

Sura 9: Al-Tawba (Repentence)

This Medinian Sura was one of the last few Suras of the Quran to be revealed. The first few verses of the Sura were revealed in the 9th. year after Hijra. The Prophet (PBUH) sent ‘Ali ibn Abi Taleb (RA) to recite it in front of people during the season of Pilgrimage.

Most of its verses were revealed after the battle of Tabuk, which was the last battle that the Prophet (PBUH) participated in. The battle of Tabuk was conducted in the summer, when the weather was hot. The hypocrites used this as an excuse for not participating in the battle. The Sura stated the final version of the rulings which organize the relationship between the Islamic state and the international community. The Sura also included a classification of the Muslim community, a definition of its values, and ethics. It described the different groups that constituted this community. It described clearly the actual condition of the community and the conditions of each group and class in this community.

This Sura, unlike the other Suras in the Quran, does not start with the traditional opening of, “*In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy.*” It has been narrated that Ibn ‘Abbas (RA) said, “I asked ‘Uthman bin A’fan, why did you join the two Suras Al-Infal and Al-Tawba without using the traditional ‘In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy,’ between the two Suras. ‘Uthman replied, ‘The Prophet (PBUH) used to tell his scribes where to place the different verses when they were revealed to him. Surat Al-Anfal was among the first Suras to be revealed in Medina while Surat Al-Tawba was among the last Suras to be revealed in Medina. Both these two Suras dealt with similar topics so, I thought they belonged together. The Prophet (PBUH) died before I was able to ask him about this. That is why I put them together without placing, “In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy the Giver of Mercy,” between them as usual.” I included these two Suras among the seven long Suras.’”

This narration provides a reasonable explanation for the absence of “*In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy the Giver of Mercy,*” in the beginning of this Sura. The narration emphasized that the order of the verses within each Sura, as well as the order of the Suras in the Quran, were dictated by the Prophet (PBUH) himself. This indicates that there is a rationale for the order of the verses within each Sura and for the order of the different Suras in the Quran.

Hawwa indicated that the Sura has three main divisions. The first consists of the first thirty-seven verses. The second division consists of the verses thirty-eight to verse one hundred and twenty-two. The third division consists of the verses one hundred and twenty-three to the end.

Verses: 1 to 28

1. *Release from obligation (is proclaimed) from God and His messenger toward those of the idolaters with whom you made a treaty.*
2. *Travel freely in the land for four months, and know that you cannot escape God and that God will disgrace the disbelievers.*
3. *And a proclamation from God and His Messenger to all people on the day of the greater pilgrimage that God is dissociated from any connection to the idolaters, and (so is) His Messenger. So, if you repent, it will be better for you; but if you turn away, then know*

that you cannot escape God. Give tidings (Muhammad) of a painful torment to those who disbelieve.

- 4. Excepting those of the idolaters with whom you have a treaty, and who have honored the treaty you made with them and have not supported anyone against you. (As for these), fulfill your obligations of the treaty to them to the end of their term. God loves those who are conscious of Him.*
- 5. Then, when the Sacred Months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them (captive), and besiege them, and prepare for them each ambush. But if they repent and establish prayers and pay the poor-due, then let them travel freely on their way. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
- 6. If one of the idolaters should seek your protection (Muhammad), then grant him protection so that he may hear the Word of God, and afterward bring him to his place of safety. That is because they are a folk who do not know.*
- 7. How can there be a treaty between God and His messenger and the idolaters, save those with whom you made a treaty at the Sacred Mosque? So long as they are true to you, be true to them. God loves those who remain conscious of Him.*
- 8. How (can there be any treaty with the others) when, if they have the upper hand over you, they would not respect any tie with you of kinship or of treaty? They please you with their mouths while their hearts are averse to you. And most of them are transgressors.*
- 9. They have sold God's revelation for a little gain, and barred others from His way. Surely, evil is that which they were doing.*
- 10. They neither observe a tie of kinship nor a treaty with a believer. These are they who are aggressors.*
- 11. But if they repent and establish prayer and pay the poor-due, then they are your brethren in faith. We detail Our revelations for a people who have knowledge.*
- 12. But if they break their pledges after they have entered in a treaty with you, and defame your faith, then you should fight the chiefs of disbelief – oaths mean nothing to them – so that they may desist.*
- 13. Will you not fight people who broke their oaths, plotted to expel the Messenger, and attacked you first? Do you fear them? It is God you should fear if you are believers.*
- 14. Fight them, God will torment them by your hands, cover them with shame, help you to have victory over them, and heal the hearts of a believing people.*
- 15. And He will remove the anger of their (the believers) hearts. God relents toward whom He wills. God is Omniscient, Wise.*
- 16. Or do you think you shall be left alone while God has not yet made evident those of you who will strive hard and will not take any one besides God and His Messenger and the believers as intimates. God is Totally-Aware of what you do.*
- 17. It is not for the idolaters to maintain God's mosques, bearing witness against themselves of disbelief. As for such, their deeds are in vain and in the Fire they will abide.*
- 18. The mosques of God are only to be maintained by those who believe in God and the Last Day, establish regular prayers, pay the poor due, and fear none (at all) except God. It is they, who will be among the rightly guided.*
- 19. Have you made providing drinking water to pilgrims, or maintaining the Sacred Mosque, equal to (the pious service of) those who believe in God and the Last Day, and strive with might in the cause of God? They are not equal in the sight of God. God certainly does not guide the wrongdoers.*

20. *Those who believe, emigrated, and strived with might in God's cause, with their wealth and their persons, have the highest rank in the sight of God. Those are the achievers (of triumph.)*
21. *Their Lord gives them glad tidings of mercy from Himself, His good pleasure, and gardens for them, wherein lasting bliss will be theirs.*
22. *They will dwell therein for ever. Verily, with God there is an immense reward.*
23. *You who believe, do not take your fathers and your brothers as protecting guardians if they prefer disbelief over faith. Whosoever of you do so, such are the wrongdoers.*
24. *Say (Prophet), "If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your mates, or your kindred; the wealth that you have acquired; the trade in which you fear a decline; or the dwellings in which you delight are dearer to you than God, and His Messenger, and striving in His cause, then wait until God brings His command to pass." God does not guide the transgressors.*
25. *God has given you victory in many battlefields and on the day of Hunain, when you exulted in your great numbers, but they were of no use to you; and the earth, vast as it is, was straitened for you; then you turned back in flight.*
26. *Then God sent His tranquility down upon His Messenger and upon the believers, and sent down hosts you could not see, and tormented those who disbelieved. Such is the recompense of the disbelievers.*
27. *Then afterward God will accept the repentance from whom He wills. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
28. *You who believe, truly the idolaters are unclean. So let them not, after this year of theirs, approach the Sacred Mosque. And if you fear poverty, soon will God enrich you, if He wills, out of His grace, for God is Omniscient, Wise. (9:1-28)*

"Release from obligation (is proclaimed) from God and His messenger toward those of the idolaters with whom you made a treaty. Travel freely in the land for four months, and know that you cannot escape God and that God will disgrace the disbelievers. And a proclamation from God and His Messenger to all people on the day of the greater pilgrimage that God is dissociated from any connection to the idolaters, and (so is) His Messenger. So, if you repent, it will be better for you; but if you turn away, then know that you cannot escape God. Give tidings (Muhammad) of a painful torment to those who disbelieve. Excepting those of the idolaters with whom you have a treaty, and who have honored the treaty you made with them and have not supported anyone against you. (As for these), fulfill your obligations of the treaty to them to the end of their term. God loves those who are conscious of Him. Then, when the Sacred Months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them (captive), and besiege them, and prepare for them each ambush. But if they repent and establish prayers and pay the poor-due, then let them travel freely on their way. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. If one of the idolaters should seek your protection (Muhammad), then grant him protection so that he may hear the Word of God, and afterward bring him to his place of safety. That is because they are a folk who do not know."

These verses (and the following verses up to verse 28) were revealed to provide the final version of the protocol which establishes the basis for the relationship between the Muslim community, which had settled in Medina, and the idolaters who did not embrace Islam and were still living in Arabia. Arabs who did not embrace Islam were divided into three groups. Some concluded a treaty with the Prophet (PBUH) but later reneged on their treaty when they thought that the Romans will annihilate the

Muslims. The second group were idolaters who were neutral to the Muslims but never concluded a treaty with them. The third group were idolaters who concluded a treaty with the Muslims and did not breach that treaty.

The verses came to provide a proclamation; the style and rhyme of the verses fit the style of such a proclamation. There are many narrations which describe who delivered the proclamation, how it was delivered, and the general ambience in which it was delivered. The most plausible of these is the version narrated by Ibn Jareer. Ibn Jareer quoted Mejahed (RA) saying, “When the Messenger of God (PBUH) returned back from the battle of Tabuk he wanted to perform pilgrimage but he said, ‘I do not want to perform pilgrimage while the idolaters perform pilgrimage in the nude because I fear that it would be construed that I approve of their actions.’ The Messenger (PBUH) sent Abu Bakr (RA) and ‘Ali (RA) to perform pilgrimage in his stead. They then offered the tribes which concluded an armistice agreement with the Muslims an extension of the agreement for four months, at the end of which fighting would resume unless the idolaters chose to embrace Islam. All of them embraced Islam.” Mejahed (RA) then continued by saying, “Having reviewed all narrations regarding what is meant by the word ‘Obligation’ in the first verse of this group of verses, to whom was this obligation owed, and the duration of the obligation, we conclude that, the word “obligation” referred to the armistice agreement between the Muslims and the idolaters who breached their treaty with the Prophet (PBUH) and allied themselves with the enemy of Islam. The verse offered those idolaters a unilateral extension of the armistice agreement for a period of four months. On the other hand, the Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to honor his treaties with the idolaters who did not breach their agreements with him to the end of the appointed terms of such agreements.” Those who think otherwise, namely, those who think that the verses commanded the Prophet (PBUH) to fight all idolaters at the end of the four months’ armistice extension are in error. Verse 7, supports our conclusion, *‘How can there be a treaty between God and His messenger and the idolaters, save those with whom you made a treaty at the Sacred Mosque? So long as they are true to you, be true to them. God loves those who remain conscious of Him.’* (9:7) The verse clearly commanded the Messenger of God (PBUH) to remain true to the idolaters as long as they remain true to him.”

We thus, conclude, having reviewed all narrations, that the Prophet (PBUH) appointed Abu Bakr (RA) as a leader of the pilgrimage expedition and when the first verses of this Sura were revealed he sent ‘Ali (RA) to make the proclamation regarding the armistice agreement. Al-Tirmidhi narrated that ‘Ali (RA) said, “When the first few verses of Surat Al-Tawba were revealed, the Prophet (PBUH) sent me with four announcements: No one should circumambulate around the Ka’ba in the nude, no idolater is allowed near the Ka’ba after this year, the Messenger (PBUH) will honor existing peace treaties with the idolaters, only Muslims will be admitted to paradise.” This is the best account we could find for this incident.

“Release from obligation (is proclaimed) from God and His messenger toward those of the idolaters with whom you made a treaty.” This was a general proclamation which delineated the protocol organizing the relationship between the Muslims and the idolaters within Arabia. The proclamation was clear, unequivocal, and binding for each and every Muslim. Then came the conditions, *“Travel freely in the land four months, and know that you cannot escape God and that God will disgrace the disbelievers.”* The idolaters were given a grace period of four months, during which they can travel, conduct their business, and make arrangements and future plans.

During this grace period, their safety and security were guaranteed by the Muslims, even though they were the ones who acted treacherously and breached their treaty with the Muslims when they thought that the Muslims will be defeated and taken captives by the Romans. They repeatedly breached their treaties with the Muslims. However, Muslims treated them according to the Islamic traditions which came to replace the law of the jungle that ruled the world at the time of the advent of Islam. In case of conflicts, Islam replaced the law of the jungle with a civilised war protocol. These rules did not evolve over time but were the standard that Islam brought to the world since its advent. The verse warned the idolaters that they should not be deluded by the generosity of the Muslims because they will not be able to escape God. Where would they escape? Could they escape God in whose hand is the control of heavens and earth? He has decreed that the idolaters will be disgraced.

The date of the proclamation was also given, *“And a proclamation from God and His messenger to all people on the day of the greater pilgrimage that God is dissociated from any connection to the idolaters, and (so is) His messenger. So, if you repent, it will be better for you; but if you turn away, then know that you cannot escape God.”* The scholars differed whether it was the day of ‘Arafat or the day of the sacrifice that was meant by the expression, “the day of greater pilgrimage.” It seems that the reference here was to the day of the sacrifice. The proclamation was made in a general form and then the exception was made in the verses that followed. The verse also opened the door for repentance. This is an example of the style of the Quran which provides the warning of the consequences of disobedience and in the same time opens up the opportunity for the reward that comes with obedience. The Quran’s objective is to provide a way for guidance. So an opportunity is given for people to reflect and make an informed decision. However, the consequences of making the wrong decision are clearly indicated. This approach also reassures the Muslims that the final decision is in God’s hand. They need not be hesitant or fearful in dealing with the idolaters.

An exception from the general rule was then made, *“Excepting those of the idolaters with whom you have a treaty, and who have honored the treaty you made with them and have not supported anyone against you. (As for these), fulfill their treaty to them till their term. God loves those who are conscious of Him. Then, when the Sacred Months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them (captive), and besiege them, and prepare for them each ambush. But if they repent and establish prayer and pay the poor due, then let them travel freely on their way. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. If one of the idolaters should seek your protection (Muhammad), then grant him protection so that he may hear the Word of God, and afterward bring him to his place of safety. That is because they are a folk who do not know.”*

The exception in the verse referred to a clan called Banu Khuzaimah who honoured the treaty which they concluded with the Muslims when the Hudaibiah armistice agreement was ratified. The term of this agreement was ten years. The verse came to command the Muslims to honor the terms of the agreement. The verse emphasized the strong relationship between the fulfilment of the promise and God consciousness, *“fulfill their treaty to them till their term. God loves those who are conscious of Him.”* Fulfilment of the promise is an integral component of the code of Islamic ethics, God promised to reward those who fulfill their promises. Ethical behaviour in Islam is a means to achieve God consciousness. Ethical behaviour is an integral component of worship in Islam and it is an important tool for building safe and secure communities.

However, once the appointed term of the grace period (four months) has expired then, *“slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them (captive), and besiege them, and prepare for them each ambush. But if they repent and establish prayer and pay the poor-due, then let them travel freely on their way. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* This command reflects the fact that the state of war between the Muslims and the idolaters will resume after the grace period had ended. Ample warning had been given to the idolaters to opt either for the resumption of hostilities or seeking peace by entering the fold of Islam. Establishing prayers and paying the poor due (Zakat) are used in this verse as a sign for their acceptance of Islam.

However, the war between the Muslims and the idolaters was not a war to annihilate all idolaters. It was a war against those who committed treason and started the fight against Muslims. Those who were not party to this conspiracy and who sought refuge and protection with the Muslims should be granted such protection. So that they get an opportunity to learn about this religion, *“If one of the idolaters should seek your protection (Muhammad), then grant him protection so that he may hear the Word of God, and afterward bring him to his place of safety. That is because they are a folk who do not know.”* Even if they did not accept Islam, Muslims are obliged to grant them protection until they reach their safe destination. Islam brought a program for guidance not for revenge and annihilation. This verse refutes the claim that some make saying that the objective of Jihad was to convert people and force them to accept Islam. The objective of Jihad is to destroy the tyrants and to establish the people’s right to be free to adopt the religion of their choice.

“How can there be a treaty between God and His Messenger and the idolaters, save those with whom you made a treaty at the Sacred Mosque? So long as they are true to you, be true to them. God loves those who remain conscious of Him. How (can there be any treaty with the others) when, if they have the upper hand over you, they would not respect any tie with you of kinship or of treaty? They please you with their mouths while their hearts are averse to you. And most of them are transgressors. They have sold God’s revelation for a little gain, and barred others from His way. Surely, evil is that which they were doing. They neither observe a tie of kinship nor a treaty with a believer. These are they who are aggressors.” How can there be a treaty between the idolaters and God and His Messenger (PBUH) when they only take recourse to these treaties when they are weak and unable to conquer the Muslims? Had they been strong enough to overcome the Muslims, they would have overwhelmed the Muslims and assaulted them regardless of any existing treaty. They would have not had any regard to kin relationships, a treaty with the Muslims, nor would they have observed any human decency in dealing with the Muslims. They were bent on taking revenge against the Muslims.

This verse indicates that prohibiting the Muslims to be party to a treaty with the idolaters was a matter of principle. These idolaters did not submit completely to God and they neither believed in His Message nor His Messenger. How can God have a treaty with them; while they challenge God’s authority and refuse adamantly to show any gratitude to Him? This may seem at odds with the fact that the Messenger of God (PBUH) had conducted agreements with the idolaters at that time and the verses of this Sura conveyed God’s command to the believers to honor these agreements. Our understanding of the Islamic dynamic program is that the treaties that were conducted with the idolaters before the revelation of this verse constituted a temporary phase for the interaction between the Muslims and the idolaters. These agreements were conducted to meet

certain needs that were dictated by the realities of life at that time. Muslims did not trick people with whom they conducted treaties nor did they deceive them. On the contrary, it was the idolater Arabs who reneged on their promises. This required a change of tactics by the Muslims. Thus, the final rule is that the Muslims should not conduct treaties with the idolaters after the revelation of this verse.

“But if they repent and establish prayer and pay the poor-due, then they are your brethren in faith. We detail Our revelations for a people who have knowledge.” So the door was open for forgiveness if they repent. They would then become part of the Muslim community and all previous sins would be wiped out. But if they break their pledges, then the only alternative is the resumption of hostilities.

“Will you not fight people who broke their oaths, plotted to expel the Messenger, and attacked you first? Do you fear them? It is God you should fear if you are believers.” The idolaters had a long history of breaking the agreements they made with the Muslims. The latest in this series of broken agreements was the agreement of Hudaibiyah. The Messenger (PBUH) accepted (based on God’s revelation) all the conditions that the idolaters stipulated, even though some of the Prophet’s (PBUH) companions considered them unfair. The Prophet (PBUH) respected and honoured each and every stipulation they made. But it was they, who less than two years later, reneged on their agreement. They were the same people who conspired to kill the Prophet (PBUH) and forced him to flee his home. They did not honor the sanctity of the Sacred Mosque and planned to kill the Prophet (PBUH) in defiance of God’s command to keep the Sacred Mosque a safe place for everyone. Their aggression continued even after the Muslims migrated to Medina. These memories flash in the minds of Muslims when they listen to the question, *“Do you fear them?”* The response follows quickly with a reminder and a rebuke, *“It is God you should fear if you are believers.”* A believer should never fear another human being, a believer should only fear God.

“Fight them, God will torment them by your hands, cover them with shame, help you to have victory over them, and heal the hearts of a believing people, And He will remove the anger of their (the believers) hearts.” When you fight them, God will give you the power and the ability to be the tool with which He will punish them. They will be defeated at your hands and the believers will be pleased. In addition, you will be rewarded with God’s forgiveness, *“God relents toward whom He wills. God is Omniscient, Wise.”* The believers’ victory may also act as a wakeup call for some disbelievers. They may open their eyes to heed the guidance and see the truth when they see the miracles which the believers performed and realize that there is a super natural power behind these miracles.

“Or do you think you shall be left alone while God has not yet made evident those of you who will strive hard and will not take any one besides God and His Messenger and the believers as intimates. God is Totally-Aware of what you do.” The test was absolutely necessary to uncover those who did not completely submit to God, those who excelled in conniving with the disbelievers for their own benefit while pretending to be part of the Muslim community.

“It is not for the idolaters to maintain God’s Mosques, bearing witness against themselves of disbelief.” It is quite illogical that those who do not believe in God claim the right to maintain God’s mosques. God’s mosques are built so that only God would be worshipped therein. Those who disbelieve associate partners with God. Thus, it is against the nature of things that the disbelievers would be entrusted with the maintenance of God’s mosques, and even if they do, their deeds would not be accepted, *“As for such, their deeds are in vain and in the Fire they will*

abide.” Worship is an expression of faith; bad faith can only produce bad worship. Thus, only those who have pure faith can maintain God’s mosques, *“The mosques of God are only to be maintained by those who believe in God and the Last Day, establish regular prayers, pay the poor due, and fear none (at all) except God. It is they who will be among the rightly guided.”* The verse stressed the requirements that a believer should have deep belief in God and that this belief should be reflected on his/her deeds, and also emphasized that a believer should fear God alone. A believer should not fear anyone else but God. Believers should rid themselves of any shadow of associating partners with God. They should devote themselves fully to God. This devotion should be embedded in their psyche and be manifested by their behaviour. Those who will be rightly guided and those who deserve to carry the responsibility of maintaining God’s mosques.

Can one say that those who used to provide water for the pilgrims but did not believe fully in God have the same status as those who believed in God and strived in His cause? They are not equal according to God’s standard, *“Have you made providing drinking water to pilgrims, or maintaining the Sacred Mosque, equal to (the pious service of) those who believe in God and the Last Day, and strive with might in the cause of God? They are not equal in the sight of God. God certainly does not guide the wrongdoers.”* God does not guide those who associate partners with Him. These are the wrongdoers.

“Those who believe, emigrated, and strived with might in God's cause, with their wealth and their persons, have the highest rank in the sight of God. Those are the achievers (of triumph.) Their Lord gives them glad tidings of mercy from Himself, His good pleasure, and gardens for them, wherein lasting bliss will be theirs. They will dwell therein forever. Verily, with God there is an immense reward.” This is a clear statement that outlines the status of the believers who migrated and strived in God’s cause. They are promised the highest rank with their Lord. As for the others, their deeds will be nullified and in Hell fire they will abide forever.

“You who believe, do not take your fathers and your brothers as protecting guardians if they prefer disbelief over faith. Whosoever of you do so, such are the wrongdoers.” All blood relationships should be broken if the bonds between the hearts are broken as a result of the deviation in faith. God’s bond between the believers should be valued more than the tribal or family bonds. God’s bond brings the whole humanity in one family. Those who pledge allegiance to the disbelievers are truly wrongdoers. The term wrongdoers in this verse refer to those who associate partners with God.

The verses stated the general principle regarding the formation of alliances with others and provided a detailed list of all possible relationships that may pose a temptation for the believers, *“Say (Prophet), ‘If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your mates, or your kindred; the wealth that you have acquired; the trade in which you fear a decline; or the dwellings in which you delight are dearer to you than God, and His Messenger, and striving in His cause, then wait until God brings His command to pass.’”* God does not guide the transgressors.” A question is posed. Will the scale be tipped in favour of the love for fathers, sons, brothers, mates, or kindred (an expression of relationships acquired through blood or marriage), wealth, trade (an expression for the natural disposition towards the love of ownership), or the dwellings in which you delight (an expression for worldly pleasures) over the love of God, His Messenger, and striving in God’s cause?

This kind of devotion is required of individuals and the whole Muslim community and nation alike. No benefit or a relationship should take precedence over the requirement of the faith in God and striving in His cause. This kind of obligation would not have been mandated unless God knew that the believers

were able to fulfil the undertaking. God inculcated in the initial natural disposition of His servants a great ability for endurance and dedication. The endurance and dedication are rewarded by the great pleasure obtained from feeling the closeness to God, hoping for His grace, rising high above the material requirements of the physical body, and aspiring to a brilliant horizon.

“God has given you victory in many battlefields and on the day of Hunain, when you exulted in your great numbers, but they were of no use to you; and the earth, vast as it is, was straitened for you; then you turned back in flight.” The memory of the victory that they achieved in the different battles which was only possible because of God’s grace was still fresh in their memory. The battle of Hunain took place after the conquest of Mecca in the 10th month of the 8th year of Hijra. After the conquest of Mecca, most of the people in Mecca embraced Islam. News came to the Prophet (PBUH) that the tribe of Hawazen under the leadership of Malek bin ‘Awf Al-Nadari had formed an alliance with the tribes of Thuqaif, Banu Jashm, Banu Bakr, and others to attack the Muslims. The Prophet (PBUH) moved with his army of ten thousand Muslims who came from Medina in addition to two thousand from the people of Mecca. The two armies met at a valley called Hunain which is located between Mecca and Al-Taieef. The battle started early in the morning. The disbelievers camped stealthily around the valley and ambushed the Muslims as they came in. The Muslims turned back on their heels and fled the battle field. The Prophet (PBUH) together with few of his companions stood fast. The Prophet (PBUH) charged towards the enemy while calling the Muslims to come back to fight. The Prophet (PBUH) asked his uncle Al- ‘Abbas (RA) to call upon the companions of the tree (those were the companions who pledged their allegiance to the Prophet (PBUH) during the battle of Hudaibiyah, the pledge which was called the pledge of Riddwan). Muslims started to gather around the Prophet (PBUH) and he lead them against the disbelievers. The battle ended by a victory for the Muslim army.

This was the first battle in which the Muslims were able to form an army of twelve thousand people. They were impressed by their numbers and thought that an army of this size could not be defeated. They forgot the basic requirement for victory, so God reminded them. God made them suffer defeat first and then showed them that a small army of true believers can achieve the victory that eludes a huge non-committed army, *“Then God sent His tranquility down upon His Messenger and upon the believers, and sent down hosts you could not see, and tormented those who disbelieved. Such is the recompense of the disbelievers. Then afterward God will accept the repentance from whom He wills. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* The verses paint a dynamic picture, first there was rejoicing, jubilation, and exultation in numbers; then there came the earthquake of defeat, the feeling of collapse, and the turning away. Then, the picture changed by the arrival of God’s help. Tranquility engulfed the believers and made them to stand their ground and God’s host fought with them and turned the balance against the disbelievers. The disbelievers were punished, but the door for God’s forgiveness is always open for those who sin and later repent.

The story of the battle of *Hunain*, narrated through these verses to illustrate the futility of the dependence on any power other than God’s, highlights another principle. It is the principle of the power of true and strong faith. True and strong faith, not large numbers, is the source of strength.

A final verdict is then given regarding the idolaters, *“You who believe, truly the idolaters are unclean. So let them not, after this year of theirs, approach the Sacred Mosque. And if you fear poverty, soon will God enrich you, if He wills, out of His grace, for God is Omniscient, Wise.”* The verse indicates that idolatry is a spiritual impurity. This spiritual impurity defiles the purity

of the precinct of the Sacred Mosque. Thus, idolaters are not fit to gain access to the precinct of the Sacred Mosque. But, what about the economic opportunities and the wealth that were brought to Mecca during the time of pilgrimage. The people of Mecca depended in their living on the financial gains which they made from people who come to perform pilgrimage. The verse reminded the believers that it is God who provides.

Verses: 29 to 35

29. *Fight those who disbelieve in God and the Last Day, who do not forbid that which God and His Messenger have forbidden, who do not acknowledge the religion of truth, (even if they were) of the People of the Scripture, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.*
30. *The Jews said, "Ezra is the son of God," and the Christians said, "The Messiah is the son of God." That is their saying with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved before. May God destroy them; how deluded are they?*
31. *They took their rabbis and their monks to be their lords beside God, (also) the Messiah, the son of Mary. They were commanded to worship only One God. There is no deity but He. Be He glorified above all that they ascribe as partners (to Him.)*
32. *They want to extinguish the light of God with their mouths, but God refuses except to perfect His light, though the disbelievers hate it.*
33. *It is He who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, to proclaim it over all religion, even though the idolaters may hate it.*
34. *You who believe, many of the rabbis and the monks devour the wealth of people unjustly and turn them away from the way of God. Those who hoard up gold and silver and do not spend it in the way of God, give them tidings (Muhammad) of a painful torment.*
35. *On the Day when it will (all) be heated in the fire of Hell, and their foreheads and their sides and their backs will be branded therewith (and it will be said to them), "Here is that which you hoarded for yourselves. Now taste of what you used to hoard." (9:29-35)*

"Fight those who disbelieve in God and the Last Day, who do not forbid that which God and His Messenger have forbidden, who do not acknowledge the religion of truth, (even if they were) of the People of the Scripture, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued." This verse and the subsequent ones were revealed shortly before the battle of Tabuk against the Romans and their Christian Arab vassals. These verses were revealed to deal specifically with the impending battle with the Romans. The verses describe the doctrine of these people and explain the reasoning behind fighting them. It should not be taken as a directive to fight the people of the Scripture in general. The bases for fighting the Romans and their allies were summarized as: they disbelieve in God and the Last Day, they do not forbid that which God and His Messenger have forbidden, and they do not acknowledge the religion of truth. Four facts were given to support these statements.

First, *"The Jews said, 'Ezra is the son of God,' and the Christians said, 'The Messiah is the son of God.' That is their saying with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved before. May God destroy them; how deluded are they?"* Those who make such a claim associate partners with God, do not believe in Oneness of God and the Day of Judgment.

Second, *"They took their rabbis and their monks to be their lords beside God, (also) the Messiah, the son of Mary. They were commanded to worship only One God. There is no deity*

but He. Be He glorified above all that they ascribe as partners (to Him.)” This contravenes the belief in the Oneness of God.

Third, *“They want to extinguish the light of God with their mouths, but God refuses except to perfect His light, though the disbelievers hate it.”* They launched war against the religion of God.

Fourth, *“Many of the rabbis and the monks devour the wealth of people unjustly and turn them away from the way of God.”* They did not forbid what God and His Messenger forbade.

These were actual attributes of the Romans and their Christian Arab vassals whom the Muslims were getting ready to engage in battle. The rule enunciated in these verses is a general rule that should be applied to all people of the Scripture who satisfy the above mentioned criteria.

However, there were exceptions made by the Prophet (PBUH). Muslims were commanded not to attack non combatants like women, children, and elderly people; and priests and hermits.

The verse commands the believers to fight the people of the Scripture who, *“who disbelieve in God and the Last Day.”* Those who believe that Ezra or the Messiah are the sons of God do not believe in the Oneness of God. The verse gives another criterion for the people of the Scripture who should be fought, *“who do not forbid that which God and His Messenger have forbidden.”*

The command applies whether the word Messenger in the verse refers to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) or refers to the Messenger that God sent to these people before. The succeeding verses explained this by stating that they used to, *“devour the wealth of people unjustly and turn them away from the way of God,”* which was forbidden in all God’s messages. The verses also indicated that they, *“do not acknowledge the religion of truth.”*

The condition that the Quran gave for the believers to stop fighting these people was simply that (let there be no compulsion in religion), *“they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.”* Why was paying the Jizya a condition for the hostilities to cease? The people of the Scripture who satisfied the above mentioned criteria represented a threat to Islam. They had different ideology and their behavior contravened the norms of Islam. They also posed a threat to the Muslim society because of the confrontation between their doctrine and the doctrine of Islam. History bears witness that the threat did materialize later. The only way Islam would have been able to establish its objective, to guarantee the freedom of religion for every human being, was to subdue the tyrants who oppressed the people. Those authorities who were placing obstacles in the way of people and robbing them of the freedom to choose had to be subdued. Agreeing to pay the Jizya was the sign they have been subdued.

The objectives of paying this tax were

- It is a sign of submission and an agreement not to attack the Muslims or hinder others from receiving information about Islam.
- It is a contribution to the state’s treasury to cover protection expenses. The Muslim community was obliged to offer protection for those who pay the tax.
- It is a contribution to the state’s treasury dedicated to helping those who need help whether Muslims or non-Muslims. Muslims were required to pay the poor due; this tax was the contribution by non-Muslims to the treasury.

“The Jews said, ‘Ezra is the son of God,’ and the Christians said, ‘The Messiah is the son of God.’ That is their saying with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved before. May God destroy them; how deluded are they?” This verse draws a parallel between the doctrine of those who say Ezra the son of God and those who say the Messiah is the son of God

and the doctrine of the idolatrous Arabs. A doctrine that claims that God has a son defies the fundamental doctrine that states that God is One. Although these verses were revealed to prepare the believers for the impending fight with the Romans and their Christian Arab allies, we notice that the verses also mention the Jews as well. We think that they were mentioned in this verse for two reasons:

- The verses establish a general rule that applies to all people of the Scripture. The verses explain the reasons for fighting the people of the Scripture. The people of the Scripture include the Christians and the Jews.
- The Jews, at this time, resided in an area north of Syria after they had been evacuated from Medina. The Muslims may have had to pass by them on their route to meet the Romans.

“That is their saying with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved before. May God destroy them; how deluded are they?” The Quranic expression indicates that this was their statement which they made using their mouths. The expression provides a dynamic image as if the reader hears their statement as they spoke. It also alludes to the fact that the statement is mere words that were not supported by any proof. Their statement is similar to the statement made by the idolaters before. The scholars explained that the similarity between the statements of the Christians and the Jews and the statement of the idolatrous Arabs stems from the fact that the Arabs claimed that the angels were the daughters of God. But the similarity is much deeper than this. The concept of the trinity existed in many religions before Christianity; of these we mention the old Egyptian and the Hindu religions. The Assyrians believed in the concept that God has a son. This shows the parallel between the sayings of the Jews and Christians on one side and the idolaters on the other side. These facts were not known to the Arabs at that time which provides another proof that Quran is a revealed message.

“They took their rabbis and their monks to be their lords beside God, (also) the Messiah, the son of Mary. They were commanded to worship only One God. There is no deity but He. Be He glorified above all that they ascribe as partners (to Him.)” Ibn Katheer mentioned in his interpretation of the Quran that, “ ‘Adi bin Hatem (RA), who was a Christian, fled to Syria when he received the Messenger’s (PBUH) invitation to Islam. His sister was taken captive in a skirmish with the Muslims. The Prophet (PBUH) freed ‘Adi’s sister and she accepted Islam. She later went to her brother and asked him to accept Islam. ‘Adi went to Medina to meet with the Prophet (PBUH) and heard him reciting, ‘They took their rabbis and their monks to be their lords beside God.’ ‘Adi (RA) objected saying, ‘They did not worship their rabbis and their monks.’ The Prophet (PBUH) said, ‘did not the rabbis and the monks forbade them to do things that God made lawful and allowed them to do things which God forbade. This is worship.’” Al-Alousi mentioned in his interpretation of the Quran that the verse implies that being obedient to the rabbis and monks who devised rules regarding the lawful and the forbidden, such rules contravened the will of God, amounts to taking them lords beside God.

Based on the obvious meaning of the Quranic text, the interpretation of the Prophet (PBUH) (which is the final reference) and the understanding of the early and later scholars who interpreted the Quran, we come to the following conclusion:

- Worship means following the rules enunciated in the Quran and explained in the tradition of the Prophet (PBUH). The statement, *“They took their rabbis and their monks to be their lords beside God,”* does not mean they believed in them as gods. It means that they followed blindly the laws devised by the rabbis and priests. These were laws which contravened the law of God. This is synonymous to associating partners with God. Blindly accepting laws devised by a human being and which contravene the laws of God is synonymous to worshipping that human being.

Although the main objective of these verses was to prepare the Muslims for the battle with the Romans, and to deal with hesitation on the part of Muslims to fight people of the Scripture, they state general principles.

The fundamental meaning of the word “religion” is the complete submission to God. This is the only religion that God will accept. Submission encompasses following God’s law as well as performing the rituals. Those who perform the rituals but follow those who usurp God’s right to legislate cannot be considered Muslims. These are the ones who take lords beside God.

“They want to extinguish the light of God with their mouths, but God refuses except to perfect His light, though the disbelievers hate it. It is He Who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, to proclaim it over all religion, even though the idolaters may hate it.” They fight Islam and would like to extinguish the light of God. They fabricate lies against Islam and motivate their followers to attack Islam. But, God’s light will prevail. God sent His Messenger (PBUH) with the true religion. The true religion is God’s light. God will perfect His light in spite of the attempts of those who want to extinguish it. The verse indicates that the religion of truth is the religion that God sent Muhammad (PBUH) with.

“You who believe, many of the rabbis and the monks devour the wealth of people unjustly and turn them away from the way of God. Those who hoard up gold and silver and do not spend it in the way of God, give them tidings (Muhammad) of a painful torment.” The verses continued to deal with the rabbis and monks who usurped the right of God to legislate and were followed blindly by their followers by referring to the ways they devised to devour people’s wealth. It should be noted that the verse did not generalize. It stated that “many” of the rabbi’s and monks do this and not all of them. Then the warning of a severe torment in the Hereafter is issued, *“On the Day when it will (all) be heated in the fire of hell, and their foreheads and their sides and their backs will be branded therewith (and it will be said to them), ‘Here is that which you hoarded for yourselves. Now taste of what you used to hoard.’”*

Verses: 36 to 37

36. *God has decreed that the number of months is twelve - so ordained by Him in His book, the day He created the heavens and the earth - of them four are sacred. That is the straight religion. So wrong not yourselves in them. And wage war on all of the idolaters as they are waging war on all of you. And know that God is with those who remain conscious of Him.*
37. *Postponement (of a sacred month) is only an excess in disbelief whereby those who disbelieve are misled. They allow it one year and forbid it (another) year that they may make up the number of the months which God has hallowed, so that they allow that*

which God has forbidden. Their evil deeds have been made pleasing to them. God does not guide the disbelieving folk. (9:36-37)

“God has decreed that the number of months is twelve - so ordained by Him in His book, the day He created the heavens and the earth - of them four are sacred. That is the straight religion.” This verse indicates that time is a part of God’s original plan of the creation of the universe. The verse indicates that there is a perpetual periodic cycle which is composed of twelve months. God fixed the length of the cycle as well as the number of the months. This is God’s law. God also fixed the number and the place of the Sacred Months within this periodic cycle. No one has the right to change this. This is part of the right religion which conforms to God’s creation plan.

“So wrong not yourselves in them.” Do not wrong yourselves during these months which had been established by God’s law. Do not wrong yourselves by violating what God has forbidden during these months. God wanted these months to be a period of safety and security for people, free of hostilities. But when the Sacred Months had ended, *“wage war on all of the idolaters as they are waging war on all of you. And know that God is with those who remain conscious of Him.”* They fight you indiscriminately, so repel their aggression by fighting all of them together. The idolaters collectively are party to the battle between faith and disbelief, the battle between guidance and misguidance. This is a battle between two distinct groups. The differences between these two groups cannot be reconciled and there is no hope of an eternal peace between the two. The differences between the two groups are not caused by a difference in interest that can be settled through compromise or land claims that can be settled through negotiations. It is a battle between different doctrines which cannot be resolved through compromise. The verse ends by a reminder to the believers to remain conscious of God by following God’s commands regarding the lawful and forbidden, by participating in fighting the idolaters, and by observing the protocol of war that God had decreed.

“Postponement (of a Sacred Month) is only an excess in disbelief whereby those who disbelieve are misled. They allow it one year and forbid it (another) year that they may make up the number of the months which God has hallowed, so that they allow that which God has forbidden. Their evil deeds have been made pleasing to them. God does not guide the disbelieving folk.”

Mejahed (RA) explained this verse by saying, “A man from the tribe of Kenanah used to come each year (during the time of pilgrimage) riding a donkey. The man would say, ‘People, what I say goes, we have made the month of Muharram a Sacred Month and we have postponed the month of Safar.’ The following year, he would say, ‘we have made Safar a Sacred Month and we have postponed the month of Muharram.’ This is how they used to change God’s law regarding the Sacred Months.” Another story was narrated by Abd El-Rahman bin Aslam. He said, “The Arabs used to honour the Sacred Months by abstaining from fighting during these months to the extent that a man would face his father’s killer but would not raise a hand against him to avenge his father’s death, till a man from Kenanah commanded his tribe to fight during the month of Muharram. When his people reminded him that they could not fight during the month of Muharram, he said, ‘We will postpone Muharram, the present month is the month of Safar. This year has two months by the name of Safar. The month of Safar of the following year would then be considered a Sacred Month.’”

These are two versions of the way the idolaters used to change the Sacred Months around. In one version they make the month of Safar sacred instead of the month of Muharram. Thus, the number of Sacred Months remains four but they are not the months which God had decreed to be sacred. In the second version, they would have three sacred months in one year and five sacred

months in the subsequent year. Either way they change God's law. This is an excess in disbelief.

Verses: 38 to 41

38. *You who believe, what is the matter with you, that, when you are asked to go forth in the cause of God, you cling heavily to the earth? Are you satisfied with the life of this world rather than the Hereafter? But little is the enjoyment of this life, as compared with the Hereafter.*
39. *Unless you go forth, He will punish you with a grievous torment, and replace you with others and you will not harm Him at all. God is Able to do all things.*
40. *If you do not help him, God did indeed help him when the disbelievers drove him out, the second of two; when the two of them were in the cave, when he said to his companion, "Do not grieve. God is with us." Then God caused His tranquility to descend upon him and supported him with hosts you could not see, and made the word of those who disbelieved the lowest, while God's word became the uppermost. God is Eminent, Wise.*
41. *Go forth, light-armed and heavy-armed, and strive with your wealth and your lives in the way of God. That is best for you if you only knew. (9:38-41)*

It is most probable that these verses were revealed right after the Prophet (PBUH) announced his intention to form an army to fight the Romans in the battle of Tabuk. The Prophet's (PBUH) move was in response to the intelligence he received that the Roman emperor has formed a huge army to fight the Muslims. The emperor gave his soldiers one-year salary as an incentive to fight the Muslims. The vassal Christians Arab tribes who lived near the boundary between Arabia and the Romans also allied themselves with the Romans against the Muslims and the front of the Roman army had already reached Syria. It was the Prophet's (PBUH) policy to keep the objective of his expedition confidential to gain the advantage of surprising his enemy. However, in this particular incident he did announce that the objective was to fight the Romans. The reason for this change in policy was that this was a particularly difficult battle for the Muslims. The distance that the army had to travel was very long, the people of Medina were preparing to harvest their fields, and it was summer time which made travel more difficult. This was a golden opportunity for the hypocrites to dampen the spirits of the Muslims and to tempt them to stay home and to abandon the Prophet's (PBUH) expedition.

"You who believe, what is the matter with you, that, when you are asked to go forth in the cause of God, you cling heavily to the earth?" The love of life, the love of wealth, and the love of comfort and worldly pleasures make people heavy in weight and hinder their movement. All of these meanings are reflected on the expression, *"Cling heavily to the earth."* Greed and short sightedness are shackles which increase the gravity of the body and impede its movement.

"Are you satisfied with the life of this world rather than the Hereafter? But little is the enjoyment of this life, as compared with the Hereafter." Going out to fight in the cause of God is a step towards destroying the worldly shackles which attach humankind to the earth and prevents him from flying in the space of spirituality towards the eternal life. No one with a sound faith in God would resist the call to strive in the cause of God.

The verses issue a very stern warning, *"Unless you go forth, He will punish you with a grievous torment, and replace you with others and you will not harm Him at all. God is Able to do all*

things.” Although the warning was meant to address a specific group of people, in a specific circumstance, its scope can be generalized. The torment that was promised in the verse was meant for both the Hereafter and this life. God is able to replace you with another people who will obey His commands and will be able to overcome the weakness to cling to the earth. The following verses provide an example, that they knew very well, *“If you do not help him, God did indeed help him when the disbelievers drove him out, the second of two; when the two of them were in the cave, when he said to his companion, “Do not grieve. God is with us.” Then God caused His tranquility to descend upon him and supported him with hosts you could not see, and made the word of those who disbelieved the lowest, while God's word became the uppermost. God is Eminent, Wise.”* The verse tells the story of the migration of the Prophet (PBUH) to Medina. When Quraish was fed up with the Prophet (PBUH) they plotted to kill him. But God revealed their plot to the Prophet (PBUH) and commanded him to migrate to Medina. The Prophet (PBUH) migrated from Mecca in the company of his friend Abu Bakr (RA). On their way to Medina, they hid in a cave to lose the idolaters who were in their pursuit. While they were in the cave, they saw the idolaters who were following them standing at the opening of the cave. Abu Bakr (RA) was worried that they may decide to enter the cave and apprehend them. The Prophet (PBUH) calmed the fears of Abu Bakr (RA) saying, *“What do you think of two, God is their third?”* Quraish had the might and the physical power, but with God on their side, Muhammad (PBUH) and his companion prevailed. God sent His host to support them and made, *“The word of those who disbelieved the lowest, while God's word became the uppermost.”*

This was an example of how God’s intervention awarded His Messenger victory over the idolaters and made God’s word to prevail. God is able to repeat this intervention for another group who are willing to strive in God’s cause.

The command to strive in God’s cause was then given subsequent to the reminder of God’s help, *“Go forth, light-armed and heavy-armed, and strive with your wealth and your lives in the way of God. That is best for you if you only knew.”* The believers were then commanded to stop making excuses and to go forth and strive with their wealth and their persons. The believers realized the benefit of following God’s command and they fought and won; and God’s word prevailed.

Verses: 42 to 92

42. *Had it been a near adventure and an easy journey they would have followed you, but the distance seemed too far for them. Yet, they will swear by God (saying), “If we had been able, we would surely have set out with you.” They destroy their souls, and God knows that they are indeed liars.*
43. *God pardoned you (Muhammad); why did you grant them leave before it had become clear to you those who spoke the truth and you had known the liars?*
44. *Those who believe in God and the Last Day do not ask you for an exemption from fighting with their wealth and their persons. And God knows well those who are conscious of Him.*
45. *Only those who disbelieve in God and the Last Day will ask you for an exemption, those whose hearts are in doubt, so they waver in their doubt.*
46. *If they had intended to go forth, they would certainly have prepared for it; but God was averse to their being sent forth, so He made them lag behind. They were told, “Sit among those who stayed behind.”*

47. *Had they gone forth with you, they would have contributed nothing save trouble and they would have scurried around seeking to cause sedition among you; and among you there are some who would have listened to them. God knows the wrongdoers.*
48. *Indeed, they sought to cause sedition before and raised difficulties for you until the truth came out and God's decree was made manifest, though they hated it.*
49. *Of them is he who says, "Grant me an exemption (to stay at home) and do not subject me to temptation." Indeed, it is into temptation that they (thus) have fallen. Certainly, Hell will encompass the disbelievers.*
50. *If good befalls you, it grieves them; but if a misfortune befalls you, they say, "We took indeed our precautions beforehand," and they turn away rejoicing.*
51. *Say, "Nothing will befall us except that which God has decreed for us, He is our Protecting Guardian," and in God let the believers put their trust.*
52. *Say, "Do you expect for us (any fate) other than one of the two glorious things (Martyrdom or victory)? But we expect that God will either torment you Himself, or by our hands. So wait (expectantly); we too will wait with you."*
53. *Say, "Spend (for the cause) willingly or unwillingly. It will not be accepted from you. You were indeed a transgressing folk."*
54. *The reasons their contributions were not accepted, were that they rejected God and His Messenger; that they come to prayer slothfully; and they offer contributions grudgingly.*
55. *So let not their riches nor their children impress you (Muhammad). God only wishes to torment them thereby in the life of this world and that their souls shall pass away while they are disbelievers.*
56. *They swear by God that they indeed belong to you while they do not belong to you, but they are people who are afraid.*
57. *If they could find a place to flee to, or caves, or a place of concealment, they would turn to it in great haste.*
58. *And among them are those who disparage you in the matter of (the distribution of) the poor due. If they are given part thereof, they are pleased, but if not, they become enraged.*
59. *If only had they been content with what God and His Messenger gave them, and had said, "God is sufficient for us. God and His Messenger will soon give us out of His grace, and to God do we turn our hopes."*
60. *The poor dues are only for the poor, the needy, those who are employed to administer the (funds), those whose hearts have been (recently) reconciled (to truth), those in bondage, those in debt, in the cause of God, and for the wayfarer. This is ordained by God, and God is Omniscient, Wise.*
61. *Among them are men who abuse the Prophet and say, "He is (all) ear." Say, "He listens to what is best for you. He believes in God, has faith in the believers, and is a mercy to those of you who believe." But those who abuse the Messenger will have a painful torment.*
62. *They swear by God to you (Muslims) to please you, but it is more fitting for them to please God and His messenger, if they were believers.*
63. *Do they not know that whoever opposes God and His Messenger, he shall certainly have the fire of Hell to abide in it? That is the great ignominy.*
64. *The Hypocrites are apprehensive lest a Sura should be revealed telling them plainly of what is in their hearts. Say, "Go on mocking; God will certainly expose what you fear."*

65. *If you (Muhammad) ask them, they will say, "We were only talking idly and in jest." Say, "Was it at God and His revelations and His Messenger that you were mocking?"*
66. *Make no excuses. You have disbelieved after you had believed. If We pardon a party of you, We shall torment another party because they were criminals.*
67. *The hypocrite men and hypocrite women are all alike; they enjoin evil and forbid good and withhold their hands; they have forsaken God, so He has forsaken them; indeed, the hypocrites are the transgressors.*
68. *God promised the hypocrites, both men and women, and the disbelievers the fire of Hell. Therein shall they dwell. It will suffice them. God cursed them, and theirs is a lasting torment.*
69. *As in the case of those before you, they were mightier than you in power and more abundant in wealth and children. They had their portion of enjoyment and you had yours, as did those before you; and you indulged in idle talk as they did. Such are they whose deeds are fruitless in this world and in the Hereafter, and it is they who are the losers.*
70. *Have they never heard the stories of those who came before them? - The People of Noah, 'Ad, and Thamud; the people of Abraham, the people of Madyan, and the cities overthrown. Their messengers came to them with clear signs. God would have never wronged them, but they wronged their own souls.*
71. *The believers, men and women, are protecting guardians of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is evil; they establish regular prayers and pay the prescribed poor due; and they obey God and His Messenger. God will have mercy on them. God is Eminent, Wise.*
72. *God promised the believers, men and women, gardens under which rivers flow to dwell therein and beautiful mansions in gardens of everlasting bliss. But the greatest bliss is the good pleasure of God. That is the supreme achievement.*
73. *Prophet, strive hard against the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and be harsh against them. Their refuge is Hell, an evil destination indeed.*
74. *They swear by God that they said nothing (evil), but indeed they uttered the word of disbelief, and they did disbelieve after they had accepted Islam. They meditated a plot which they were unable to carry out. They were not resentful except (for the fact) that God and His Messenger had enriched them out of His grace. So, if they repent it will be better for them; and if they turn away, God will afflict them with a painful torment in the world and the Hereafter, and they have no protecting guardian nor a helper on earth.*
75. *And of them is he who made a covenant with God (saying), "If He gives us out of His grace we will certainly spend in charity and become of the righteous."*
76. *But when He bestowed out of His grace on them, they became niggardly, and turned back (from their covenant), averse.*
77. *He penalized them with hypocrisy in their hearts, (to last) till the Day whereon they shall meet Him - because they broke their covenant with God, and because they lied (again and again).*
78. *Do they not know that God knows their secret (thoughts) and their secret counsel, and that God knows well all things unseen?*
79. *Those who criticize the believers who give freely to charity and those who can find nothing to give except the fruits of their labour, so they mock them. God will mock them and they shall have a painful torment.*

80. *Whether you (Muhammad) ask God to forgive them, or do not. If you ask seventy times for their forgiveness, God will not forgive them. This is because they disbelieved in God and His Messenger. God does not guide the transgressors.*
81. *Those who were left behind (in the Tabuk expedition) rejoiced for staying behind when the Messenger of God departed. They hated to strive and fight, with their wealth and their persons, in the cause of God. They said, "Do not go forth in the heat." Say, "The fire of Hell is more intense in heat." If only they could understand.*
82. *Let them laugh a little (then) weep much. This is the recompense they earned for the (evil) that they did.*
83. *If God should return you to a party of them, and they ask for your permission to go out (with you), say, "Never shall you go out with me, nor fight an enemy with me. Indeed, you preferred to stay (at home) on the first occasion. Then sit you (now) with those who lag behind."*
84. *And never (Muhammad) pray for one of them who dies nor stand by his grave. They disbelieved in God and His messenger, and they died while they were transgressors.*
85. *Let not their wealth nor their children impress you. God intends to punish them with these things in the world, and that their souls may perish while they are disbelievers.*
86. *When a Sura is revealed, enjoining them to believe in God and to strive along with His Messenger, those with wealth and influence among them ask you for exemption saying, "Let us stay (behind). We would be with those who sit (at home)."*
87. *They preferred to be with those who remain behind (at home). A seal was set on their hearts so they understand not.*
88. *But the Messenger, and those who believed with him, strived with their wealth and their persons. For them are all the good things and it is they who will be successful.*
89. *God prepared for them gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein. That is the supreme achievement.*
90. *And those among the wandering Arabs who had excuses came in order that permission might be granted them. And those who lied to God and His messenger stayed at home. A painful torment will fall on those of them who disbelieved.*
91. *There is no blame on those who are infirm, or ill, or who find no resources to spend (on the cause), if they are sincere (in duty) to God and His Messenger. No ground (of complaint) can there be against the doers of good. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
92. *Nor (is there blame) on those who came to you to be provided with mounts, you said, "I can find no mounts for you," they turned back, their eyes streaming with tears of grief that they could not find the means to spend. (9:42-92)*

Had it been a short trip which they considered safe, they would have followed you. But, it was a long and difficult trip that you have invited them to. This was a test for the weak who did not aspire to higher goals. This is a common human model, *"Had it been a near adventure and an easy journey they would have followed you, but the distance seemed too far for them."* Many people fall short of achieving higher goals. They are tempted with minor worldly achievements. They live on the fringe of life. They never venture into attempting higher feats, *"Yet, they will swear by God (saying), 'If we had been able, we would surely have set out with you.' They destroy their souls, and God knows that they are indeed liars."* So they lie to hide their cowardice. Lying and cowardice go hand in hand. They destroy themselves with their oaths and lying. They thought that they will be saved by lying to people, but God knows the truth and He

revealed it. Thus, the liars become exposed.

It is out of the grace of God that He forgave His Messenger before He blamed him, *“God pardoned you (Muhammad); why did you grant them leave before it had become clear to you those who spoke the truth and you had known the liars?”* Those who stayed behind used the Prophet’s (PBUH) permission as an excuse to avoid joining the army. However, even if they had not obtained the Prophet’s (PBUH) permission, they would have stayed behind. But, then their delinquency would have been exposed. The verses then describe the different attitudes of the believers and the hypocrites, *“Those who believe in God and the Last Day do not ask you for an exemption from fighting with their wealth and their persons. And God knows well those who are conscious of Him. Only those who disbelieve in God and the Last Day will ask you for an exemption, those whose hearts are in doubt, so they waver in their doubt.”* This is the true criterion. Those who believe in God and the Day of Reckoning are not hesitant to strive in the way of God with their wealth and persons. They hasten to respond to the call to strive. The hypocrites, on the other hand, are hesitant. They try hard to find a way out which allows them to stay behind. The way to God is straight and clear. Only those who do not know the way and those who know it but find it difficult to follow are hesitant to join the ranks of the believers in their strive. Those who stayed behind could have gone forth, if they wanted to, *“If they had intended to go forth, they would certainly have prepared for it; but God was averse to their being sent forth, so He made them lag behind. They were told, ‘Sit among those who stayed behind.’”* But God was aware of their hypocrisy, so He made them lag behind. They stayed back with the elderly, the women, and children.

This was better for the believers, *“Had they gone forth with you, they would have contributed nothing save trouble and they would have scurried around seeking to cause sedition among you; and among you there are some who would have listened to them. God knows the wrongdoers.”* Had they gone forth with the believers, they would have gone forth half hearted. This would have spread trouble among the ranks of the believers. They would have also sought to spread sedition among the Muslims. *“Indeed they sought to cause sedition before and raised difficulties for you until the truth came out and God’s decree was made manifest, though they hated it.”* They tried to spread sedition before when the Prophet (PBUH) arrived at Medina, but God supported him and gave him victory over the hypocrites.

“Of them is he who says, ‘Grant me an exemption (to stay at home) and do not subject me to temptation.’ Indeed, it is into temptation that they (thus) have fallen. Certainly, Hell will encompass the disbelievers. If good befalls you, it grieves them; but if a misfortune befalls you, they say, ‘We took indeed our precautions beforehand,’ and they turn away rejoicing. Say, ‘Nothing will befall us except that which God has decreed for us, He is our Protecting Guardian,’ and in God let the believers put their trust. Say, ‘Do you expect for us (any fate) other than one of the two glorious things (Martyrdom or victory)? But we expect that God will either torment you Himself, or by our hands. So wait (expectantly); we too will wait with you.’” Muhammad bin Ishaq narrated on the authority of Al-Zuhary, *“While the Messenger of God (PBUH) was preparing for the battle of Tabuk, he asked Gad bin Qais, ‘Gad, will you fight the Romans?’ Gad said, ‘Messenger of God, grant me an exemption and do not subject me to temptation. I am extremely prone to seduction by women. I fear that I would fall for the women of the Romans.’ The Prophet (PBUH) granted him an exemption.”* Such were the lame excuses that the hypocrites advanced to seek exemptions from joining the Muslim expedition to Tabuk.

The verse paints the image of an abyss in which those who were tempted fall in and then get torched by Hell fire. They never wished the Messenger and the believers well. They would rejoice when something bad befalls the believers. They had a very short sighted view of what was happening. The believers on the other hand, looked at the big picture. They were promised victory by God and it is in God that they had put their trust. They had absolute trust in God and His decrees. However, they also knew that putting one's trust in God goes hand in hand with preparing the best they can to achieve their goal. The believers knew that either way it is good for them. If they die in battle, they will gain martyrdom and if they survive they will enjoy victory. The hypocrites on the other hand had nothing to look forward to except severe punishment from God.

"Say, 'Spend (for the cause) willingly or unwillingly. It will not be accepted from you. You were indeed a transgressing folk.' The reasons their contributions were not accepted, were that they rejected God and His Messenger; that they come to prayer slothfully; and they offer contributions grudgingly." The verses paint a classic picture for the hypocrites. Hypocrisy results in hearts with no conviction. Hypocrisy breeds cowardice. Hypocrites are afraid to express their true beliefs. They have no internal drive to motivate them to perform prayers or to spend in the way of God. They perform prayers reluctantly and they spend out of fear. God does not accept superficial acts which are not based on a deep conviction of the belief in Him.

The hypocrites were wealthy and powerful in their community. But no one should be impressed by their wealth or power because this was the way God tested them. *"So let not their riches nor their children impress you (Muhammad). God only wishes to torment them thereby in the life of this world and that their souls shall pass away while they are disbelievers."* Wealth and offspring are blessings from God; He bestows them on His servants. Servants who are blessed with wealth and offspring should express their gratitude to God for His bounty. Gratitude is expressed by raising good offspring and spending the wealth in a way that pleases God. In this case, wealth and offspring will be a source of happiness and content. If they suffer a loss in wealth or offspring, then they put their trust in God and they say *"God is sufficient for us."* Wealth and offspring are a source of trouble and misery for those who do not put their trust in God.

Hypocrites came to the fold of Islam motivated by fear and greed. *"They swear by God that they indeed belong to you while they do not belong to you, but they are people who are afraid."* They tried all the time to assure the Muslims that they were part of the Muslim community. They wanted to cover up their true nature, a nature of cowardice and insecurity. The expression, *"If they could find a place to flee to, or caves, or a place of concealment, they would turn to it in great haste,"* reflects how desperate they were to cover up their true feelings.

"And among them are those who disparage you in the matter of (the distribution of) the poor due. If they are given part thereof, they are pleased, but if not, they become enraged." The verse addresses the Messenger of God (PBUH) telling him about the hypocrites who were critical of the Messenger's way of distributing the poor due. Their criticism was motivated by their greed. If they were given plenty, they were pleased. They did not care whether there were others who were more deserving than them. Several stories were narrated about those hypocrites who complained about the Prophet's (PBUH) unfairness in distributing the poor due among the believers. Their complaints were only motivated by greed and the hatred they harboured for the believers. Their approach was not befitting a believer. The Quran illustrated how the proper

approach should have been, *“If only had they been content with what God and His Messenger gave them, and had said, ‘God is sufficient for us. God and His Messenger will soon give us out of His grace, and to God do we turn our hopes.’”* This is the proper approach for those who learnt the manners in the school of faith. Believers should be content with whatever God and His Messenger (PBUH) bestow on them. It is a contentment that is the result of voluntary submission to God, not a contentment that is forced upon them. Believers should put their hopes in God and devote themselves to Him without looking for any material gains.

Having clarified the proper etiquette in dealing with God and His Messenger, the verses continue to emphasize that the Messenger (PBUH) had no say in how the poor due are to be distributed. Poor due are distributed according to God’s command, *“The poor dues are only for the poor, the needy, those who are employed to administer the (funds), those whose hearts have been (recently) reconciled (to truth), those in bondage, those in debt, in the cause of God, and for the wayfarer. This is ordained by God, and God is Omniscient, Wise.”* This is God’s legislation regarding the poor due. It is not a gift or a donation that is given by the rich. It is a duty that has to be fulfilled by those who are eligible to pay; and it is a right for those who are eligible to receive. It is an integral part of the system of social justice in Islam. The poor due is only one of the components of the social justice in Islam. There are other components which complement the poor due which make the system a comprehensive system that covers all aspects of the needs of the members of the society.

The verse lists those who are eligible to receive the poor due. The first category includes the poor and the needy. Then, there are those who are employed to collect the poor due. Next come those whose hearts have been reconciled. This category includes those who reverted to Islam recently and those who are in the process of reverting to Islam. There is a difference in opinion between the scholars whether this category exists today or not. It is important to continue to give people in this category their due share from the poor due because of the real life dynamics of the Muslim society. The verse indicates that the poor due can also be used to free slaves. At the time of the revelation of the Quran, slavery was a well established world-wide institution. Islam established a practical tool to help slaves who wanted to buy their freedom. The poor due can also be used to pay the debt for those who are in debt and are unable to pay their debt. The poor due can also be spent in the way of God. This is a comprehensive category which encompasses any activity that would be beneficial to the community. Finally, the poor due can be used to support the travellers whose means were depleted and are unable to cover the expenses needed for them to reach their destination. The verse ends by a reminder that the poor due and its distribution have been mandated by God, He knows best what is good for His servants.

Having stated the rules for distributing the poor due, the verses return to address those who cast doubt on the fairness of the Prophet (PBUH), *“Among them are men who abuse the Prophet and say, ‘He is (all) ear.’ Say, ‘He listens to what is best for you. He believes in God, has faith in the believers, and is a mercy to those of you who believe.’ But those who abuse the Messenger will have a painful torment.”* They misunderstood the decency of the Prophet (PBUH) in dealing with people. The Prophet (PBUH) used to treat people nicely according to the Islamic etiquette. He listened to people and took what they said at its face value. The hypocrites underestimated the Prophet (PBUH) and thought they could deceive him. The Quran responds to their allegations, saying that the Prophet (PBUH) has a good ear. He listens to the revelations and conveys it to them and he listens to people but he is able to differentiate between the truthfulness

and falsehood. The Prophet (PBUH) believed in God and he was sent as a mercy to those who believed. Those who attempted to hurt the Prophet (PBUH) will suffer a painful torment.

“They swear by God to you (Muslims) to please you, but it is more fitting for them to please God and His messenger, if they were believers.” The verse described the classical approach for the hypocrites at all times. The hypocrites always avoid confrontation. They work behind the scenes but when they come face to face with the believers they try to please them by all means. It is God that they should try to please. They deserved to be rebuked and they should be warned of the consequence of their deeds, *“Do they not know that whoever opposes God and His Messenger, he shall certainly have the fire of Hell to abide in it? That is the great ignominy.”*

“The Hypocrites are apprehensive lest a Sura should be revealed telling them plainly of what is in their hearts. Say, ‘Go on mocking; God will certainly expose what you fear.’” The verse provided a general description of the insecurity of the hypocrites. The verse was revealed to address several incidents which occurred at that time. Muhammad bin Ishaq narrated that a group of the hypocrites were among the army that the Prophet (PBUH) led to the battle of Tabuk. They were talking to each other about how deluded the Muslims were in trying to fight the Romans. They were spreading rumours to weaken the spirits of the Muslims. The verse came to tell the Prophet (PBUH) about the hypocrites’ talk. The Prophet (PBUH) sent ‘Ammar bin Yaser (RA) to warn them that the Prophet (PBUH) is aware of their plots. One of them came to the Prophet (PBUH) to apologize saying that they were only joking, *“If you (Muhammad) ask them, they will say, ‘We were only talking idly and in jest.’ Say, ‘Was it at God and His revelations and His Messenger that you were mocking?’ Make no excuses. You have disbelieved after you had believed. If We pardon a party of you, We shall torment another party because they were criminals.”* The verse emphasized the gravity of their deed. Their deed brought them back to disbelief after they had adopted Islam. The verse warned them of the grievous punishment that awaits those of them who did not repent.

“The hypocrite men and hypocrite women are all alike; they enjoin evil and forbid good and withhold their hands; they have forsaken God, so He has forsaken them; indeed, the hypocrites are the transgressors. God promised the hypocrites, both men and women, and the disbelievers the fire of Hell. Therein shall they dwell. It will suffice them. God cursed them, and theirs is a lasting torment.” All hypocrites share the same characteristics and they have the same nature. They behave in deceptive ways. They are afraid to look people in the eye and say exactly what they actually believe in. They encourage evil and discourage good deeds. They are stingy unless they want to show off. They forgot God, and God will forget them. They are truly transgressors. They have transgressed the limits of faith. They have been cursed and destined to Hell fire.

The Quran reminded the hypocrites with previous generations who behaved similarly. The Qur’an warned them that they will meet the same fate, *“As in the case of those before you, they were mightier than you in power and more abundant in wealth and children. They had their portion of enjoyment and you had yours, as did those before you; and you indulged in idle talk as they did. Such are they whose deeds are fruitless in this world and in the Hereafter, and it is they who are the losers.”* God bestowed on those who came before them power and children to test them. Those who were afraid of God spent their wealth in God’s way. They showed their gratitude for the bounty that God bestowed on them by raising their children to obey God. But those who forgot the source of the blessings and the power they received became arrogant. Their

deeds were all in vain and they lost everything.

“Have they never heard the stories of those who came before them? - The People of Noah, 'Ad, and Thamud; the people of Abraham, the people of Madyan, and the cities overthrown. Their messengers came to them with clear signs. God would have never wronged them, but they wronged their own souls.” The verse narrates the examples of people who were destroyed before, Noah’s people who perished in the flood, the tribe of ‘Ad who were destroyed with severe wind, the tribe of Thamud who met their death as a result of the loud scream, the tribe of Madyan who were destroyed in an earth quake, and others. The Quran wonders at the heedlessness of people who knew about these stories. God did not wrong them. It is they that wronged themselves by being heedless. They were blinded by their power and wealth and forgot that these were means that God used to test them. So, they failed the test.

Opposite to those who were heedless, stand the true believers, *“The Believers, men and women, are protecting guardians of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is evil; they establish regular prayers and pay the prescribed poor due; and they obey God and His Messenger. God will have mercy on them. God is Eminent, Wise.”* The verse describes the believers as “protecting guardians” of one another while the previous verse which talked about the hypocrites said, *“The hypocrite men and hypocrite women are all alike;”* Offering protection to one another requires a noble character which is bent on courage and sacrifice. Such attributes are part of the character of a believer. Hypocrites are usually lacking in this area. The believers are engaged in enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil. Such actions require a united front which is formed by the believers who stand side by side with each other. They establish prayers and pay the prescribed poor due and obey God. They follow the commands of God and His Messenger (PBUH) and they are happy with whatever God and His Messenger (PBUH) decree for them. They will gain the mercy of God. Mercy is meant for this life as well; it will engulf the believers in this life as well. The believers enjoy four attributes: they enjoin what is right, they forbid what is evil, they establish prayers, and they pay the prescribed poor due. The hypocrites, on the other hand, have four opposing attributes: they enjoin what is evil, they forbid what is good, they forget God, and they are stingy. God is able to bestow His honour on the believers and He is wise in timing this honour.

The reward for the believers are then stated, *“God promised the believers, men and women, gardens under which rivers flow to dwell therein, and beautiful mansions in gardens of everlasting bliss. But the greatest bliss is the good pleasure of God. That is the supreme achievement.”*

“Prophet, strive hard against the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and be harsh against them. Their refuge is Hell, an evil destination indeed.” The Messenger was quite lenient in dealing with the hypocrites. This verse commanded him to change his strategy in dealing with the hypocrites. The verse combined the hypocrites and the disbelievers in one category. Leniency did not work with the hypocrites so it was time to try another strategy.

The hypocrites had a long history of trying to hurt the Messenger (PBUH) and the believers, *“They swear by God that they said nothing (evil), but indeed they uttered the word of disbelief, and they did disbelieve after they had accepted Islam. They meditated a plot which they were unable to carry out. They were not resentful except (for the fact) that God and His messenger*

had enriched them out of His grace. So, if they repent it will be better for them; and if they turn away, God will afflict them with a painful torment in the world and the Hereafter, and they have no protecting guardian nor a helper on earth.” They were never ill treated by Muslims, so why were they bent on hurting the Muslims? Were they angry because they were given their share of the wealth that the Muslims gained? However, God gave them another chance for repentance. Those who forfeited this chance will suffer great torment in this life as well as in the Hereafter.

The verses continued to describe examples of the hypocrites, *“And of them is he who made a covenant with God (saying), ‘If He gives us out of His grace we will certainly spend in charity and become of the righteous.’ But when He bestowed out of His grace on them, they became niggardly, and turned back (from their covenant), averse. He penalized them with hypocrisy in their hearts, (to last) till the Day whereon they shall meet Him - because they broke their covenant with God, and because they lied (again and again).”* Of them were those who asked God of His bounty, promising God that they if He bestows His bounty on them they would be generous to the needy. However, when God responded favourably to their request and provided them with His bounty, they reneged on their promise. Hypocrisy took hold of their hearts as a result of reneging on their promise to God. Reneging on the promise is one of the signs of hypocrisy. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“A hypocrite has three attributes: He lies when he talks, he reneges on his promise when he makes a promise, and he betrays the trust when he is entrusted with a trust.”*

“Do they not know that God knows their secret (thoughts) and their secret counsel, and that God knows well all things unseen?” They should have known that God knows what is in their hearts. Did they really, thought that they can keep a secret from God?

“Those who criticize the believers who give freely to charity and those who can find nothing to give except the fruits of their labour, so they mock them. God will mock them and they shall have a painful torment.” Ibn Jareer narrated a story, on the authority of E’kremah (RA), about an event that occurred before the revelation of this verse. He said, *“The Messenger (PBUH) urged the believers to provide financial support for the army going to the battle of Tabuk. Abd El-Rahman bin A’wf (RA) contributed half his wealth and kept the other half as a provision for his family. The Prophet (PBUH) said, ‘God bless what you contributed and what you kept.’ Another man by the name of Abu O’kael (RA) contributed half the date that he had and kept the other half for his family. The hypocrites scoffed at these contributions saying, ‘Ibn A’wf’s (RA) contribution is only a show off and Abu O’kael’s (RA) contribution is trivial.”* The verse responded to their mocking, *“God will mock them and they shall have a painful torment.”*

“Whether you (Muhammad) ask God to forgive them, or do not. If you ask seventy times for their forgiveness, God will not forgive them. This is because they disbelieved in God and His Messenger. God does not guide the transgressors.” Their destiny has been sealed. There is no use for asking God to forgive them because they have already gone too far and there is no hope that they will return back to the straight path. The number “seventy” is a number which indicates a multitude in the Arabic language and should not be taken literally.

The theme changes to address the case of those who remained behind, *“Those who were left behind (in the Tabuk expedition) rejoiced for staying behind when the Messenger of God departed. They hated to strive and fight, with their wealth and their persons, in the cause of God.”*

They said, 'Do not go forth in the heat.' Say, 'The fire of Hell is more intense in heat.' If only they could understand." Those are the people whose love for a comfortable life and their greed kept them from joining the ranks of the believers in fighting their enemy. Their hearts were void of faith and they did not have the spirit to fight. They said to each other, *"Do not go forth in the heat."* Tell them, *"The fire of Hell is more intense in heat."* Their happiness will be short lived and soon they will be recompensed for what they had done, *"Let them laugh a little (then) weep much. This is the recompense they earned for the (evil) that they did."* They will laugh in this life for a few days but they will weep in the Hereafter forever. They will receive a reward commensurate with their deeds.

"If God should return you to a party of them, and they ask for your permission to go out (with you), say, 'Never shall you go out with me, nor fight an enemy with me. Indeed, you preferred to stay (at home) on the first occasion. Then sit you (now) with those who lag behind.'" Those were people who were not worthy of joining the ranks of the believers because of their weak will and lack of commitment. They forfeited their right to be treated honourably when they die, *"And never (Muhammad) pray for one of them who dies nor stand by his grave. They disbelieved in God and His messenger, and they died while they were transgressors."* There are narratives which relate this verse to specific incidents. However, the verse states a general rule. It indicated that honor should be bestowed only on those who work hard and are committed to the Muslim nation at the time of need. The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded not to perform funeral prayers for the hypocrites because, *"They disbelieved in God and His messenger, and they died while they were transgressors."*

"Let not their wealth nor their children impress you. God intends to punish them with these things in the world, and that their souls may perish while they are disbelievers." Being impressed with their wealth or children is a recognition that they did not deserve.

"When a Sura is revealed, enjoining them to believe in God and to strive along with His Messenger, those with wealth and influence among them ask you for exemption saying, 'Let us stay (behind). We would be with those who sit (at home).' They preferred to be with those who remain behind (at home). A seal was set on their hearts so they understand not. But the Messenger, and those who believed with him, strived with their wealth and their persons. For them are all the good things and it is they who will be successful. God prepared for them gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein. That is the supreme achievement." Whenever a Sura came to command the believers to strive in the way of God, those who have the means to fight came seeking an exemption. They were happy to be left behind with the women and children who do not fight. They did not feel any shame that their delinquency became apparent because they had no appreciation of the pride of being part of a striving force. On the other hand, the Messenger (PBUH) and the believers with him strived very hard with their wealth and their selves. They carried the burden and performed the duty entrusted to them. They will reap the best results in this life and in the Hereafter. They will be honoured in this life and they will have the great reward in the Hereafter.

"And those among the wandering Arabs who had excuses came in order that permission might be granted them. And those who lied to God and His messenger stayed at home. A painful torment will fall on those of them who disbelieved." Those who had legitimate reasons for seeking exemption not to fight, their reasons were accepted. But those who had no legitimate

reasons only told a lie. Those among them who had disbelieved will suffer grievous torment.

“There is no blame on those who are infirm, or ill, or who find no resources to spend (on the cause), if they are sincere (in duty) to God and His Messenger. No ground (of complaint) can there be against the doers of good; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. Nor (is there blame) on those who came to you to be provided with mounts, you said, ‘I can find no mounts for you,’ they turned back, their eyes streaming with tears of grief that they could not find the means to spend.’ Neither the weak, the elderly, nor the ill who were unable to bear arms were to be blamed for not joining the Muslim army in its expedition. No blame also should fall on those who were able to fight but could not afford an animal to ride on. These were sincere in their wish to help in God’s cause. They felt bad for their inability to provide such help. It was narrated that Ibn Abbas (RA) said, “A group of people came to the Prophet (PBUH) asking for rides so that they can fight with the Muslims. The Prophet (PBUH) told them that he had no rides for them. They left crying and feeling sad they were unable to join the expedition. It was then that this verse was revealed to accept their excuse.”

Verses: 93 to 96

93. *Indeed, there is grounds for a complaint against those who claim exemption while they are rich. They preferred to stay with those who remained behind. God has placed a seal over their hearts so that they do not know.*
94. *They will make excuses to you (Muslims) when you return back to them. Say, “Make no excuse, for we shall not believe you. God has informed us of your news. God and His Messenger will observe your deeds, and then you will be brought back to Him who knows the unseen as well as the seen, and He will tell you what you used to do.*
95. *They will swear to you by God, when you return to them, that you would leave them alone. So leave them alone. They are indeed an abomination, and their refuge is Hell as a recompense for what they used to earn.*
96. *They will swear to you, that you may be pleased with them but if you are pleased with them, God is not pleased with the transgressing folk. (9:93-96)*

“Indeed, there is grounds for a complaint against those who claim exemption while they are rich. They preferred to stay with those who remained behind. God has placed a seal over their hearts so that they do not know.” The verse states that only those who could afford, both physically and financially, to fight with the Muslim army but chose to stay behind are the one who deserve to be rebuked. They had no real excuse that prevented them to join the army but they were delinquent in the fulfilment of their duty. For these reasons God sealed upon their hearts. God told His Messenger (PBUH) on the way back from the expedition how those who remained behind will continue to make excuses and how he should respond to them, *“They will make excuses to you (Muslims) when you return back to them. Say, ‘Make no excuse, for we shall not believe you. God has informed us of your news. God and His messenger will observe your deeds, and then you will be brought back to Him who knows the unseen as well as the seen, and He will tell you what you used to do.’”* Nothing can be kept secret from God. He knows your secret intentions.

“They will swear to you by God, when you return to them, that you would leave them alone. So leave them alone. They are indeed an abomination, and their refuge is Hell as a recompense for

what they used to earn.” The verse continued to tell the Prophet (PBUH) about the hypocrites. The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to turn away from them because they are an abomination. They are destined to Hell fire; this is a result that they gained because of their deeds.

“They will swear to you, that you may be pleased with them but if you are pleased with them, God is not pleased with the transgressing folk.” They started by asking the Muslims to forgive them, they will ask for Muslims’ acceptance to secure their safety in the Muslim community. They were hoping that the Muslims would continue to take what they say at its face value as they used to do before. However, this verse came with the final decree regarding these hypocrites. They were transgressors because they stayed behind. God is not pleased with them because He does not like those who are transgressors.

Verses: 97 to 110

97. *The wandering Arabs are worst in disbelief and hypocrisy and more likely to be ignorant of the limits which God has revealed to His messenger; and God is Omniscient, Wise.*
98. *Some of the wandering Arabs consider what they spend as a loss and wait for an (evil) turn of fortune for you. The evil turn of fortune will be theirs; God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.*
99. *But some of the wandering Arabs believe in God and the Last Day, and consider what they spend as pious gifts bringing them nearer to God and receiving the blessings of the Messenger. Indeed, their gifts bring them nearer (to Him); God will admit them to His Mercy; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
100. *God is pleased with the forerunners (in faith) of the emigrants (who migrated from Mecca) and the supporters (inhabitants of Medina) and those who followed them in good deeds; as they are well pleased with Him. He prepared for them gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein for ever. That is the supreme achievement.*
101. *And among those around you of the wandering Arabs, there are hypocrites; and among the townspeople of Medina (there are some who) persist in hypocrisy. You (Muhammad) do not know them, We know them. We will torment them twice; then they will be relegated to grievous torment.*
102. *And (there are) others who have admitted their sins. They mixed a righteous deed with another that was bad. It may be that God will relent toward them; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
103. *Take from their wealth a charity, wherewith you may cleanse and purify them, and pray for them. Your prayer will be a source of comfort for them; God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.*
104. *Do they not know that God accepts repentance from His servants and receives their charity? God is Ever-Relenting, Giver of Mercy.*
105. *And say (Prophet), “Act,” God will observe your deeds, and His Messenger, and the believers. Soon you will be brought back to Him who knows what is seen and what is unseen, and He will tell you what you used to do.*
106. *There are (yet) others who await God's decree, whether He will torment them or will forgive them. God is Omniscient, Wise.*
107. *And there are those who chose a place of worship to cause harm and disbelief, and in order to cause dissent among the believers, and as an outpost for those who*

fought against God and His Messenger aforetime. They will certainly swear, “We only intended the best.” God bears witness that they are indeed liars.

108. *Never stand (to pray) there. A place of worship which was founded upon God consciousness from the first day is more worthy for you to stand (to pray) therein, wherein are men who love to purify themselves. God loves those who purify themselves.*

109. *Is he who founded his building upon God consciousness and His good pleasure better; or he who founded his building on the brink of a crumbling, overhanging precipice so that it toppled with him into the fire of Hell? God guides not the wrongdoing folk.*

110. *The building which they built will never cease to be a source of doubt in their hearts until their hearts are torn to pieces; God is Omniscient, Wise. (9:97-110)*

This section of the Sura provides a description of the different groups which constituted the Muslim community at the time when the battle of Tabuk took place. The first group of people were the wandering Arabs who lived around the city of Medina. These Arabs used to attack the Muslims in Medina but later they accepted Islam. The verse described the nature of this group, *“The wandering Arabs are worst in disbelief and hypocrisy, and more likely to be ignorant of the limits which God has revealed to His messenger; and God is Omniscient, Wise.”* These tribes lived an isolated life in the desert with little interaction with the civil society in Medina. They had little chance to learn from the Messenger of God (PBUH). They lived a tough life dominated by material values. The harshness of the character of the wandering Arabs is the subject of many old anecdotes.

After this general statement about the original characteristic of the wandering Arabs, the verse describes how Islam changed some of them while it failed to change others. *“Some of the wandering Arabs consider what they spend as a loss and wait for an (evil) turn of fortune for you. The evil turn of fortune will be theirs; God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.”* This was the group that reluctantly accepted Islam motivated by greed. They neither wanted to contribute to the community, nor did they care for the welfare of this community. They hated the duties that were ordained for the Muslims: paying the poor due and striving in God’s cause. They bemoaned the fact that they had to spend in the way of God and considered the money they spent a loss. They had ill wishes for the Muslims and wanted them to be defeated. God hears what they say and knows what they do.

But the hearts of some of the wandering Arabs were touched by Islam, *“But some of the wandering Arabs believe in God and the Last Day, and consider what they spend as pious gifts bringing them nearer to God and receiving the blessings of the Messenger. Indeed, their gifts bring them nearer (to Him); God will admit them to His Mercy; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* They accepted Islam motivated by true belief in God and the Last Day. These people considered spending in the way of God a means for pleasing God and seeking His nearness. They aspired for the Messenger’s (PBUH) prayers as a sign for the acceptance of their deeds. God will forgive them and admit them to His mercy. The verse visualizes God’s mercy as a home to which they would be admitted.

“God is pleased with the forerunners (in faith) of the emigrants (who migrated from Mecca) and the supporters (inhabitants of Medina) and those who followed them in good deeds; as they are well pleased with Him. He prepared for them gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein

forever. That is the supreme achievement.” The verse mentions the three categories of Muslims who constituted the strong foundation of the Muslim community in Arabia after the conquest of Mecca. There are many interpretations given for the term “forerunners,” but we think that most probably it refers to those who accepted Islam before the battle of Badr. God will reward the first forerunners as well as those who followed in their footsteps by bestowing His pleasure on them. God’s pleasure is the greatest reward. They will also be pleased with their Lord. Their pleasure emanates from their feelings of security under God’s care, their trust in Him, their acceptance of His decrees, their gratitude for His blessings, and their perseverance during times of trial. The term “pleasure” conveys a comprehensive meaning of contentment that shapes the relationship between them and God. It is a great honour for them that they were allowed to engage in such a relationship with their Lord. This is truly the supreme triumph.

In contrast to those who will win the supreme triumph, there was another group, *“And among those around you of the wandering Arabs there are hypocrites, and among the townspeople of Medina (there are some who) persist in hypocrisy. You (Muhammad) do not know them, We know them. We will torment them twice; then they will be relegated to grievous torment.”* The verse warned the Prophet (PBUH) of a group of the hypocrites who excelled in the practice of hypocrisy to the extent that even the Prophet (PBUH) did not recognize their true colours. But, God knows them and He will foil their plots. They will be punished twice in this life: a punishment which they will suffer as a result of living in fear that their plot will be discovered, and a second punishment at the hands of the angels who will come to capture their souls at the time of death.

There was yet a third group, *“who have admitted their sins. They mixed a righteous deed with another that was bad. It may be that God will relent toward them; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* The verse commanded the Prophet (PBUH) to deal with this group in a specific way which indicates that they were known to him. They were the people who did not join the Muslim army in the battle of Tabuk, but later recognized their sin and repented. Ibn Jareer said that *“It may be that God will relent toward them”* implies that God will forgive them.

The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to *“Take from their wealth a charity, wherewith you may cleanse and purify them, and pray for them. Your prayer will be a source of comfort for them; God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.”* They regretted what they had done and repented so, God gave them hope and filled their hearts with comfort. God listens and knows.

“Do they not know that God accepts repentance from His servants and receives their charity? God is Ever-Relenting, Giver of Mercy.” This is a rhetorical question. They should know that God accepts the repentance of His slaves, receives their charity, and forgives them.

The Islamic project is based on a creed that should be manifested in the deeds of the believers. *“And say (Prophet), ‘Act,’ God will observe your deeds, and His Messenger, and the Believers. Soon you will be brought back to Him who knows what is seen and what is unseen, and He will tell you what you used to do.”* The sign that shows the truth of their repentance is if they act upon their words. In this life, their deeds will be seen by God, His Messenger, and all the believers. But in the Hereafter, it is God who will judge their deeds; He knows their actions as well as the secrets of their hearts. It is not enough to regret one’s sin and to express repentance but it is important to act accordingly. Islam provides a plan for a realistic way of life. Good

intentions have to be confirmed with appropriate deeds.

The last group mentioned in these verses is a group whose fate had not been decreed by God yet, *“There are (yet) others who await God's decree, whether He will torment them or will forgive them. God is Omniscient, Wise.”* This was a group of people who did not participate in the battle of Tabuk but they were not among the other groups described above.

“And there are those who chose a place of worship to cause harm and disbelief, and in order to cause dissent among the believers, and as an outpost for those who fought against God and His messenger aforetime. They will certainly swear, ‘We only intended the best.’ God bears witness that they are indeed liars.” The verse narrates an event contemporaneous to the battle of Tabuk. Ibn Katheer mentioned in his interpretation of Quran that, “One of the chiefs of the tribe of Khazraj by the name of Abu A’mer El-Raheb who had embraced Christianity resented the fact that the Prophet (PBUH) migrated to Medina and became the head of the Medinian government. When the Prophet (PBUH) called him to Islam, he refused and decided to move from Medina to join the idolaters of Mecca in their war against the Muslims. Abu A’mer then approached the Roman king to move against Muhammad (PBUH). The Roman king was agreeable. Abu A’mer wrote to his followers in Medina, in anticipation of the Roman expedition against the Muslims in Medina, to build a place to be used as his headquarters upon his victory over the Muslims. Abu A’mer’s followers established a building which looked like a Mosque near the Mosque of Qibaa. They were able to finish the building just before the battle of Tabuk had started. They came to the Prophet (PBUH) asking him to bless their Mosque with his prayers. However, the Prophet (PBUH) was already on his route to Tabuk so he said to them that he will do that after he comes back from Tabuk. On his way back from Tabuk, the Prophet (PBUH) received a revelation disclosing the plan of the hypocrites and their collusion with Abu A’mer. The Prophet (PBUH) commanded one of his companions to destroy the mosque.” This was the story of the mosque that was built to be a base for hypocrites who wanted to hurt the believers.

“Never stand (to pray) there. A place of worship which was founded upon God consciousness from the first day is more worthy for you to stand (to pray) therein, wherein are men who love to purify themselves. God loves those who purify themselves. Is he who founded his building upon God consciousness and His good pleasure better; or he who founded his building on the brink of a crumbling, overhanging precipice so that it toppled with him into the fire of Hell? God guides not the wrongdoing folk. The building which they built will never cease to be a source of doubt in their hearts until their hearts are torn to pieces. God is Omniscient, Wise.” The verses paint a dynamic image of two buildings side by side. One of the buildings is well established on a strong foundation, while the other is built on an overhanging edge that has no support. The overhanging edge very quickly gave way and the building that it carried fell into Hell fire. The destruction of the building left traces of doubt into their hearts. These doubts will linger forever in their hearts depriving them of safety and security.

Verses: 111 to 129

111. *Indeed, God has purchased from the believers their persons and their wealth in return for paradise. They fight in God's cause, and shall slay and be slain. It is a promise which is binding on Him in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran. And who is more*

- faithful to his covenant than God? Then rejoice in the bargain which you have concluded. That is the supreme achievement.*
112. *(The believers are) those who turn (to God) in repentance, who serve Him, who praise Him, who wander in devotion in God's cause, who bow down, who prostrate themselves in prayer, who enjoin good, who forbid evil, and who observe the limits set by God; and give glad tidings to the believers.*
113. *It is not fitting, for the Prophet and those who believe, that they should pray for forgiveness for the idolaters, even though they may be of kin, after it has become clear to them that they are companions of the Fire.*
114. *The prayer of Abraham for the forgiveness of his father was only because of a promise he had promised him, but when it had become clear to him that he (his father) was an enemy to God, he (Abraham) disowned him. Abraham was soft hearted, forbearing.*
115. *And God will not mislead a people after He had guided them, until He had made clear to them what they should avoid. God has knowledge of all things.*
116. *Indeed, to God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. He gives life and He takes it. You have neither a protecting guardian nor a helper besides God.*
117. *God has forgiven the Prophet, the migrants (Muhajirin) and the supporters (Ansar) who followed him in the time of distress, after the hearts of a group of them had nearly swerved aside; then He turned to them (also) in mercy. He is to them All-Pitying, Giver of Mercy.*
118. *And (He also forgave) the three who were left behind, when the earth, vast as it is, was straitened for them, and their own souls were straitened for them till they knew for certain that there is no refuge from God except with Him. Then turned He to them in mercy that they (too) might turn (repentant to Him); God, He is the Ever-Relenting, the Giver of Mercy.*
119. *You who believe, be conscious of God and be with the truthful.*
120. *It was not fitting for the people of Medina and the wandering Arabs of the neighbourhood, to refuse to follow God's Messenger, nor to prefer their own lives to his. Nothing could they suffer or do, but was reckoned to their credit as a deed of righteousness - whether they suffered thirst, fatigue, or hunger in the cause of God, or they trod paths to raise the ire of the disbelievers, or received any injury from an enemy. Certainly, God does not waste the reward of the doers of good.*
121. *Nor do they spend anything (for the cause) - small or great- nor cut across a valley, but the deed is recorded to their credit so that God may reward them the best (possible reward).*
122. *And the believers should not all go out to fight. Of every company of them, a party only should go forth, that they (who are left behind) may gain sound knowledge in religion, and that they may warn their folk when they return to them, so that they may beware.*
123. *You who believe, fight the disbelievers who are near to you, and let them find harshness in you, and know that God is with those who are conscious of Him.*
124. *Whenever a Sura is revealed, there are some of them who say, "Which one of you has this increased his faith?" As for those who believe, it has increased them in faith and they rejoice.*

125. *But those in whose hearts is a disease, it will add wickedness to their wickedness, and they die while they are disbelievers.*
126. *Do they not see that they are tested once or twice every year? Yet they do neither turn in repentance, nor are they mindful.*
127. *And whenever a Sura is revealed, they look at each other (as if to say), "Does anybody see you?" Then they turn away. God turned away their hearts because they are a folk who do not understand.*
128. *Certainly a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves; grievous to him is your suffering. He is full of concern for you; to the believers (he is) compassionate, merciful.*
129. *But if they turn away, say (Muhammad), "God suffices me. There is no deity but He. In Him I put my trust. He is the Lord of the Supreme Throne." (9:111-129)*

"Indeed, God has purchased from the believers their persons and their wealth in return for paradise. They fight in God's cause, and shall slay and be slain. It is a promise which is binding on Him in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran. And who is more faithful to his covenant than God? Then rejoice in the bargain which you have concluded. That is the supreme achievement. (The believers are) those who turn (to God) in repentance, who serve Him, who praise Him, who wander in devotion in God's cause, who bow down, who prostrate themselves in prayer, who enjoin good, who forbid evil, and who observe the limits set by God; and give the glad tidings to the believers." I have heard and read these verses numerous times while reciting, memorizing and studying the Quran for more than twenty-five years. Yet, only when I read this text during writing this book that I understood meanings that I did not understand before. It is a tremendous text. It reveals the nature of the relationship between the believers and God and the nature of the oath of allegiance that the believers made to God. Only those who made that oath of allegiance are true believers. Through this oath of allegiance, which God by His grace called "purchase," the believers gave up all rights to their persons and their wealth and devoted them solely to God. They have given up all rights to their persons and their wealth so, they have no right to dispose of any of them in any way except as God ordains. He had bought their wealth and their persons and thus, He acquired the sole right to dispose of them as He wishes. Those who sold their souls and their wealth no longer had any right to argue or contest how they are being disposed of. The price that they will receive for their bargain is paradise; the road to paradise is striving and fighting; and the end result is either victory or martyrdom.

The believers sold their persons and their wealth to God. It is by God's grace that He decreed a price for this merchandise. It is by the Grace of God that He honoured the believers and allowed them to have the will to sell their persons and their wealth. God bestowed on humankind the right and ability to engage in contracts. Humankind was honoured by the ability to engage in a contract with God Himself. The fulfilment of the contract of God is a criterion that differentiates humans and beasts, *"The worst of creatures in the sight of God are those who reject Him. They will not believe. The ones with whom you made a covenant, but they break their covenant every time, and they are not conscious of God."* (8:55-56) I was awed by these words. It is a great responsibility. It is an obligation for each one of those who call themselves Muslims, who abandoned striving in the way of God allowing tyrants to rule the earth.

The early Muslims used to listen to the words of Quran and act upon them. It was narrated that Abd Allah bin Rawaha (RA) said to the Prophet (PBUH), during the deliberations that preceded

the Oath of Allegiance of ‘Aqaba, “Tell us the terms of the oath of allegiance that would satisfy you and your Lord.” The Prophet (PBUH) said, “I ask you to serve my Lord alone and do not associate partners with Him and I ask for your protection the same way you protect yourselves and your wealth.” Ibn Rawaha (RA) said, “If we do this, what do we get in return?” The Prophet (PBUH) said, “Paradise.” Ibn Rawaha (RA) said, “This is a profitable bargain. We will keep our part of the deal.”

This is God’s covenant, “*And who is more faithful to his covenant than God?*” which He made in the Torah, the Gospel and the Quran. The original Torah and Gospel are no longer available. The present texts have suffered many changes. However, the old Testament still has references to the obligation of striving in the way of God but there are no similar references in the Gospel.

Striving in the way of God is a duty based on a solid foundation of faith, not a mere impulse to fight. Faith is a combination of feelings, high morals, ethical behaviour, and actions. Those who strive in the way of God are, “*those who turn (to God) in repentance, who serve Him, who praise Him, who wander in devotion in God’s cause, who bow down, who prostrate themselves in prayer, who enjoin good, who forbid evil, and who observe the limits set by God.*” They regret their previous sins and they seek God’s forgiveness. They have the strong conviction to abandon bad practices and purify themselves. They serve God alone, never associating partners with Him. They praise God. Their hearts beat with the gratitude to God. Their tongue continuously utter God’s praises, both in secret and in the open, whether rich or poor.

There are different interpretations of the expression that has been translated here as “*who wander in devotion in God’s cause.*” Some say the expression refers to those who migrate. Some say it refers to those who strive in God’s cause. Others say, it refers to those who travel seeking knowledge. Still others say, it refers to those who fast. We are of the opinion that it refers to those who contemplate God’s creation. They are those who were mentioned in the verse, “*In the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day, there are indeed signs for men of understanding. Those who celebrate the praises of God, standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the (wonders of) the creation of the heavens and the earth, and say, ‘Our Lord, You have not created all of this in vain.’ Glory be to You.*” (3:190-191) This interpretation seems a logical extension of the other attributes of the believers which are mentioned in these verses. Repentance, worshiping God, and showing gratitude to Him lead to the contemplation about the wonders of the creation of God. Through contemplation they gain knowledge of the purpose of God’s creation which helps them build a better life on this earth.

The verse continues to list the attributes of the believers; those who bow and prostrate in prayers; those who enjoin good and forbid evil; and those who observe the limits set by God. These are the attributes of the believers who made an oath of allegiance with God and who sold their persons and their wealth for a place in paradise.

“*It is not fitting, for the Prophet and those who believe, that they should pray for forgiveness for the idolaters, even though they may be of kin, after it has become clear to them that they are companions of the Fire.*” It seems that some Muslims used to pray God to forgive their parents who were idolaters. They also used to ask the Prophet (PBUH) to pray God to forgive their parents. The verse was revealed to command the Muslims to cease asking for forgiveness for their relatives who were still, or who died while, being idolaters. The bond of faith takes precedent over the blood bond.

“*The prayer of Abraham for the forgiveness of his father was only because of a promise he had promised him, but when it had become clear to him that he (his father) was an enemy to God he*

(Abraham) disowned him. Abraham was soft hearted, forbearing.” Prophet’s Abraham (PBUH) request for forgiveness for his father should not be taken as a precedent. Prophet Abraham (PBUH) wanted his father to believe, however, when his father died while being an idolater, Prophet Abraham (PBUH) stopped praying God to forgive him.

When the believers heard the previous two verses, they were worried that they had committed a sin by asking God to forgive their idolatrous parents. So, the next verse was revealed to assure the believers that God does not pass laws retroactively, *“And God will not mislead a people after He had guided them, until He had made clear to them what they should avoid. God has knowledge of all things.”* God will take people to task only after He had made things clear to them. God had made this religion a religion of ease. God stated what is allowable and what is forbidden. There were things which were not mentioned in either category. God did not forget them, but they were left out deliberately to make things easy for people. We should accept God’s mercy gratefully.

“Indeed to God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. He gives life and He takes it. You have neither a protecting guardian nor a helper besides God.” God has control over wealth, souls, heavens, earth, life, death, protection, and victory. The most important relationship that we need to maintain is our relationship with God. The main theme that these verses emphasized over and over again is that the faith bond is the real bond between people. It takes precedence over blood relationships.

“God has forgiven the Prophet, the migrants (Muhajirin) and the supporters (Ansar) who followed him in the time of distress, after the hearts of a group of them had nearly swerved aside; then He turned to them (also) in mercy. He is to them All-Pitying, Giver of Mercy.” God’s forgiveness of the Prophet (PBUH) may be understood in the context of an earlier verse which referred to the permission that some of the strong wealthy Muslims requested in order not to participate in the battle of Tabuk and the Prophet (PBUH) gave them the permission they requested, *“God pardoned you (Muhammad), why did you grant them leave before it had become clear to you those who spoke the truth and you had known the liars?”* (9:43) The forgiveness that God bestowed on the migrants and the supporters was for the sin which some of the sincere believers committed by being slothful in joining the army going to the battle of Tabuk but later they joined the army.

It may be better to describe the atmosphere during which the battle took place and some of the details leading to the battle, which was nick-named the “hour of adversity,” so that we can appreciate the feelings of the Muslims and the dynamics of the situation. The following is a summary that is based on the books by Ibn Hesham, Ibn Katheer and Al-Maqreezi. The Prophet (PBUH) started the preparation for fighting the Romans upon the receipt of the verse, *“Fight those who disbelieve in God and the Last Day, who forbid not that which God and His Messenger have forbidden, who do not acknowledge the religion of truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Scripture, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.”* (9:29) This was at the beginning of the summer when people were ready to harvest the fruits from the fields. It was also the time during which the Arabs liked to stay in the shade of their gardens to avoid the scorching heat of the desert. The Prophet (PBUH) used to keep the objectives of his expeditions confidential, but this time he announced the destination of the expedition. Some of the hypocrites came to seek his permission for not joining the army and he gave them his permission. The hypocrites said to each other do not go forth in the heat. They

schemed together to demoralize the believers and to weaken their spirits so that they would not go with the expedition. The Prophet (PBUH) urged the believers to support the expedition. Muslims responded favourably. Notable among those who made great contributions was ‘Uthman bin ‘Afan (RA). It is narrated that he paid a thousand Dinar. The Prophet (PBUH) prayed God to bless ‘Uthman (RA). Some Muslims wanted to join the army but could not afford the rides. They asked the Prophet (PBUH) to provide them with rides, but he was not able to secure rides for them. These sincere Muslims went away with eyes welling with tears when they realized that they will not be able to join the army. Finally, an army of thirty thousand people was ready to go forth. A group of Muslims had sincere intentions to join the army but for one reason or another were not prompt in joining the army, so they were left behind. Some of the people in this group were K’ab bin Malek (RA), Mararah bin El-Rabi’ (RA), Helal bin Umaiyyah (RA), Abu Khaithamah (RA) and ‘Umair El-Jamhi (RA). As the army went forth, people started to fall behind. Some were deserters but others could not keep up with the moving army. The first deserters were a group of hypocrites under the leadership of ‘Abd Allah bin Saloul, the chief of hypocrites. One of those who fell behind was Abu Dhar El-Ghafary (RA). Abu Dhar’s camel could not keep up with the army, so Abu Dhar (RA) abandoned his camel and continued the trip walking until he joined the army again. The Prophet (PBUH) said, “May God have mercy on Abu Dhar. He was a loner when he walked, he will be a loner when he dies and when he will be resurrected.” Abu Khaithamah (RA) regretted his tardiness, so he decided to embark on a trip to join the army, which he did.

This was the story of the “hour of adversity.” The Muslims who remained behind were divided into three groups. The first group were the hypocrites. The second group were, “those *who have admitted their sins. They mixed a righteous deed with another that was bad. It may be that God will relent toward them; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*” God forgave them. The third group were those, “*who await God's decree, whether He will torment them or will forgive them. God is Omniscient, Wise.*” Before we discuss the verse, let us hear their story as narrated by one of them. K’ab bin Malek (RA) said, “I always participated in the expeditions that the Prophet (PBUH) led, except for the battles of Badr and Tabuk. No one was rebuked for missing the expedition to Badr because the Prophet (PBUH) did not make it mandatory for Muslims to participate. I pledged my allegiance to the Prophet (PBUH) at ‘Aqaba. This was a great day for me. When the Prophet (PBUH) decided to lead an army to fight the Romans, he urged the Muslims to get ready and join the army. I was in my best shape both physically and financially. However, I procrastinated until the army departed Medina. A huge number of the Muslims joined the army. Many thought that they would not be missed if they remained behind because there was no record for those who volunteered. The Prophet (PBUH) enquired about me when he reached Tabuk. They told him that I was delinquent. When I heard that the Prophet (PBUH) returned to Medina, I went to see him. I thought about ways to explain my delinquency. I finally decided that the best way to deal with this is to tell the truth. Those who remained behind came to the Prophet (PBUH) and offered their excuses and he accepted their excuses and asked God to forgive them. When he saw me, he said, ‘Come here. Why did you remain behind? Did you not buy a camel for the expedition?’ I said, ‘Messenger of God, if it were anyone other than you I would have made excuses. But I don’t want to make a false excuse and later you become angry with me. I will tell you the truth. I did not have any excuse to miss the expedition. I was physically and financially able to join your expedition.’ The Prophet (PBUH) said to his companions, ‘He is telling the truth.’ Then he said to me, ‘Wait for God’s judgement.’ Some of the brothers from Bani Salamah rebuked me for not making an excuse like the others. I asked

them, ‘Did anyone else approach the Prophet (PBUH) the same way I did? They said, ‘Yes. Mararah ibn El-Rabi’ (RA) and Helal ibn Umaiyah (RA).’ These were two of the men who participated in Badr and I always looked up to them. The Prophet (PBUH) commanded the Muslims to boycott the three of us. Suddenly, everything was different. This continued for about fifty days. During this time, the other two stayed home, but I used to go to the Mosque to pray and go to the market but people ignored me and no one ever spoke to me. I used to watch the Prophet (PBUH) to see if he would relent. One day, while I was in the Market a man approached me with a message from the king of Ghassan. The message was an invitation to abandon Islam and join the king’s court. I said to myself, ‘This is a real trial.’ I burned the message. After forty days of boycott had passed, I received a message from the Prophet (PBUH) commanding me to separate from my wife. I asked whether this meant that I should divorce her. They said no, but you should not have intimate relationship with her.

On the fiftieth day of the boycott, after I prayed Fajr, I heard someone bringing me glad tidings. I realized that I was forgiven and prostrated myself in gratitude to God. I gave the person who brought me the glad tidings my dress as a gift. I went to see the Prophet (PBUH) at the Mosque. On my way to Mosque many people offered their congratulations. Upon my arrival at the Mosque, I saw the Prophet (PBUH) sitting with a group of his companions. Talha ibn ‘Ubaid (RA) was among them, when he saw me he rose hurriedly to welcome and congratulate me. This was something that I cherished and I loved him for it. I saw that the Prophet (PBUH) was quite pleased, when I greeted him he said to me, ‘Rejoice, this is the best day that you have ever seen since you were born.’ I asked him, ‘Is this your decision? Or is it God’s forgiveness?’ He said, ‘It is God’s forgiveness.’ I said, ‘Messenger of God, I would like to confirm my repentance by giving away all my wealth as a charity in the way of God.’ The Prophet (PBUH) said, ‘Keep some of your wealth. This would be better for you.’ I said, ‘I will keep my share that I received from the Khaiber. Messenger of God, God saved me because I told the truth. I vow to tell the truth as long as I live.’ I never told a lie deliberately since I made this vow.”

This story shows the depth of the meaning of the verse, “*when the earth, vast as it is, was straitened for them,*” what is the meaning of “the earth”? Is it not the people, the morals, and the relationships? Then, “*their own souls were straitened for them,*” as if their souls were crowded in a tight place. And, “*till they knew for certain that there is no refuge from God except with Him.*” Is there any place to go to other than God? But then came the deliverance, “*then turned He to them in mercy that they (too) might turn (repentant to Him); God, He is the Ever-Relenting, the Giver of Mercy.*”

“*You who believe, be conscious of God and be with the truthful.*” The people of Medina were the ones who supported Islam, and welcomed the Prophet (PBUH) in their city. They were the solid foundation upon which Islam was supported. It was not befitting for them to be indolent when the call to fight was proclaimed. They were then called upon to be among those who are truthful to their faith and their messenger. “*It was not fitting for the people of Medina and the wandering Arabs of the neighbourhood, to refuse to follow God's Messenger, nor to prefer their own lives to his. Nothing could they suffer or do, but was reckoned to their credit as a deed of righteousness - whether they suffered thirst, fatigue, or hunger in the cause of God, or they trod paths to raise the ire of the disbelievers, or received any injury from an enemy. Certainly, God does not waste the reward of the doers of good. Nor do they spend anything (for the cause) - small or great- nor cut across a valley, but the deed is recorded to their credit so that God may reward them the best (possible reward).*” The verse provides a mild rebuke to remind the Muslims of their duty. Nothing is more painful for a believer than to be considered of those who

prefer themselves over the Prophet (PBUH). This call is still valid today as it was valid then. God will reward them for each and every effort they make, difficulty they face, or money they spend. Each contribution, small or large, will be rewarded.

“And the believers should not all go out to fight. Of every company of them, a party only should go forth, that they (who are left behind) may gain sound knowledge in religion, and that they may warn their folk when they return to them, so that they may beware.” Not all the believers should go out to fight every time there is an expedition. They should be divided into groups and these groups should participate alternately in the different expeditions. The experience of being in the army is part of the education of people. Those who go out with the army will understand the meaning of striving in God’s way and they will receive practical training in the protocol of war. They can then teach the others when they return to their homes. Our opinion has origins in Ibn Abbas’ (RA) interpretation; and agrees with the interpretation by Al-Hassan Al-Basri, as well as opinions made by Ibn Jareer and Ibn Katheer. Islam is a dynamic religion. A great deal of knowledge is gained by getting actively involved in the different aspects of life. Those who strive in the way of God will become most knowledgeable about the rules of striving in the way of God.

“You who believe, fight the disbelievers who are near to you, and let them find harshness in you, and know that God is with those who are conscious of Him.” This was the strategy of the Prophet (PBUH) and the guided caliphs after him. They needed to secure the boundaries around the Muslims land. However, we understand that the text commands Muslims to go forth rather than engage the disbelievers only when they attack. We differ with those who place the condition that Muslims should not fight unless they are attacked first. The intention to fight the disbelievers should be made known to them before the war is waged. They should be given the choice of accepting Islam, paying the Jiziah, or fight. No war should be waged against any people who have a treaty with the Muslims unless they breach the treaty first.

“Whenever a Sura is revealed, there are some of them who say, ‘Which one of you has this increased his faith?’ As for those who believe, it has increased them in faith and they rejoice.” Such query reflects a confused state of mind that doubts the value of the revelation and shows a lack of belief in its authenticity. The query is answered unequivocally, only the faith of those who believe will increase. *“But those in whose hearts is a disease, it will add wickedness to their wickedness, and they die while they are disbelievers.”*

“Do they not see that they are tested once or twice every year? Yet they do neither turn in repentance, nor are they mindful.” How many times they were tested but they did not benefit from these tests. They continue in their hypocritical ways, *“whenever a Sura is revealed, they look at each other (as if to say), ‘Does anybody see you?’ Then they turn away. God turned away their hearts because they are a folk who do not understand.”*

Finally, the Sura ends with two verses which we believe were revealed in Medina. The two verses describe the Prophet’s (PBUH) relationship with his people and his interest in their welfare. It is a timely reminder that the request to go forth in the heat of the summer was not motivated by a desire to make them suffer. The second verse commands the Prophet (PBUH) to put his trust fully in his Lord when others turn away from him.

“Certainly a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves; grievous to him is your suffering. He is full of concern for you; to the believers (he is) compassionate, merciful.” The verse announced that the Messenger was from “among them” to emphasize the deep and personal relationship between the Prophet (PBUH) and the Muslims. He is one of them and connected spiritually to them. He grieves when they suffer. He is keen on their welfare. He does not want them to suffer nor does he want them to be humiliated.

“But if they turn away, say (Muhammad), ‘God suffices me. There is no deity but He. In Him I put my trust. He is the Lord of the Supreme Throne.’” God is the Almighty, the King. He is the Lord of the Supreme throne. He is sufficient for those who seek refuge in Him. This is an appropriate ending for the Sura which talks about striving and fighting in the way of God.