

Sura 59: Al-Hashr (The Gathering)

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

Verses 1 to 24:

1. *All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth glorifies God, and He is the Eminent, the Wise.*
2. *It is He who evicted those who disbelieved from among the People of the Scripture from their homes at the first gathering (of the forces). You did not think that they would get out. And they thought that their fortresses would protect them from God. But the (wrath of) God came to them from where they had not expected, and He cast terror into their hearts, so that they destroyed their dwellings by their own hands and the hands of the believers so learn a lesson, O you who have eyes.*
3. *And had it not been that God had decreed that they should be evicted, He would certainly have tormented them in this world; and in the Hereafter they shall (certainly) have the torment of the Fire.*
4. *That is because they opposed God and His Messenger; and if any one opposes God, verily God is severe in punishment.*
5. *Whatsoever palm-trees you cut down or leave standing on their roots, it was by God's leave, in order that He might disgrace the transgressors.*
6. *And that which God gave as spoil to His Messenger from them, you spurred neither a horse nor a camel for it, but God gives authority to His messengers against whom He pleases, and God has power over all things.*
7. *What God has bestowed on His Messenger (and taken away) from the people of the townships, it belongs to God, to His Messenger, and to the kindred and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer; in order that it may not circulate perpetually among the wealthy among you. And whatsoever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatsoever he forbids, abstain (from it). And remain conscious of God. God is severe in punishment.*
8. *(It is) for the poor migrants who have been driven out from their homes and their belongings, who seek grace from God and help God and His Messenger. These are the truthful.*
9. *But those who before them, had homes (in Medina) and had adopted the faith, show their affection to those who migrated to them, and entertain no desire in their hearts for things given to the (latter), but give them preference over themselves, even though poverty was their (own lot). And those who are saved from the covetousness of their own souls; these are the successful.*
10. *And those who came after them say, "Our Lord, forgive us, and our brethren who came before us into the faith, and do not leave in our hearts rancor against those who have believed. Our Lord, You are indeed All-Pitying, Giver of Mercy."*
11. *Have you not seen the hypocrites say to their disbelieving brethren among the People of the Scripture? "If you are evicted, we too will go out with you, and we will never obey any one against you; and if you are attacked (in fight) we will help you." But God is witness that they are indeed liars.*
12. *If they are evicted, they will never go out with them; and if they are attacked (in fight), they will never help them; and if they do help them, they will turn their backs; and then they would not have been victorious.*

13. *Fear of you is more intense in their hearts than the fear of God. This is because they are people who do not understand.*
14. *They will not fight against you all together save in fortified villages or from behind walls. Their enmity among themselves is very great. You think of them as a whole whereas their hearts are diverse. That is because they are a people who cannot reason.*
15. *Like those who shortly preceded them, they have tasted the evil result of their conduct; and (in the Hereafter there is) for them a painful torment.*
16. *Like Satan, when he says to the human being, "Disbelieve in God," but when he disbelieves in God, (Satan) says, "I disown you; I do fear God, the Lord of the Worlds."*
17. *And the consequence for both will be that they are in the Fire, therein abiding. This is the recompense for the wrongdoers.*
18. *Believers, be conscious of God and let every soul look to what it has put forth for tomorrow. And remain conscious of God. God is Totally-Aware of what you do.*
19. *And do not be like those who forgot God; and He made them forget their own souls. Such are the transgressors.*
20. *Not equal are the companions of the fire and the companions of paradise. The companions of paradise, they are the achievers (of triumph).*
21. *Had We sent down this Quran on a mountain, verily, you would have seen it humble itself and rent asunder for fear of God. We cite these parables for the people that they may reflect.*
22. *He is God, there is no god other than Him; the Knower of the unseen and the seen. He is the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy.*
23. *He is God, there is no god other than Him; the King, the Holy, the Flawless (the Source of Peace), the Faithful, the Guardian, the Eminent, the Compeller, the Supreme in Pride. Glorified He above all that they ascribe as partners (to Him).*
24. *He is God, the Creator, the Producer, the Fashioner. To Him belong the most beautiful names. Whatever is in the heavens and on earth glorifies Him, and He is the Eminent, the Wise. (59: 1 – 24)*

This Sura was revealed during the fourth year of Hijra. It describes the events that led to the eviction of the Jewish tribe of Bani Al-Nadeer from Medina. It also describes the impact that these events had on the organization of the Muslim community. The narrative is delivered in the special style of Quran. We will first summarize the events that lead to the revelation of this Sura then we will discuss its interpretation.

The events of this story occurred in the beginning of the fourth year of Hijra just after the Muslims fought the idolaters of Mecca in the battle of Uhud. The story began when a Muslim man killed by mistake two non-Muslim men. According to the traditions of the time, the Muslims had to pay the victims' tribe a ransom. The treaty that was agreed upon between the Muslims and the Jews when the Prophet (PBUH) migrated to Medina included an article which required the Muslims and the Jews to help each other in the payment of such ransoms. Since the Muslims were short of money at that time, the Prophet (PBUH) headed a delegation of ten of his companions to request the help of the tribe of Bani Al-Nadeer in paying the ransom. The Prophet (PBUH) and his companions were well received and the chiefs of Bani Al-Nadeer promised to help out. They requested the Prophet (PBUH) to wait until they had deliberated the matter with each other. However, their secret deliberations turned into a plot to assassinate the Prophet (PBUH) rather than a discussion of the help the Muslims had requested. Some of them thought

that this is a golden opportunity to murder the Prophet (PBUH) and thus break up the Muslims. The Prophet (PBUH) was sitting on the ground with his back to the wall of a house. The idea of sending one of them to the roof of the house to throw a rock on the Prophet (PBUH) took shape in their minds. However, the Prophet (PBUH) received a revelation which alerted him to the conspiracy being conceived by the chiefs of the tribe of Bani Al-Nadeer. The Prophet (PBUH) stood up suddenly and left his companions without telling anyone where he was going and went back to Medina, thus foiling their conspiracy. The companions of the Prophet (PBUH) waited for some time for the Prophet (PBUH) to return but then realized that he had gone to Medina so they left and went back to Medina. War was the inevitable consequence for reneging on the treaty. The Prophet (PBUH) led a Muslim army which laid a siege around the dwellings of the tribe of Bani Al-Nadeer. The Prophet (PBUH) gave them the choice either to abandon their dwellings and leave Medina taking with them their wealth and whatever they could carry of their property and belongings or stay and fight. The hypocrites of Medina under the leadership of Abdullah ibn Salul urged the tribe of Bani Al-Nadeer not to leave and promised to support them in their fight. However, this was an empty promise. The siege continued for twenty-six days, during which the Muslims burned down some of the palm trees which belonged to Bani Al-Nadeer but were outside their fortifications. The tribe of Bani Al-Nadeer eventually capitulated and accepted the terms that the Prophet (PBUH) offered them and they left their dwellings. Some of them settled in Khaiber and others moved to Syria. On their way out, the people of Bani Al-Nadeer destroyed the property and belongings which they could not carry with them rather than leave it intact for the Muslims to enjoy.

The Sura starts with glorifying God, *“All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth glorifies God, and He is the Eminent, the Wise.”* The verse states the fact that everything in the universe glorifies God. God is the Eminent, the Wise. He has the power to destroy His enemy and support His servants.

Then the verses narrate the events of the story, *“It is He who evicted those who disbelieved from among the People of the Scripture from their homes at the first gathering (of the forces). You did not think that they would get out. And they thought that their fortresses would protect them from God. But the (wrath of) God came to them from where they had not expected, and He cast terror into their hearts, so that they destroyed their dwellings by their own hands and the hands of the believers so learn a lesson, O you who have eyes.”* The verse states clearly that God evicted those who disbelieved from among the People of the Scripture. The way the statement is composed emphasizes that this was an explicit act of God. Neither the Muslims nor Bani Al-Nadeer thought that this would happen. The fortifications that Bani Al-Nadeer built around their dwellings were invincible. However, the threat came from within not from without, *“But the (wrath of) God came to them from where they had not expected, and He cast terror into their hearts.”* They were mainly concerned with strengthening their fortresses and never thought that fear would overwhelm their hearts. But God cast fear in their hearts and they simply gave in. God does what He wills and no one can escape the wrath of God. They cherished their dwellings, but God made them destroy the property that they loved with their own hands. Those who can see should take a lesson from this.

They deserved to be punished, so even if God had decided not to evict them, they would have been punished in a different way; and in the Hereafter they would get the torment of the Fire, *“And had it not been that God had decreed that they should be evicted, He would certainly have tormented them in this world; and in the Hereafter they shall (certainly) have the torment of the*

Fire.” They deserved this punishment because they opposed God and His Messenger (PBUH) and violated their covenant with God, *“That is because they opposed God and His Messenger; and if any one opposes God, verily God is severe in punishment.”*

It should be noted that the tribe of Bani Al-Nadeer is described in this Sura as, “those who disbelieved from among the People of the Scripture.” They disbelieved in God’s Message which was sent through Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Scripture that was revealed to them and which they believed in foretold the coming of a Messenger from God. They had been expecting the Messenger to come. But, when the Messenger came they rejected him. So, they broke their covenant with God and became disbelievers.

The verses continue to explain to the Muslims the rationale behind the actions they were commanded to undertake, *“Whatsoever palm-trees you cut down or leave standing on their roots, it was by God's leave, in order that He might disgrace the transgressors.”* The Muslims were commanded not to cut a tree except for a reason, so when they were commanded to cut down some of the palm trees that belonged to Bani Al-Nadeer they had doubts in their hearts about the legality of such action. This verse was revealed to reassure them that what they were commanded to do was in fulfillment of God’s will. God decides what tree to cut and what tree to spare. Bani Al-Nadeer felt sad for the trees that were cut because they saw their wealth being destroyed and they were also sad for the trees that were spared because they left them behind for the Muslims to benefit from.

The following verses describe the model that Muslims should follow in distributing the spoils of war, *“And that which God gave as spoil to His Messenger from them, you spurred neither a horse nor a camel for it, but God gives authority to His messengers against whom He pleases, and God has power over all things.”* The first rule deals with the spoils that they gained without engaging in actual combat. The Muslims did not use a horse or a camel to gain these spoils. These spoils were to be distributed according to a scheme different from the scheme that was used to distribute the spoils gained as a result of active combat, *“What God has bestowed on His Messenger (and taken away) from the people of the townships, it belongs to God, to His Messenger, and to the kindred and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer; in order that it may not circulate perpetually among the wealthy among you. And whatsoever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatsoever he forbids, abstain (from it). And remain conscious of God. God is severe in punishment.”* The Messenger of God (PBUH) was given the authority to distribute the spoils among the mentioned categories as he saw fit. The term “kindred” mentioned in the verse refers to the Messenger’s (PBUH) family. Members of the Messenger’s (PBUH) family were not eligible to receive charity whether it was poor-dues or supererogatory charity. The Messenger (PBUH) was also not allowed to leave an estate to be distributed among his poor relatives. For these reasons, they were given a share in the spoils obtained without combat. The verse also sends a message that whatever happens, happens according to the will of God. God creates the reasons to achieve the results, *“God gives authority to His messengers against whom He pleases.”*

The verses also explain the rationale for the scheme described for the division of the spoils, *“in order that it may not circulate perpetually among the wealthy among you.”* This is one of the fundamental principles on which the economic system in Islam has been founded. Islam allows and respects the right of people to own property and wealth; however, there are also mechanisms

that prevent the wealth from being perpetually circulating among the rich while the poor are continuously deprived.

The second fundamental principle that these verses establish is that the Quran and the Prophet's (PBUH) tradition are the sources for the laws which govern the Muslim society, *"And whatsoever the messenger gives you, take it; and whatsoever he forbids, abstain (from it)."* Islamic Jurisprudence is derived from the Quran and the tradition of the Prophet (PBUH). This principle takes away the people's right to enact laws that contradict the Quran or the Prophetic tradition. However, if there are no rules dictated by the Quran or the Prophetic tradition regarding a specific problem, then the people are allowed to introduce whatever law they see fit as long as it does not contradict the basic principles of Islam. People are warned not to deviate from these principles; otherwise, they would be subjected to God's wrath, *"And remain conscious of God. God is severe in punishment."*

The verses continued to mention in detail those who were eligible to receive a share from these spoils, *"(It is) for the poor migrants who have been driven out from their homes and their belongings, who seek grace from God and help God and His Messenger. These are the truthful."* The verse depicts the actual sad conditions of the migrants. They were oppressed in Mecca and chose to migrate from Mecca to Medina fleeing from oppression. Their only crime for being oppressed was that they said, *"God is our Lord."* They left their property, their wealth, and their homes in Mecca and went out seeking God's pleasure. Although they were weak and poor, they pledged to support God and His Messenger. They were the true believers. They professed the word of faith and were true in their undertaking.

The above verse described the first group of people who constituted the Muslim society. A second group is described in the following verse, *"But those who before them, had homes (in Medina) and had adopted the faith, show their affection to those who migrated to them, and entertain no desire in their hearts for things given to the (latter), but give them preference over themselves, even though poverty was their (own lot). And those who are saved from the covetousness of their own souls; these are the successful."* This is a brief description of the supporters (the people of Medina.) It highlights the main characteristics of the members of this group. They established the faith of Islam in Medina before the migrants from Mecca came to them. Although many of them were poor, they welcomed their brethren from Mecca and were very generous in helping them to settle in Medina. They even gave them preference over themselves. The verse ends by stating one of the basic principles, *"And those who are saved from the covetousness of their own souls; these are the successful."*

Then came the third group, *"And those who came after them say, 'Our Lord, forgive us, and our brethren who came before us into the faith, and do not leave in our hearts rancor against those who have believed. Our Lord, You are indeed All-Pitying, Giver of Mercy.'"* The verse depicts the main characteristics of the subsequent generations of Muslims. These are the characteristics that the members of the Muslim nation should enjoy at all times and in all places. Although this group did not exist at the time of the revelation of these verses, God knew the characteristics of the true Muslim generations. They will express their love to the earlier generations by asking God to forgive them. This shows how the Muslim nation consists of strongly connected groups of people living at different times and in different places. The verse refers to the strong feeling of brotherhood that permeates the Muslim nation.

The narrative then goes back to the events that surrounded the eviction of Bani Al-Nadeer, *"Have you not seen the hypocrites say to their disbelieving brethren among the People of the*

Scripture? 'If you are evicted, we too will go out with you, and we will never obey any one against you; and if you are attacked (in fight) we will help you.' But God is witness that they are indeed liars. If they are evicted, they will never go out with them; and if they are attacked (in fight), they will never help them; and if they do help them, they will turn their backs; and then they would not have been victorious. Fear of you is more intense in their hearts than the fear of God. This is because they are people who do not understand. They will not fight against you all together save in fortified villages or from behind walls. Their enmity among themselves is very great. You think of them as a whole whereas their hearts are diverse. That is because they are a people who cannot reason." The verses describe the behavior of the hypocrites during the events that led to the expulsion of the tribe of Bani Al-Nadeer from Medina. They urged them to stand their ground and promised them support, but they let them down. The verses stress the close relationship between the two groups, *"Have you not seen the hypocrites say to their disbelieving brethren among the People of the Scripture?"* The verse reiterates the promise that the hypocrites made; however, it states that God knew they were liars. The Quran then reveals the secrets of the disbelievers and the hypocrites, *"Fear of you is more intense in their hearts than the fear of God."* They feared the believers more than they feared God. Had they feared God, they would not have been afraid of any of His creation. Fear of God and fear of His creation do not occupy the heart of a human being at the same time. God is the Eminent; all the forces in the universe are under His control. They did not have the courage to fight the believers face to face; they would only fight them from behind fortifications. The Quran then points to one of the main differences between the believers on one side and the hypocrites and the disbelievers on the other side. The believers were bonded together with the bond of brotherhood in faith while the hypocrites and the disbelievers had no such bond. A superficial look at them may show that they were united but the reality is that, *"Their enmity among themselves is very great. You think of them as a whole whereas their hearts are diverse."* They would be able to overcome the believers only if the bond of brotherhood that binds the believers together is broken and they are no longer united. The Quran states these characteristics to reassure the believers and to motivate them to stay united and not to fear their enemy.

This episode with the tribe of Bani Al-Nadeer was not the first confrontation between the Muslims and the other tribes that lived in Medina. The Quran refers to one of these confrontations which happened between the Muslims and the tribe of Bani Qaynuqa, *"Like those who shortly preceded them, they have tasted the evil result of their conduct; and (in the Hereafter there is) for them a painful torment."* This confrontation happened after the Muslims had won the battle of Badr. Bani Qaynuqa had hoped that the idolaters of Mecca would humiliate the Muslims in the battle of Badr, but when the Muslims won they felt bad and feared that this victory might strengthen the Muslim position in Medina. They started harassing and challenging the Muslims. The Muslims laid a siege around their dwellings and eventually they were allowed to leave Medina with whatever they could carry of their property and wealth.

The verses draw a parallel between the roles of the hypocrites and Satan in seducing human beings and then letting them down, *"Like Satan, when he says to the human being, 'Disbelieve in God,' but when he disbelieves in God, (Satan) says, 'I disown you; I do fear God, the Lord of the Worlds.' And the consequence for both will be that they are in the Fire, therein abiding. This is the recompense for the wrongdoers."* The parable's objective is to generalize the lesson learnt from the events of this story. This is one of the facets of the style of Quran. It uses a concrete example as the basis for establishing a general principle.

The narrative turns into an address to the believers, *“Believers, be conscious of God and let every soul look to what it has put forth for tomorrow. And remain conscious of God. God is Totally-Aware of what you do.”* God consciousness is a state of the heart that cannot be described in words. It is a state that evokes in the heart the continuous feeling of God’s observance. This feeling is a combination of fear, shame, and embarrassment that arises when a person commits a deed that may displease God, knowing that God is ever observing. The verses then alert the person to remember the passage of time. The verse reminds the believers that they should prepare for the future. Have they prepared themselves for the day when they will stand in front of God to account for their deeds? The command of remaining conscious of God is then repeated with the reminder that God is Totally-Aware of what we do.

A warning is then issued, *“And do not be like those who forgot God; and He made them forget their own souls. Such are the transgressors. Not equal are the companions of the fire and the companions of paradise. The companions of paradise, they are the achievers (of triumph).”*

Those who forget God lose the divine guidance and walk aimlessly in this vast life. In doing so one loses one of the most important characteristics of human nature which elevates him above material life. One then forgets to work for the Hereafter. Those are the true transgressors. Their path leads to Hell fire, but the believers’ path leads to paradise. Those are the successful.

The following verse impacts the heart and shakes it as it visualizes the scene when a solid mountain is crushed under the heavy weight of the Quran, *“Had We sent down this Quran on a mountain, verily, you would have seen it humble itself and rent asunder for fear of God. We cite these parables for the people that they may reflect.”*

The following verses glorify God by reciting His beautiful names. They are like a concert in which the whole universe participates. Each one of these names has its own effect on the universe and on the lives of people. These names evoke in the hearts the practical implications that accompany each name.

“He is God, there is no god other than Him;” a statement of the belief in the uniqueness and Oneness of God. He is the sole Creator and only He is worthy of being worshiped.

“The Knower of the unseen and the seen,” Only He knows what is visible and what is invisible. One should be aware that nothing can be hidden from God. He knows everything we do, whether we do it surreptitiously or in the open.

“He is the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy,” This is an attribute which evokes a feeling of serenity and security. The hope overcomes the fear. God does not seek to punish His servants; He wants them to be guided, and He helps them achieve felicity.

“He is God, there is no god other than Him;” The statement of the belief in the Oneness and uniqueness of God is reiterated because it is the basis of all other attributes.

“The King,” He is the only sovereign and He is the only master that deserves to be obeyed.

“The Holy,” This is an attribute from which emanates absolute purity and holiness. It falls on the human heart to cleanse, purify, and make it fit for glorifying God.

“The Flawless (the Source of Peace),” This is the attribute that generates peace, safety and security in the whole universe and in the heart of the believer.

“The Faithful,” God is the giver of faith. This attribute provides the incentive to the believer to follow the path of faith.

“The Guardian,” God is the Guardian and the controller over everything.

He is “*the Eminent, the Compeller, the Supreme in Pride.*” These are the attributes which describe the supremacy and power of God. No one else shares these attributes with Him, “*Glorified He above all that they ascribe as partners (to Him).*”

He is God, “*the Creator, the Producer, the Fashioner. To Him belong the most beautiful names. Whatever is in the heavens and on earth glorifies Him, and He is the Eminent, the Wise.*”