

Al-Hashr [The Gathering]

Madinan Period

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate

[1] All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth extols Allah's Glory: He is the Most Mighty, the Most Wise.

[2] He it is Who in the first assault drove forth the People of the Book that disbelieved from their homes at the first gathering of forces.¹ You did not believe that they would leave; while they too thought that their fortresses would defend them against Allah. Then Allah came upon them from whence they did not even imagine,² casting such terror into their hearts that they destroyed their homes by their own hands and their destruction was also caused by the hands of the believers. So learn a lesson from this, O you who have perceptive eyes!

1. *"The People of the Book that disbelieved" refers to the Jewish clan, the Banu al-Nadir, who lived in a quarter of Madinah. The Prophet (peace be on him) had a treaty of alliance with them which they repeatedly violated. As a result, the Prophet (peace be on him) eventually notified them in Rabi' al-Awwal 4 AH. Either to leave Madinah or to fight. Initially, they declined to leave Madinah. Thereupon the Prophet (peace be on him) amassed an army and launched an attack upon them. However, before any actual battle could commence, the Banu al-Nadir agreed to go into exile. They did so even though they had very strong fortresses to protect them, their numbers were larger than the Muslims' and they were well-equipped militarily.*

2. *The verse reads: "Then Allah came upon them from whence they did not even imagine." Obviously this does not mean that God was previously elsewhere and that later on He launched an attack upon them from a specific location. What is said here is a figurative statement. It means that the Banu al-Nadir had thought that they would be able to use their fortresses to defend themselves when an attack came. But when the events unfolded they were taken by surprise. The real attack under whose pressure they collapsed, did not come from outside. Instead, they capitulated because they were left with no will to fight and their morale simply failed them. As a result, neither their army nor their fortresses availed them.*

[3] If Allah had not decreed banishment for them, He would certainly have chastised them in this world.³ As for the Hereafter, the chastisement of the Fire awaits them.

[4] That is because they set themselves against Allah and His Messenger; and whoever sets himself against Allah should know that Allah is surely Most Stern in retribution.

3. *" He would certainly have chastised them in this world" means that God would simply have effaced them. Had they chosen to fight rather than surrender, they would have been totally wiped out.*

[5] The palm-trees that you cut down or those that you left standing on their roots, it was by Allah's leave that you did so.⁴ (Allah granted you this leave) in order that He might humiliate the evil-doers.⁵

4. *This alludes to the fact that at the very outset of laying siege on the Banu al-Nadir's hamlet, the Muslims cut down or burnt many of the palm-trees that stood in the oasis around it. This was obviously done to facilitate the siege. However, the Muslims refrained from cutting down those trees which did not obstruct the movement of troops. Yet the hypocrites and Jews of Madinah raised a storm of protest against this. They vociferously protested that the Prophet's conduct was self-contradictory. On the one hand he condemned creating disorder in the world. Yet on the other hand, lush green trees laden with fruit were being axed down at his behest. They asked: if that is not spreading disorder in the world, what is? It was in this context that this verse was revealed, stating that the believers' actions - cutting down some trees and letting others stand – could not be declared unlawful, for both acts enjoyed God's sanction.*

5. *The purpose of the verse is to emphasise that both these acts - cutting down some trees and letting others stand – were meant to humiliate the evil-doers. In the first instance, they were humiliated when the trees, which they themselves had planted and which had been in their possession for a long time, were cut down and they could do nothing but helplessly watch it happen. In the second instance, they also suffered humiliation because whilst leaving Madinah they could see their green orchards, which they had owned until then, were now in the hands of the Muslims. If they had the power to do so, they would have laid all those orchards to waste so that not a single tree would pass to the Muslims. But the fact was that they were fleeing their home town in utter helplessness. They could do no more than watch, in a state of sheer grief and desperation, their properties slip out of their hands.*

[6] Whatever Allah has taken away from them⁶ and bestowed (as spoils) on His Messenger⁷ for which You spurred neither horses nor camels; but Allah grants authority to His Messengers over whomsoever He pleases. Allah has power over everything.⁸

[7] Whatever (from the possessions of the towns people) Allah has bestowed on His Messenger belongs to Allah, and to the Messenger, and to his kinsfolk,⁹ and to the orphans, and to the needy and to the Wayfarer so that it may not merely circulate between the rich among you.¹⁰ So accept whatever the Messenger gives you, and refrain from whatever he forbids you. And fear Allah: verily Allah is Most Stern in retribution.¹¹

6. *Here mention is being made of the lands and properties that came to be possessed by the Islamic state after Banu al-Nadir's exile. From the present verse onwards till verse 10, God lays down a set of directives as to how these properties should be managed.*

7. *The words suggest that the earth and whatever is on it does not truly belong to God's rebels. The true position of the properties whose ownership passed on to the Muslims from the unbelievers as a result of a lawful and just war is that God, the true Owner of those properties, withdrew them from His disobedient and rebellious servants and granted or restored, them to His loyal and faithful servants. This is why, in Islamic parlance, such properties are called **fay'** (restored properties).*

8. *The Muslims were able to take possession of these properties not because of their army's fighting prowess, but because of the overall strength that God had bestowed upon His Messenger and his community and the wholesome system that it had established. Therefore, the position of these properties was quite different from that of the spoils of war and hence they could not be distributed among the soldiers. It is for this reason that the Islamic law makes a distinction between **ghanimah** (spoils) and **fay** (restored properties). **Ghanimah** consists of those transferable properties which are seized from the enemy in the course of actual fighting. All other transferable and non-transferable goods of the enemy are excluded from the definition of **ghanimah** and are treated as **fay**'.*

9. *The "kinsfolk" of the Prophet (peace be on him) signify the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib. Their portion was laid down in order to enable the Prophet (peace be on him) to use it to meet his own expenses and those of his immediate family as well as to fulfil his obligations towards those of his relatives who stood in need or whom he himself wanted to help. After the Prophet's demise, however, the portion earmarked for his kinsfolk ceased to be a separate and independent apportionment. This because, like the rights of the rest of the orphans, wayfarers and needy, providing for the needy ones of the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib became the responsibility of the public treasury. It was, however, recognised that the claims of the needy among the Prophet's kinsfolk had priority over others' claims.*

10. *This is one of the major guiding principles expounded by the Qur'an. This verse spells out a basic principle of the Islamic state's economic policy, viz. that wealth should circulate in the whole community rather than only among the rich, this in order to prevent the rich from getting richer and the poor poorer.*

11. *Although this injunction was revealed in connection with the distribution of the properties of Banu al-Nadir, the terms in which it is couched are of a general character. The verse directs the Muslims to obey the Prophet (peace be on him) in all matters. The purpose of the injunction becomes even clearer if we were to consider the words that are used here: "So accept whatever the Messenger gives you, and refrain from whatever he forbids you." It is significant that the words used in opposition to "whatever the Messenger gives you" are not "whatever he does not give". Instead, the words are: "...and refrain from whatever he forbids you."*

[8] It also belongs to the poor Emigrants who have been driven out of their homes and their possessions, those who seek Allah's favour and good pleasure and help Allah and His Messenger. Such are the truthful ones.

[9] It also belongs to those who were already settled in this abode (of Hijrah) having come to faith before the (arrival of the) **Muhajirun** (Emigrants).¹² They love those who have migrated to them and do not covet what has been given them; they even prefer them above themselves though poverty be their own lot. And whosoever are preserved from their own greed, such are the ones that will prosper.

[10] (And it also belongs to) those who came after them,¹³ and who pray: "Lord, forgive us and our brethren who have preceded us in faith, and do not put in our hearts any rancour towards those who believe. Lord, You are the Most Tender, the Most Compassionate."¹⁴

12. *The people meant by this expression are the **Ansar**. The purpose of this injunction was to drive home the fact that not only the **Muhajirun** but also those Muslims who had been living in the Abode of Islam (i.e. Madinah) before the **Hijrah**, were also entitled to a share in **fay**'.*

13. *A share in **fay**' was not only meant for the present generation, for the future generations also had a claim on it.*

14. *Through this verse the Muslims were provided with an important moral directive: that they should nurse no feelings of spite and rancour in their hearts towards other Muslims, and that they should pray for the forgiveness of other Muslims rather than lavish curses and abuse upon them.*

[11] Did you¹⁵ not see the hypocrites say to their brethren, the unbelievers among the People of the Book: "If you are banished we too will go with you and will not listen to anyone concerning you; and if war is waged against you, we will come to your aid." But Allah bears witness that they are liars.

[12] To be sure, if they are banished, they will not go with them and if war is waged against them, they will not aid them; and even if they provide any aid to them, they will still turn their backs, and thereafter no aid will be forthcoming to them.

[13] Surely they have greater dread for you in their hearts than for Allah. That is because they are a people who are devoid of understanding.¹⁶

[14] They will never fight against you as a body (in an open battlefield); and if they fight against you they will fight only in fortified townships or from behind walls. Intense is their hostility to one another. You reckon them united while their hearts are divided. That is because they are a people devoid of reason.

15. *The whole passage (vv. 11-17) is a commentary on the hypocrites' attitude and behaviour. This relates to the time when the Prophet (peace be on him) served notice on the Banu al-Nadir to leave Madinah within ten days but had not yet laid siege to the district in which they lived. At this stage the chiefs of the hypocrites sent the Banu al-Nadir a message that they would assist them with two thousand men. They also informed them that the Qurayzah and the Ghatafan too would come to their aid. They were, therefore, urged to confront the Muslims courageously and not to lay down their arms. They assured the Banu al-Nadir that if the Muslims attacked them, they would fight side by side with them; and if things came to such a pass that the Banu al-Nadir were banished, they too would share their exile.*

16. *The statement that the hypocrites were "devoid of understanding" succinctly epitomises a great truth. Anyone who is granted true understanding of things is aware that it is God Who ought to be held in awe rather than human beings. Hence a wise person will strive to avoid all acts that make him liable to God's censure, regardless of whether any human censures him for that action or not. In like manner, if God enjoins him to perform a duty, he rises to perform it even if he faces the whole world's opposition in that regard. The person who lacks true understanding and wisdom is he who takes into account how other humans perceive his actions and is not at all concerned about how God sees them. If he avoids doing something he does not do so because he believes that he will be held to account by God; instead, it is because of his fear that human authority will bring him to book. Likewise, if he does*

something, it is not because God enjoined that action on him, but rather because there existed an authority whose order either commanded or commended it. It is this understanding or lack of it which marks out the attitude and character of a believer from that of an unbeliever.

[15] They are like those who tasted the evil consequences of their deeds a short while before.¹⁷ A grievous chastisement awaits them.

[16] Their parable is that of Satan when he says to man: "Disbelieve," but when he disbelieves, he says: "I am quit of you. Verily I fear Allah, the Lord of the Universe. "

[17] In the end both will be in the Fire, and will abide in it. That is the recompense of the wrong-doers.

17. This alludes to the pagans of the Quraysh, and the Jews of the Qaynuqa 'tribe. As we know, despite their superiority in numbers and weapons, they were vanquished by a handful of ill-equipped Muslims because of these very weaknesses of theirs.

[18] Believers, fear Allah and let every person look to what he sends forward for the morrow.¹⁸ Fear Allah; Allah is well aware of all that you do.

[19] And be not like those who forgot Allah and so He made them oblivious of themselves.¹⁹ They -are the wicked ones.

[20] Those destined for the Fire and those destined for Paradise cannot be alike. Verily it is those destined for Paradise who shall triumph.

[21] Had We sent down this Qur'an upon a mountain you would indeed have seen it humbling itself and breaking asunder out of fear of Allah.²⁰ We propound such parables to people that they may reflect.

18. The words "for the morrow" refer to the Hereafter. In other words, the assumption is that the life of this world constitutes "to-day" whose "morrow" is the Day of Resurrection.

19. If one forgets God, this inevitably leads one to forget one's true self. When man forgets that he is God's servant, he assigns to himself a position that is basically wrong. Thus his whole life is oriented in the wrong direction because of this misconception on his part. The same happens when he forgets that he is the servant of none else except the One True God. When this happens, he refrains from serving Him whose born servant he is and serves instead many others whose servant he is not.

20. This parable stresses the awesomeness of the responsibility symbolised by the Qur'an's revelation. The Qur'an extols God's greatness and states in clear and emphatic terms how immense man's responsibility towards God is. Had any mountain been endowed with the understanding granted to man, it would have trembled and shivered with fear.

[22] He is Allah: there is no god but He,²¹ the Knower of the unseen and the manifest, He is the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate.

[23] He is Allah: there is no god but He: the King, the Holy,²² the All-Peace,²³ the Giver of security²⁴ the Overseer,²⁵ the Most Mighty, the Overpowering, the All-Great. Exalted be He from whatever they associate with Him.

[24] He is Allah, the Planner, Executer and Fashioner of creation. His are the names most beautiful. Whatever is in the heavens and the earth extols His Glory.²⁶ He is the Most Mighty, the Most Wise.

21. None other than God has the status and position that entitles him to be served and worshipped. None other than God is possessed of the attributes and powers that justify regarding them as an object of worship and service.

22. God is above any defect or shortcoming; nor is it possible that He has any demerit. On the contrary, He is the Most Holy, One about Whom no imperfection is conceivable.

23. God is far above being liable to any harm, weakness or deficiency; nor can His Perfection ever suffer decline.

24. God's creatures are secure from the possibility that He will ever subject them to injustice, or deny them their rights, or nullify the reward of their deeds, or commit a breach of promise.

*25. The word used in the text is **muhaymin** which signifies that God is: (1) the Guardian and Protector; (2) the One Who observes all what others do; and (3) the Provider.*

26. This means that all that exists proclaims either by words or by the very fact of its existence that the Creator is immune from every kind of flaw or deficiency, weakness or mistake.