ibn Um Maktoom (RA) was a blind person. One day, while the Prophet (PBUH) was busy talking to the chiefs of Quraish, Ibn Um Maktoom (RA) approached the Prophet (PBUH) asking the Prophet (PBUH) to teach him some verses of the Quran. The Prophet (PBUH) was at a point in the discussion where he was hopeful that the chiefs of Quraish may be inclined to adopt Islam and he was worried about the interruption by Ibn Um Maktoom (RA). Ibn Um Maktoom (RA), being unaware of the situation, kept insisting on his request. The Prophet (PBUH) was annoyed and turned away from Ibn Um Maktoom (RA). Verses from the Quran were revealed on this occasion which reproached the Prophet (PBUH) for turning away from Ibn Um Maktoom (RA), “*He frowned and turned away; because there came the blind man.*” (80: 1 – 2). Ever since this incident, the Prophet (PBUH) used to greet Ibn Um Maktoom (RA) saying, “*Welcome to the man about whom God reproached me.*”

“And those who disbelieve will not cease to be in doubt thereof until the Hour overtakes them suddenly, or there comes to them the torment of a disastrous day. On that day the Dominion will be God’s. He will judge between them, so those who believe and do good deeds will be in Gardens of bliss. While those who disbelieved and denied Our revelations, for them will be a humiliating torment.” Those who disbelieve will always be in doubt of the Quran. They will never realize its beauty; until the Day of Judgment overtakes them suddenly. They will realize then that only God has the Dominion over everything. The believers will end up in paradise while the disbelievers will meet their doom.

Verses 58 to 78:

58. *Those who fled their homes in God’s cause, and are then slain or die, on them will God bestow a goodly provision. Verily, God is the Best of the providers.*
59. *Verily He will admit them to a place with which they shall be well pleased; God is Omniscient, Forbearing.*
60. *That (is so). And whoso has retaliated with the like of that which he was made to suffer and then has (again) been wronged, God will support him; God is verily Effacer of Sins, All-Forgiving.*
61. *That is because God merges night into day, and He merges day into night, and verily God is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.*
62. *That is because God is the Truth, and that which they call upon instead of Him, is falsehood; God is the Most High, the Great.*
63. *Do you not see that God sends down rain from the sky, and forthwith the earth becomes clothed with green? God is Subtle, Totally-Aware.*
64. *To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth; God is verily Self-Sufficient, Praised.*
65. *Do you not see that God has subjected to you all that is on earth, and the ships that sail through the sea by His Command? He withholds the sky from falling on the earth except by His leave; God is All-Pitying, Giver of Mercy to people.*
66. *It is He who gave you life, will cause you to die, and will again give you life. Truly, humankind is a most ungrateful creature.*
67. *To every people have We appointed rites and ceremonies which they are to perform; so let them not dispute with you about the matter, but call to your Lord. You are indeed on the right guidance.*
68. *If they do wrangle with you, say, “God knows best what it is you are doing.*
69. *God will judge between you on the Day of Judgment concerning the matters in which you differ.”*
70. *Do you not know that God knows what is in the heaven and the earth? Surely, this is in a Record; surely, this is easy to God.*
71. *And they worship besides God that for which He did not send down authority and that whereof they have no knowledge. The wrongdoers have no helper.*
72. *And when Our revelations are recited to them, you recognize the denial in the faces of those who disbelieve; they would be on the verge of assaulting those who recite Our revelations to them. Say “Shall I proclaim to you worse than that? The Fire, God has promised it for those who disbelieve; a hapless journey’s end.”*
73. *People, a parable has been coined, so pay heed to it. Those on whom you call besides God will never create a fly even if they gather together for the purpose. And if the fly*

took something from them, they could not rescue it from it. So weak are (both) the seeker and the sought.

74. *They did not give God His rightful measure; God is Strong, Eminent.*

75. *God chooses messengers from angels and from people. God is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.*

76. *He knows what is before them and what is behind them. To God go back all matters (for decision).*

77. *Believers, bow down and prostrate yourselves, and worship your Lord, and do good, that haply you may succeed.*

78. *And strive for God with the endeavor which is His right. He has chosen you and has not laid upon you in religion any hardship; the faith of your father Abraham (is yours). He has named you Muslims of old time and in this (Book) that the Messenger may be a witness against you, and that you may be witnesses against humankind. So establish prayer, pay the poor-dues, and hold fast to God. He is your Patron; a blessed Patron and a blessed Helper. (22: 58 – 78)*

“Those who fled their homes in God’s cause, and are then slain or die, on them will God bestow a goodly provision. Verily, God is the Best of the providers. Verily, He will admit them to a place with which they shall be well pleased; God is Omniscient, Forbearing.” Those who fled their homes in God’s cause left everything they own behind. They left behind their homes, their families, their homeland, and their property and migrated to a new place where they can practice their faith freely. They gave up their worldly possessions seeking God’s pleasure. God will reward them with a good provision, whether they die on a battleground or they die in their homes. God will give them the reward He kept for the martyrs because they left their homes in God’s cause. He will admit them to paradise through an entrance that they will be pleased with.

God promised to lend His support to those who were wronged and retaliated in a proper measure then they were again subjected to wrongdoings, *“That (is so). And whoso has retaliated with the like of that which he was made to suffer and then has (again) been wronged, God will support him; God is verily Effacer of Sins, All-Forgiving.”* The condition for obtaining God’s support is not to exceed the limit in retaliation. The verse ends by stating that God is, *“verily, Effacer of Sins, All-Forgiving.”* Mortals may choose not to forgive and may want to retaliate for any wrongdoing inflicted on them, but God is ever Forgiving. The verses then continue to describe the cosmic phenomena created by God. This may indicate that God’s promise to support those who suffered wrongdoing is one of the norms that God created in this universe, *“That is because God merges night into day, and He merges day into night, and verily God is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.”* The verse describes a phenomenon that happens every day. Everyone sees it and takes it for granted. The verse draws people’s attention to this regular phenomenon so that they recognize the limitless power of God which maintains these cosmic phenomena. Similarly, God’s support for those who suffer from the wrongdoings inflicted upon them by others is part of the phenomena of this universe. This is closely linked to the fact that God is the Truth. The Truth is the power that holds the equilibrium of the universe and maintains its discipline, *“That is because God is the Truth, and that which they call upon instead of Him, is falsehood; God is the Most High, the Great.”* This is enough reason for the eventual loss of falsehood and the victory of what is right and fair; God is Great.

The verses continue to explore other cosmic phenomena, *“Do you not see that God sends down rain from the sky, and forthwith the earth becomes clothed with green? God is Subtle, Totally-*

Aware.” Most people consider the phenomena of the fall of rain, the subsequent revival of the earth, and the growth of plants to be normal events. These phenomena are usually taken for granted. However, these phenomena can evoke strong emotions in the sensitive hearts. People who are sensitive to these cosmic phenomena may even see a similarity between the budding life of a small plant and the budding life of a small child. The process of the vegetation growth requires the right constituents of the soil and the right amount of water. The tiny trunk of the plant that penetrates the solid soil looking for air and sun is a sign of the power of God which works in a subtle way. God is the owner of the heavens and earth, and He does not need anything, and He is most worthy of all praise, *“To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth; God is verily Self-Sufficient, Praised.”*

“Do you not see that God has subjected to you all that is on earth, and the ships that sail through the sea by His command? He withholds the sky from falling on the earth except by His leave; God is All-Pitying, Giver of Mercy to people.” God subjected many things for the use of people on earth, but many of them are unaware of the blessings of God. God created the laws that allow ships to float on sea and travel through waves. God created the universe and maintains its equilibrium using laws He created. God is able to disable these laws if he wills.

“It is He who gave you life, will cause you to die, and will again give you life. Truly humankind is a most ungrateful creature.” Originating life from nothing was a miracle. The miracle of life happens every day; its secrets are still a mystery. Death is another mystery that keeps us wondering. It can happen in a split second. It transfers the human being from the state of life to a state of death; two states which are separated by a split second, yet they are separated by a huge gulf. Life after death is part of the unseen; however, it does not seem to be impossible on the basis of the first creation. All these phenomena provide points for reflection and thought. Unfortunately, humankind does not reflect, *“Truly humankind is a most ungrateful creature.”*

The following verses move to another theme, *“To every people have We appointed rites and ceremonies which they are to perform; so let them not dispute with you about the matter, but call to your Lord. You are indeed on the right guidance.”* The Prophet (PBUH) is commanded to continue on his mission and avoid the distractions that are created by the idolaters of Mecca. There is a project for each nation which involves its way of life, its beliefs, its behavior, and its thought. God controls these projects. God will guide a nation which seeks the road to guidance, while He will let go astray a nation that does not seek guidance. Thus, the Prophet (PBUH) should realize that each nation has its own project and he should not get tempted into disputing the idolaters, because these disputes aim at distracting him from his major task. He should continue to call to his Lord on a straight path, *“You are indeed on the right guidance.”*

The Prophet (PBUH) was told that if they insist on arguing with him, he should tell them, *“God knows best what it is you are doing.”* God will have the final say, *“God will judge between you on the Day of Judgment concerning the matters in which you differ.”* No one can argue with God’s judgment, because it is a judgment which is based on full knowledge, *“Do you not know that God knows what is in the heaven and the earth? Surely this is in a Record; surely this is easy to God.”* God’s knowledge encompasses everything that happens in the heavens and the earth.

“And they worship besides God that for which He did not send down authority and that whereof they have no knowledge. The wrongdoers have no helper.” Having told His Prophet (PBUH) to stop arguing with the idolaters, God reveals the distorted doctrine of the idolaters. They worship idols. The doctrine they followed had no support or proof to substantiate it.

Because they had no proof to substantiate their falsehood they did not have any argument to uphold the credibility of their beliefs, *“And when Our revelations are recited to them, you recognize the denial in the faces of those who disbelieve; they would be on the verge of assaulting those who recite Our revelations to them. Say, ‘Shall I proclaim to you worse than that? The Fire, God has promised it for those who disbelieve; a hapless journey's end.’”*

An unequivocal statement has been proclaimed, *“People, a parable has been coined, so pay heed to it. Those on whom you call besides God will never create a fly even if they gather together for the purpose. And if the fly took something from them, they could not rescue it from it. So weak are (both) the seeker and the sought.”* This is a proclamation for all people. It proclaims a general statement that cannot be disputed, *“Those on whom you call besides God will never create a fly even if they gather together for the purpose.”* They are incapable of creating a fly, and if a fly takes away something from them, they will not be able to rescue it from the fly. They are so weak, *“So weak are (both) the seeker and the sought.”* The weakness of the false gods is juxtaposed against the power of the true God, *“They did not give God His rightful measure; God is Strong, Eminent.”*

“God chooses messengers from angels and from people. God is All-Hearing, All-Seeing. He knows what is before them and what is behind them. To God go back all matters (for decision).” The Messengers were chosen by God alone. God sent Muhammad (PBUH) with the authority to call people to the right path. God oversees everything and hears everything. All matters are controlled by Him.

The following verses are commands issued to the believers to worship God, discharge their responsibility, and maintain a straight course, *“Believers, bow down and prostrate yourselves, and worship your Lord, and do good, that haply you may succeed. And strive for God with the endeavor which is His right. He has chosen you and has not laid upon you in religion any hardship; the faith of your father Abraham (is yours). He has named you Muslims of old time and in this (Book) that the Messenger may be a witness against you, and that you may be witnesses against humankind. So establish prayer, pay the poor-dues, and hold fast to God. He is your Patron; a blessed Patron and a blessed Helper.”* These two verses outline the divine project which God planned for this nation, summarize its responsibility, and determine the status that it can achieve if it lived according to the divine project and fulfilled its responsibility. The verses start with the command to bow and prostrate. The verse refers to the prayer using its two most conspicuous components. This representation animates the prayer.

The second command given in the verses refers to worshipping God in general. Worship encompasses all human activities which are carried out with the intention of pleasing God. Each and every activity that the believers perform during their daily life can be considered an act of worship if the believers have the intention that they are performing it to seek God's acceptance. This includes all regular tasks even those tasks that are used to satisfy human desires and pleasures. The verse then concludes by a command to do good. This is a general command to do good in all human transactions. Thus, the first two commands deal with the relationship between

the individual and God, and the third command deals with relationship between the individual and other people in general. These are the commands that lead to success. Worshipping God provides the strong foundation to a successful human life and treating people nicely and fairly provides the support for a successful community life. The community which fulfills these commands is ready to undertake the responsibility that God placed on the shoulders of the believer: to strive in the way of God. This is a huge undertaking, but God is Merciful, He does not want to lay any hardship on the believers. This divine project is an old project; it has its roots in the Message that Prophet Abraham (PBUH) brought to humanity. God called the nation of the believers: Muslims, those who submit to God. Islam is the complete and voluntary submission to God. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was sent to be a witness over the believers and the believers are made witnesses over the whole humanity. This task cannot be accomplished unless they continue to establish prayers, pay the poor dues, and hold tight to God. God is their Patron; a blessed Patron and a blessed Helper.