

# **Al-Tawbah [Repentance]**

## **Madinan Period**

[1] This is a declaration of disavowal<sup>1</sup> by Allah and His Messenger to those who associate others with Allah in His Divinity and with whom you have made treaties:<sup>2</sup>

[2] "You may go about freely in the land, for four months, but know well that you will not be able to frustrate Allah, and that Allah will bring disgrace upon those who deny the Truth."

1. *The first discourse (verses 1 -37) was revealed in 9 A.H. /631 C.E. at a time when the Prophet (peace be on him) had already sent Abu Bakr as leader of the Pilgrims to perform the Hajj. The Prophet (peace be on him) dispatched 'Ali to Makkah and directed him to not only recite the verses concerned publicly in the presence of the Hujjaj (Pilgrims) but also to make the following proclamation on the occasion: (i) that no one who refuses to accept Islam would enter Paradise; (ii) that no polytheist would henceforth be allowed to perform Hajj; (iii) that naked circumambulation around the Ka'bah a pre-Islamic Arabian practice - would henceforth be forbidden; (iv) that the treaties concluded between the Prophet (peace be on him) and the unbelievers which were still in force since the other party had not broken them, would be honoured until the expiry of their terms. Accordingly 'Ali made these announcements on the 10th of Dhu al-Hijjah, 9 A.H.*

2. *The Qur'an had already laid down the rule: "If you fear treachery from any group, then publicly throw their covenant at them" [8: 58] and publicly terminate the treaty. This Qur'anic principle also applied to those tribes that, despite their treaties, had constantly conspired against and were openly hostile to Islam whenever the opportunity presented itself. The public annulment of the treaties presented the polytheists with three alternatives. They could either come out into the open and engage in conflict with the Islamic state which would have led to their total extinction. They could flee from Arabia or they could embrace Islam and submit themselves, and the lands which they controlled, to the Islamic state.*

[3] This is a public proclamation by Allah and His Messenger to all people on the day of the Great Pilgrimage:<sup>3</sup> "Allah is free from all obligation to those who associate others with Allah in His Divinity; and so is His Messenger. If you repent, it shall be for your own good; but if you turn away, then know well that you will not be able to frustrate Allah. So give glad tidings of a painful chastisement to those who disbelieve.

[4] In exception to those who associate others with Allah in His Divinity are those with whom you have made treaties and who have not violated their treaties nor have backed up anyone against you. Fulfil your treaties with them till the end of their term. Surely Allah loves the pious."

[5] But when the sacred months expire<sup>4</sup> slay those who associate others with Allah in His Divinity wherever you find them; seize them, and besiege them, and lie in wait for them. But if they repent and establish the Prayer and pay *Zakah* leave them alone.<sup>5</sup> Surely Allah is All-Forgiving, Ever-Merciful.

3. *Al-Hajj al-Akbar (the day of Greater Pilgrimage) is in contrast to al-Hajj al-Asghar (that is, 'Umrah or Minor Pilgrimage). The Pilgrimage performed on the appointed dates in the month of Dhu al-Hijjah is called "the Greater Pilgrimage".*

4. *The expression "sacred months" refers to the four months of respite granted to the polytheists. Since it was not lawful for Muslims to attack the polytheists during those months, they were characterized as "hurum" (sacred, prohibited).*

5. *Apart from a disavowal of unbelief and polytheism, the Muslims are required to establish Prayers and pay Zakah. Without these, their claim that they had abandoned unbelief and embraced Islam would have no credence.*

[6] And if any of those who associate others with Allah in His Divinity seeks asylum, grant him asylum that he may hear the Word of Allah, and then escort him to safety for they are a people who do not know.

[7] How can there be a covenant with those who associate others with Allah in His Divinity be binding upon Allah and His Messenger, excepting those with whom you made a covenant near the Sacred Mosque? <sup>6</sup> Behave in a straight manner with them so long as they behave with you in a straight manner for Allah loves the God-fearing.

[8] How can there be any covenant with the other polytheists for were they to prevail against you, they will respect neither kinship nor agreement. They seek to please you with their tongues while their hearts are averse to you, and most of them are wicked.

[9] They have sold the revelations of Allah for a paltry price and have firmly hindered people from His Path. Evil indeed is what they have done.

[10] They neither have any respect for kinship nor for agreement in respect of the believers. Such are indeed transgressors.

[11] But if they repent and establish Prayer and give *Zakah* they are your brothers in faith. <sup>7</sup> Thus do We expound Our revelations to those who know.

6. *This alludes to the Kinanah, Khuza 'ah and Damrah tribes.*

7. *This reiterates the statement that if the repentance of the unbelievers is not accompanied by the establishment of Prayers and the payment of Zakah, then they would not be considered as part of the Islamic fraternity merely on the grounds of their repentance. But if they fulfil the requisite conditions, it would no longer be permissible for Muslims to fight against them, and their lives and properties would become sacred. Moreover, they would be entitled to enjoy equal rights in the Islamic society. They would be treated like other Muslims in all social and legal matters. Also they would not be discriminated against in any way, nor would any obstacles be placed before them to impede their progress in achieving what they might be capable of achieving.*

[12] But if they break their pledges after making them and attack your faith, make war on the leaders of unbelief that they may desist, for they have no regard for their pledged words.<sup>8</sup>

[13] Will you not fight against those who broke their pledges and did all they could to drive the Messenger away and initiated hostilities against you? Do you fear them? Surely Allah has greater right that you should fear Him, if you are true believers.

[14] Make war on them. Allah will chastise them through you and will humiliate them. He will grant you victory over them, and will soothe the bosoms of those who believe,

[15] and will remove rage from their hearts, and will enable whomsoever He wills to repent.<sup>9</sup> Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise.

*8. Pledges here mean their acceptance of Islam and their oath of allegiance to it. What it implies is that if, having accepted Islam, they commit apostasy the Muslims should make war on them. In dealing with apostates Abu Bakr acted on the directive set forth in this verse.*

[16] Do you imagine that you will be spared without being subjected to any test? Know well that Allah has not yet determined who strove hard (in His cause), and has not taken any others instead of His Messenger and the believers as his trusted allies? Allah is well aware of all that you do.

[17] It does not become those who associate others with Allah in His Divinity to visit and tend Allah's mosques while they bear witness of unbelief against themselves. All their works have gone to waste. They shall abide in the Fire.

[18] It only becomes those who believe in Allah and the Last Day and establish Prayer and pay *Zakah* and fear none but Allah to visit and tend the mosques of Allah. These are likely to be guided aright.

[19] Do you consider providing water to the Pilgrims and tending the Sacred Mosque equal in worth to believing in Allah and the Last Day and striving in the cause of Allah?<sup>10</sup> The two are not equal with Allah. Allah does not direct the wrong-doing folk to the Right Way.

[20] The higher rank with Allah is for those who believed and migrated and strove in His cause with their belongings and their persons. It is they who are triumphant.

[21] Their Lord gives them glad tidings of mercy from Him and of His good pleasure. For them await Gardens of eternal bliss.

*9. The Muslims were apprehensive that the Prophet's annulment of an agreement would enrage the polytheists and plunge the land into a blood-bath. God assured them that their fear was misplaced and that the outcome would be contrary to what they apprehended.*

*10. This proclaimed the decision that the custodianship of the Ka 'bah and the Sacred Mosque around it would no longer be with the polytheists. The polytheists of the Quraysh did not deserve the honour merely because they had been tending the Pilgrims.*

[22] Therein they shall abide forever. Surely with Allah a mighty reward awaits them.

[23] Believers, do not take your fathers and your brothers for your allies if they choose unbelief in preference to belief. Whosoever of you takes them as allies those are wrong-doers.

[24] Tell them, (O Prophet): "If your fathers and your sons and your brothers and your wives and your tribe and the riches you have acquired and the commerce of which you fear a slackening, and the dwellings that you love, if they are dearer to you than Allah and His Messenger and striving in His cause, then wait until Allah brings about His decree. Allah does not guide the evil-doing folk."

[25] Surely Allah has succoured you before on many a battlefield, and (you have yourselves witnessed His succour to you) on the day of Hunayn<sup>11</sup> when your numbers made you proud, but they did you no good, and the earth, for all its vastness, constrained you, and you turned your backs in retreat.

*11. Allusion is made here to the Battle of Hunayn which took place in Shawwal 8 A.H./630 C.E. in the Hunayn valley, about one year before the revelation of this verse. In this battle the Muslim army consisted of twelve thousand people, so far the strongest Muslim army. The army of the unbelievers was much smaller. Yet the archers of the Hawazin tribe put up a very tough fight and routed the Muslim army. Only the Prophet (peace be on him) and a handful of intrepid Companions stood their ground. This enabled the Muslim army to reconsolidate its position and eventually win the battle. Had the outcome of the battle been different, the Muslims would have lost much more by this defeat than what they had gained by the conquest of Makkah.*

[26] Then Allah caused His tranquillity to descend upon His Messenger and upon the believers, and He sent down hosts whom you did not see, and chastised those who disbelieved. Such is the recompense of those who deny the Truth.

[27] Then (after so chastising the unbelievers), Allah enables, whomsoever He wills, to repent.<sup>12</sup> Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful.

[28] Believers, those who associate others with Allah in His Divinity are unclean. So, after the expiry of this year, let them not even go near the Sacred Mosque.<sup>13</sup> And should you fear poverty, Allah will enrich you out of His bounty, if He wills. Surely Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise.

[29] Those who do not believe in Allah and the Last Day-even though they were given the scriptures, and who do not hold as unlawful that which Allah and His Messenger have declared to be unlawful, and who do not follow the true religion -fight against them until they pay tribute out of their hand and are utterly subdued.<sup>14</sup>

*12. This alludes to the fact that all the unbelievers who lost the Battle of Hunayn later embraced Islam.*

*13. The polytheists were not only forbidden to perform Hajj, but also to enter the precincts of the Sacred Mosque.*

14. *The purpose for which the Muslims are required to fight is not, as one might think, to compel the unbelievers into embracing Islam. Rather, its purpose is to put an end to the suzerainty of the unbelievers so that the latter are unable to rule over people. The authority to rule should only be vested in those who follow the True Faith; unbelievers who do not follow this True Faith should live in a state of subordination. Anybody who becomes convinced of the Truth of Islam may accept the faith of his/her own volition. The unbelievers are required to pay jizyah (poll tax) in return for the security provided to them as the dhimmis ("Protected People") of an Islamic state. Jizyah symbolizes the submission of the unbelievers to the suzerainty of Islam.*

[30] The Jews say: "Ezra ('Uzayr) is Allah's son," and the Christians say: "The Messiah is the son of Allah." These are merely verbal assertions in imitation of the sayings of those unbelievers who preceded them. May Allah ruin them. How do they turn away from the Truth?

[31] They take their rabbis and their monks for their lords apart from Allah,<sup>15</sup> and also the Messiah, son of Mary, whereas they were commanded to worship none but the One True God. There is no god but He. Exalted be He above those whom they associate with Him in His Divinity.

[32] They seek to extinguish the light of Allah by blowing through their mouths; but Allah refuses everything except that He will perfect His light howsoever the unbelievers might abhor it.

15. *As reported in a tradition, 'Adi b. Hatim, a Christian convert to Islam, once requested the Prophet (peace be on him) to explain the import of the following Qur'anic statement: "They (i.e. the Jews and Christians) take their priests and monks as lords apart from Allah." In reply the Prophet (peace be on him) asked him: "Is it not so that you consider unlawful whatever your priests declare to be unlawful, and consider lawful whatever your priests declare to be lawful?" 'Adi confirmed that such was the practice of the Jews and Christians. Thereupon the Prophet (peace be on him) told him that doing so amounted to "taking them as lords apart from Allah". This means, according to the Qur'an, that those who declare things to be lawful or unlawful without any sanction in the Book of God, in fact place themselves in the position of God. Similarly, those who accept the right of such persons to make laws according to their will also take them as their lords.*

[33] He it is Who has sent His Messenger with the guidance and the True Religion that He may make it prevail over all religions, howsoever those who associate others with Allah in His Divinity might detest it.<sup>16</sup>

[34] Believers! Many of the rabbis and monks wrongfully devour mankind's possessions and hinder people from the Way of Allah. And there are those who amass gold and silver and do not spend it in the Way of Allah. Announce to them the tidings of a painful chastisement

[35] on a Day when they shall be heated up in the Fire of Hell, and their foreheads and their sides and their backs shall be branded with it, (and they shall be told): "This is the treasure which you hoarded for yourselves. Taste, then, the punishment for what you have hoarded."

[36] Surely the reckoning of months, in the sight of Allah, is twelve months, laid down in Allah's decree on the day when He created the heavens and the earth; and out of these months four are sacred.<sup>17</sup> That is the true ordainment. Do not, therefore, wrong yourselves, with respect to these months. And fight all together against those who associate others with Allah in His Divinity in the manner that they fight against you all together, and know well that Allah is with the God-fearing.<sup>18</sup>

16. *The word used in the verse is al-din. In Arabic this word signifies a way of life to which one subjects oneself because of one's belief that he who prescribed it enjoys supreme authority and is worthy of obedience. The verse makes it clear that the purpose of the Prophets was to establish the supremacy of the Guidance and the Right Way revealed to them by God and make them prevail over all other systems of life. In other words, a Prophet is never sent with a sanction to let the way of life revealed to him be subjected to other ways of life. Nor is a Prophet sent to be content to live at the sufferance of the false ways of life which might hold sway. Since a Prophet is the representative of the Lord of the Universe, he seeks to make the Right Way prevail. If any other way of life continues to exist, it should be satisfied with the concessions made to it by Islam. For example, the rights granted to the dhimmis to enjoy the protection offered by Islam in lieu of Jizyah. The opposite of this should not happen, i.e. the unbelievers should not be dominant and the believers should lead the life of dhimmis instead.*

17. *The sacred four months alluded to here are the months of Dhu al-Qa 'dah, Dhu al-Hijjah and Muharram for Hajj (Major Pilgrimage) and Rajab for 'Umrah (Minor Pilgrimage).*

18. *The Muslims are told that they are free to fight in the sacred months if the unbelievers attack them. If the unbelievers fight unitedly against the Muslims in disregard of the sacred months, the Muslims may also unitedly fight against them. (For an explanation of this verse, see al-Baqarah 2:194.)*

[37] The intercalation (of sacred months) is an act of gross infidelity which causes the unbelievers to be led further astray. They declare a month to be lawful in one year and forbidden in another year in order that they may conform to the number of months that Allah has declared as sacred, and at the same time make lawful what Allah has forbidden.<sup>19</sup> Their foul acts seem fair to them. Allah does not direct those who deny the Truth to the Right Way.

19. *Nasi' was practised by the Arabs in two ways:*

(1) *In order to shed blood or to plunder, or to satisfy a blood vendetta, they declared a sacred month to be an ordinary one, and compensated for this violation later on by declaring one of the ordinary months to be sacred.*

(2) *With a view to harmonizing the lunar calendar with the solar calendar the Arabs used to add a month to the lunar calendar. Their purpose in so doing was to ensure that the Hajj dates should consistently fall in the same season so that they were spared the hardship and inconvenience resulting from the observation of the lunar calendar for the fixation of Hajj dates. As a result of this practice, Hajj was performed once on its appointed date, the days on which the 9th and 10th of Dhu al-Hijjah truly fell, and then for the next thirty-three years it was performed on days which were fictitiously declared to be 9th and 10th of Dhu al-Hijjah.*

*The year the Prophet (peace be on him) performed the Farewell Pilgrimage the Hajj fell on the due dates. Since then nasi stands abolished.*

[38] Believers! <sup>20</sup> What is amiss with you that when it is said to you: "March forth in the cause of Allah," you cling heavily to the earth? Do you prefer the worldly life to the Hereafter? Know well that all the enjoyment of this world, in comparison with the Hereafter, is trivial.

[39] If you do not march forth, Allah will chastise you grievously and will replace you by another people, while you will in no way be able to harm Him. Allah has power over everything.

[40] It will matter little if you do not help the Prophet, for Allah surely helped him when the unbelievers drove him out of his home and he was but one of the two when they were in the cave, and when he said to his companion: "Do not grieve. Allah is with us."<sup>21</sup> Then Allah caused His tranquillity to descend upon him, and supported him with hosts you did not see, and He humbled the word of the unbelievers. As for Allah's Word, it is inherently uppermost. Allah is All-Powerful, All-Wise.

*20. This verse marks the beginning of the second discourse of the surah comprising verses 38-72. It was revealed during the preparations for the Tabuk expedition.*

*21. This refers to the time when the unbelievers had resolved to kill the Prophet (peace be on him). The night he was to be assassinated the Prophet (peace be on him) left Makkah and secluded himself in a cave known as Thawr. Three days later he migrated to Madinah. Only Abu Bakr was with him in the cave.*

[41] March forth whether light or heavy, and strive in the way of Allah with your belongings and your lives. That is best for you if you only knew it.

[42] Were it a gain at hand or a short journey, they would have surely followed you, but the distance seemed too far to them.<sup>22</sup> Still they will swear by Allah: "If only we could, we would surely have gone forth with you," They merely bring ruin upon themselves. Allah knows well that they are liars.

[43] (O Prophet), may Allah forgive you! Why did you give them leave to stay behind before it became clear to you as to who were truthful and who were liars?

[44] Those who believe in Allah and the Last Day will never ask your leave to be excused from striving (in the cause of Allah) with their belongings and their lives. Allah fully knows the God-fearing.

[45] It is only those who do not believe in Allah and the Last Day, and whose hearts are filled with doubt that seek exemption from striving (in the cause of Allah). They keep tossing to and fro in their doubt.

*22. The idea of marching across vast stretches of desert to reach Tabuk appeared quite arduous for a number of reasons. Because of the prospect of an armed encounter with a power as mighty as that of the Romans; because the journey was to take place in the blazing heat of summer; and because the harvesting season was just at hand, and this was of great importance that year when famine conditions prevailed.*

[46] Had they truly intended to march forth to fight, they would have certainly made some preparation for it. But Allah was averse to their going forth, so He made them lag behind, and they were told: "Stay behind with those that are staying behind."

[47] Had they gone forth with you, they would have only added to your trouble, and would have run about in your midst seeking to stir up sedition among you, whereas there are among you some who are prone to lend ears to them. Allah knows well the wrong-doers.

[48] Surely they sought even earlier to stir up sedition, and turned things upside down to frustrate you until the Truth came and the decree of Allah appeared however hateful this may have been to them.

[49] And among them is he who says: "Grant me leave to stay behind, and do not expose me to temptation," Lo! They have already fallen into temptation. Surely Hell encompasses the unbelievers.

[50] If good fortune befalls you, it vexes them; and if an affliction befalls you, they turn away in jubilation and say: "We have taken due care of our affairs in good time."

[51] Say: "Nothing will befall us except what Allah has decreed for us; He is our Protector." Let the believers, then, put all their trust in Allah.

[52] Tell them: "What you await to befall upon us is nothing but one of the two good things!<sup>23</sup> And what we await for you is that Allah visit you with chastisement from Him or chastise you at our hands. So continue waiting; we too shall wait with you."

*23. That is, loss of life in the Way of God or victory.*

[53] Tell them: "Whether you spend your money willingly or unwillingly, it shall not find acceptance (with Allah) for you are an evil-doing folk."

[54] Nothing prevents that their expendings be accepted except that they disbelieve in Allah and His Messenger, and whenever they come to the Prayer they do so lazily, and whenever they spend they do so grudgingly.

[55] Let neither their riches nor their children excite your admiration. Allah only wants to chastise them through these things in the present life, and to cause them to die while they are unbelievers.

[56] They swear by Allah that they are part of you whereas they are certainly not part of you. They are merely a people who dread you.

[57] If they could find any shelter or any cavern, or any retreat, they would turn around and rush headlong into it.

[58] (O Prophet), some of them find fault with you in the distribution of alms.<sup>24</sup> If they are given something of it they are pleased, and if they are given nothing they are angry.

[59] Would that they were content with what Allah and His Messenger gave them, and were to say: "Allah suffices for us, and Allah will give us out of His bounty and so will His Messenger. It is to Allah alone that we turn with hope."

[60] The alms are meant only for the poor and the needy<sup>25</sup> and those who are in charge thereof, those whose hearts are to be reconciled,<sup>26</sup> and to free those in bondage,<sup>27</sup> and to help those burdened with debt, and for expenditure in the Way of Allah<sup>28</sup> and for the Wayfarer.<sup>29</sup> This is an obligation from Allah. Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise.

24. *That is, the Zakah collections.*

25. The Qur'anic term *faqir* (the poor) applies to those who depend for their subsistence on others. As for the *masakin*, they are those who are in greater distress than the ordinary poor people.

26. *The expression ta'lif al-qalb whence from the expression al- mu'allafat qububihim is derived means to win the hearts of people. The rule embodied in this verse is that Zakah funds may be used to calm down those who are actively engaged in hostile activities against Islam, or to win over the support of those who are in the unbelievers' camp. Zakah may also be used for securing the loyalty of those converts to Islam about whom it might be legitimately feared that if no consideration is shown to them they may revert to unbelief. It would be lawful that stipends or lump sum amounts are paid to such persons on a regular or temporary basis in order to secure either their support and backing for Islam, or preferably their conversion to it, or at least to neutralize such persons even if they remain in the opposite camp.*

27. *That is, emancipation of slaves.*

28. *The expression "in the Way of Allah" has a wide and general connotation and encompasses all good deeds which please God. Some authorities, therefore, believe that Zakah may be spent on all good purposes. But the truth of the matter is - and this is also the view of a great majority of past scholars -that "in the Way of Allah" stands for jihad in the Way of Allah. This expression signifies the struggle launched with a view to overthrowing ungodly systems and replacing them by the Islamic system of life. All those who participate in this struggle may be given assistance from Zakah funds, whether it be for journey expenses, for providing means of transport, for arms and equipment or for other goods relating to warfare, such assistance may be provided even to those who are otherwise well off and need no financial assistance in connection with their own living.*

29. *A traveller, though otherwise rich, is entitled to receive help out of Zakah funds if he needs such help during his journey.*

[61] And of them there are some who distress the Prophet, saying: "He is all ears." Tell them: "He listens for your good. He believes in Allah and trusts the believers, and is a mercy for

those of you who believe. A painful punishment lies in store for those who cause distress to the Messenger of Allah.”

[62] They swear by Allah to please you, while it is Allah and His Messenger whose pleasure they should seek if they truly believe.

[63] Are they not aware that Hell Fire awaits whosoever opposes Allah and His Messenger, and in it he shall abide? That surely is the great humiliation.

[64] The hypocrites are afraid lest a *surah* should be revealed concerning them intimating to the believers what lay hidden in their hearts. Tell them (O Prophet): “Continue your mockery if you will. Allah will surely bring to light all that whose disclosure you dread.”

[65] Should you question them what they were talking about, they would certainly say: "We were merely jesting and being playful."<sup>30</sup> Tell them: "Was it Allah and His revelation and His Messenger that you were mocking?"

*30. When preparations for the Tabuk expedition were under way, the hypocrites used to scoff at the Prophet (peace be on him) and the Muslims. They did so with the idea of demoralizing the Muslims engaged in jihad preparations. Many such reports are recorded in the traditions. Of these, one goes thus: "Some hypocrites were talking idly in their private meeting. One of them said: 'Do you think that fighting against the Roman warriors is like the mutual fight among the Arabs? I am sure that no sooner than the war breaks out you will find these (Muslim) warriors tied by ropes.' To this another added: 'It will be much better if, apart from that, each one of them is whipped a hundred times as well.' On seeing the Prophet (peace be on him) busy in jihad preparations, a hypocrite derisively told another: 'just look at this man! He is out to conquer the Roman and Syrian fortresses!'"*

[66] Now, make no excuses. The truth is, you have fallen into unbelief after having believed. Even if We were to forgive some of you, We will surely chastise others because they are guilty.

[67] The hypocrites be they men or women, are all alike. They enjoin what is evil, and forbid what is good, and withhold their hands from doing good. They forgot Allah, so Allah also forgot them. Surely the hypocrites are wicked.

[68] Allah has promised Hell-Fire to the hypocrites, both men and women, and to the unbelievers. They shall abide in it: a sufficient recompense for them. Allah has cursed them, and theirs is a lasting torment.

[69] Your ways are like the ways of those who have gone before you. They were mightier than you in power, and more abundant in riches and children. They enjoyed their lot for a while as you have enjoyed your lot, and you also engaged in idle talk as they did. Their works have come to naught in this world, and in the Hereafter they are surely the losers.

[70] Have they not heard the accounts of those who came before them - of the people of Noah and ‘Ad and Thamud, and the people of Abraham and the dwellers of Madyan (Midian), and the cities that were overturned?<sup>31</sup> Their Messengers came to them with Clear Signs. Then, it was not Allah Who caused them any wrong; they rather wronged themselves.

[71] The believers, both men and women, are allies of one another. They enjoin good, forbid evil, establish Prayer, pay *Zakah*, and obey Allah and His Messenger. Surely Allah will show mercy to them, Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise.

**31.** *This refers to the areas where the people of Lot lived.*

[72] Allah has promised the believing men and believing women Gardens beneath which rivers flow. They shall abide in it. There are delightful dwelling places for them in the Gardens of Eternity. They shall, above all, enjoy the good pleasure of Allah. That is the great achievement.

[73] O Prophet! <sup>32</sup> Strive against the unbelievers and the hypocrites, and be severe to them, Hell shall be their abode; what an evil destination!

[74] They swear by Allah that they said nothing blasphemous whereas they indeed blasphemed <sup>33</sup> and fell into unbelief after believing, and also had evil designs which they could not carry into effect. <sup>34</sup> They are spiteful against Muslims for no other reason than that Allah and His Messenger have enriched them through His bounty! So, if they repent, it will be to their own good. But if they turn away, Allah will sternly punish them in this world and in the Hereafter, None in the world will be able to protect or help them.

**32.** *This marks the beginning of the third discourse of the surah (comprising verses 73-129), which was revealed after the expedition to Tabuk.*

**33.** *There is no certainty about what constitutes the “word of unbelief” mentioned in the above verse. However, there are references in traditions to the many blasphemous utterances of the hypocrites. For example, a hypocrite is reported to have told his Muslim relatives: “If the message delivered by him (the Prophet, peace be on him) is really genuine, then we are worse than donkeys.” According to another report, during the expedition to Tabuk when a she-camel of the Prophet (peace be on him) went astray and the Muslims set about searching for it, a group of hypocrites made much fun of the incident, saying to one another: “just look at this man! He brings us news about the heavens but cannot tell where his she-camel is!”*

**34.** *This alludes to the conspiracies contrived by the hypocrites during the expedition to Tabuk. One of these, according to traditionists, was that the hypocrites had planned to throw the Prophet (peace be on him) into a ravine during his return from Tabuk. Another conspiracy hatched by the hypocrites was that they secretly decided that as soon as the news would come that the Muslim army had been defeated by the Romans, they would install ‘Abd Allah ibn Ubayy as the ruler of Madinah.*

[75] Some of them made a covenant with Allah: “If Allah gives us out of His bounty, we will give alms and act righteously.”

[76] Then, when He gave them out of His bounty, they grew niggardly and turned their backs (upon their covenant).

[77] So He caused hypocrisy to take root in their hearts and to remain therein until the Day they meet Him because they broke their promise with Allah and because they lied,

[78] Are they not aware that Allah knows what they conceal and what they secretly discuss, and that Allah has full knowledge even of all that is beyond the reach of perception.

[79] He also knows (the rich that are niggardly) who taunt the believers that voluntarily give alms, they scoff at those who have nothing to give except what they earn through their hard toil. Allah scoffs at them in return. A grievous chastisement awaits them.

[80] (O Prophet), it is all the same whether or not you ask for their forgiveness. Even if you were to ask forgiveness for them seventy times, Allah shall not forgive them. That is because they disbelieved in Allah and His Messenger; and Allah does not bestow His Guidance on such evil-doing folk.

[81] Those who were allowed to stay behind rejoiced at remaining behind and not accompanying the Messenger of Allah. They were averse to striving in the Way of Allah with their belongings and their lives and told others: "Do not go forth in this fierce heat." Tell them: "The Hell is far fiercer in heat." Would that they understand!

[82] Let them, then, laugh little, and weep much at the contemplation of the punishment for the evil they have committed.

[83] Then if Allah brings you face to face with a party of them, and they ask your leave to go forth (to fight in the Way of Allah), tell them: "You shall not go forth with me, and shall never fight against any enemy along with me. You were well-pleased to remain at home the first time, so now continue to remain with those who have stayed behind."

[84] Do not ever pray over any of them who dies, nor stand over his grave. They disbelieved in Allah and His Messenger and died in iniquity.

[85] Let not their riches or their children excite your admiration. Through these Allah seeks to chastise them in this world, and that their lives will depart them while they are unbelievers.

[86] And whenever any *surah* is revealed enjoining: "Believe in Allah and strive (in His Way) along with His Messenger," the affluent among them ask you to excuse them, saying: "Leave us with those who will sit back at home."

[87] They were content to stay behind with the womenfolk. Their hearts were sealed, leaving them bereft of understanding.

[88] But the Messenger and those who shared his faith strove with their belongings and their lives. It is they who shall have all kinds of good. It is they who shall prosper.

[89] Allah has prepared for them Gardens beneath which rivers flow. There shall they abide. That is the supreme triumph.

[90] Many of the bedouin Arabs came with excuses, seeking leave to stay behind. Thus those who were false to Allah and His Messenger in their covenant remained behind. A painful chastisement shall befall those of them that disbelieved.

[91] There is no blame on the weak nor on the sick nor on those who have nothing to enable them to join (the struggle in the Way of Allah) if they stay behind provided that they are

sincere to Allah and to His Messenger.<sup>35</sup> There is no cause for reproach against those who do good. Allah is All-Forgiving, Ever Merciful,

[92] Nor can there be any cause for reproach against those who, when they came to you asking for mounts to go to the battlefield, and when you said that you had no mounts for them, they went back, their eyes overflowing with tears, grieving that they had no resources to enable them to take part in fighting.

[93] But there are grounds for reproach against those who seek leave to stay behind even though they are affluent. They are the ones who were content to be with the womenfolk who stay behind. Allah has set a seal on their hearts, leaving them bereft of understanding.

[94] They will put up excuses before you when you return to them. Tell them: "Make no excuses. We will not believe you. Allah has already informed us of the truth about you. Allah will observe your conduct, and so will His Messenger; then you will be brought back to Him Who knows alike what lies beyond perception and what lies in the range of perception and will let you know what you have done."

*35. This makes it clear that even those who are otherwise apparently exempt from jihad are in fact not automatically so on grounds of physical disability, sickness or indigence. They are exempt only when these disabilities are combined with their true loyalty to God and His Messenger. If someone lacks this loyalty, he cannot be pardoned for the simple reason that when it became obligatory for him to wage jihad he was sick or indigent.*

[95] When you return to them they will surely swear to you in the name of Allah that you may leave them alone. So do leave them alone; they are unclean. Hell shall be their home, a recompense for what they did.

[96] They will swear to you in order to please you. But even if you become pleased with them, Allah will not be pleased with such an evil-doing folk.

[97] The bedouin Arabs surpass all in unbelief and hypocrisy and are most likely to be unaware of the limits prescribed by Allah in what He has revealed to His Messenger.<sup>36</sup> Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise.

[98] And among the bedouin Arabs there are such as regard whatever they spend (in the Way of Allah) as a fine and wait for some misfortune to befall you. May ill fortune befall them! Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.

*36. The word al-Arab, as we have explained earlier, signifies the Bedouin whether of the desert or the countryside - in the vicinity of Madinah. For a long time they had followed a policy of opportunism with regard to the conflict between Islam and unbelief. However, as Islam established its sway over the greater part of Hijaz and Najd and the power of the tribes hostile to Islam began to weaken, they saw that their interests lay in entering the fold of Islam. Of them, only a minority embraced Islam out of their conviction and with the readiness to fulfil its demands. In the above verse the Qur'an refers to this attitude of the Bedouin who, compared with the town dwellers, were relatively more prone to hypocrisy and unbelief, Town dwellers fare better since they have the opportunity to meet learned and pious people and thus gain some knowledge of religion and its requirements. The Bedouin, however, tend to engross themselves in the pursuit of their bread and butter alone, leaving them no time*

*available for higher pursuits. At the end of the day they are no more than economic brutes, and as such are in greater peril of remaining ignorant of the True Religion and the limits prescribed by God. Verse 122 suggests a remedy for the situation.*

[99] And among the bedouin Arabs are those who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and regard their spending (in the Way of Allah) as a means of drawing near to Allah and of deserving the prayers of the Messenger. Indeed, this shall be a means of drawing near to Allah. Allah will surely admit them to His mercy. Allah is All-Forgiving, Ever Merciful.

[100] And of those who led the way -the first of the Emigrants (*Muhajirun*) and the Helpers (*Ansar*), and those who followed them in the best possible manner - Allah is well-pleased with them and they are well-pleased with Allah. He has prepared for them Gardens beneath which rivers flow; therein they will abide forever. That is the supreme triumph.

[101] As for the bedouin Arabs around you, some are hypocrites; and so are some of the people of Madinah who have become inured to hypocrisy. You do not know them, but We know them. We will inflict double chastisement on them, and then they shall be returned to an awesome suffering.

[102] There are others who have confessed their faults. They intermixed their good deeds with evil. It is likely that Allah will turn to them in mercy, for Allah is All- Forgiving, Ever Merciful.

[103] (O Prophet)! "Take alms out of their riches and thereby cleanse them and bring about their growth (in righteousness), and pray for them. Indeed your prayer is a source of tranquillity for them." Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.

[104] Are they not aware that it is Allah Who accepts the repentance of His servants and accepts their alms, and that it is Allah Who is Oft-Relenting, Ever Merciful?

[105] And tell them, (O Prophet): "Keep working: Allah will behold your works and so will His Messenger and the believers; and you shall be brought back to Him Who knows that which is beyond the reach of perception and that which is within the reach of perception. He will then declare to you all that you have been doing."

[106] There are others in whose regard Allah's decree is awaited: whether He will chastise them or relent towards them. Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise.

[107] Then there are others who have set up a mosque to hurt the True Faith, to promote unbelief, and cause division among believers, and as an ambush for one who had earlier made war on Allah and His Messenger. They will surely swear: "We intended nothing but good," whereas Allah bears witness that they are liars.

[108] Never stand therein. Surely a mosque founded from the first day on piety is more Worthy that you should stand in it for Prayer. In it are people who love to purify themselves, and Allah loves those that purify themselves.<sup>37</sup>

[109] Is he, then, who has erected his structure on the fear of Allah and His good pleasure better, or he who erects his structure on the brink of a crumbling bank, so that it crumbles

down with him into the Hell-Fire? Allah does not bestow His Guidance on the wrong-doing folk.

*37. At that time there were two mosques in Madinah: the mosque of Quba which was situated on the outskirts of the town, and the Prophet's Mosque which was in the heart of Madinah. There was, therefore, hardly any need for another mosque. The hypocrites, knowing that there was no convincing justification for a new mosque, began to put forward flimsy pleas saying that such a mosque was necessary because of the difficulties of praying congregationally, five times a day, and particularly at night in cold and rainy weather; that this was especially difficult for the old and the disabled who lived at some distance from the Mosque of the Prophet (peace be on him). They thus secured the permission to construct this mosque and started using it as a centre for hatching Conspiracies. They wanted to inveigle the Prophet (peace be on him) into inaugurating the mosque. But God forewarned him of their intentions and the Prophet (peace be on him) razed the Dirar mosque to the ground on his return from Tabuk.*

[110] And the structure which they have erected will ever inspire their hearts with doubts unless it be that their very hearts are cut into pieces. Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise.

[111] Surely Allah has purchased of the believers their lives and their belongings and in return has promised that they shall have Paradise. <sup>38</sup> They fight in the Way of Allah, and slay and are slain. Such is the promise He has made incumbent upon Himself in the Torah, and the Gospel, and the Qur'an. Who is more faithful to his promise than Allah? Rejoice, then, in the bargain you have made with Him. That indeed is the mighty triumph.

*38. When a man has true faith it involves a commitment to devote himself sincerely to God and thus attain His reward in return for that commitment. This two-way commitment has been described as a "transaction". What this means is that faith is in fact a contract according to which man places all that he has - his life, his wealth -at the disposal of God; he "sells" them to God, In return, he accepts God's promise of Paradise in the Next Life.*

[112] Those who constantly turn to Allah in repentance,<sup>39</sup> who constantly worship Him, who celebrate His praise, who go about the world to serve His cause,<sup>40</sup> who bow down to Him, who prostrate themselves before Him, who enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil, and who keep the limits set by Allah. Announce glad tidings to such believers.

[113] After it has become clear that they are condemned to the Flaming Fire, it is not for the Prophet and those who believe to ask for the forgiveness of those who associate others with Allah in His Divinity even if they be near of kin.

[114] And Abraham's prayer for the forgiveness of his father was only because of a promise which he had made to him. Then, when it became clear to him that he was an enemy of Allah, he dissociated himself from him. Surely Abraham was most tender-hearted, God-fearing, forbearing.

[115] It is not Allah's way to cause people to stray in error after He has guided them until He has made clear to them what they should guard against, Surely Allah knows everything.

[116] Indeed Allah's is the Kingdom of the heavens and the earth. He it is Who confers life and causes death. You have no protector or helper apart from Allah.

39. *The word ta'ibun used in the above verse may be translated literally as "those who turn to God in repentance". However, the context in which this word occurs indicates that repentance is a recurring characteristic of believers, implying that far from repenting once, they constantly turn to God in repentance. We have tried to convey this nuance in the translation of the verse.*

40. *Another translation can be "those who fast".*

[117] Surely Allah has relented towards the Prophet, and towards the *Muhajirun* (Emigrants) and the *Ansar* (Helpers) who stood by him in the hour of hardship, although the hearts of a party of them had well-nigh swerved.<sup>41</sup> (But when they gave up swerving from the Right Course and followed the Prophet), Allah relented towards them. Surely to them He is the Most Tender, the Most Merciful.

[118] And He also relented towards the three whose cases had been deferred. When the earth, for all its spaciousness, became constrained to them, and their own beings became a burden to them, and they realized that there was no refuge for them from Allah except in Him; He relented towards them that they may turn back to Him. Surely, it is Allah Who is Much Forgiving, Ever Merciful.<sup>42</sup>

41. *This refers to some sincere and devoted Companions who initially shrank from jihad. However, being genuine believers and true lovers of Islam, they were able to overcome their initial reluctance and fear.*

42. *The three Companions referred to in this verse are those who stayed behind - Ka' b b. Malik, Hilal b. Umayyah and Murarah b. Rabi'. All the three had firm belief in Islam and had repeatedly proved their sincerity and made many sacrifices. Notwithstanding their illustrious services to the cause of Islam in the past, they were reproached severely for having slacked off in their duty to join the jihad to which all the able-bodied Muslims had been summoned. After his return from Tabuk, the Prophet (peace be on him) asked all Muslims to sever their ties with these three. Forty days later even their wives were asked to part company with them. The anguish they then suffered in Madinah -their home town-has been graphically set forth in the above verse. After having undergone the tormenting social boycott for a full fifty days, they were eventually pardoned by God.*

[119] Believers! Have fear of Allah and stand with those that are truthful.

[120] It did not behove the people of Madinah and the bedouin Arabs around them that they should refrain from accompanying the Messenger of Allah and stay behind and prefer their own security to his. For whenever they suffer from thirst or weariness or hunger in the Way of Allah, and whenever they tread a place which enrages the unbelievers (whenever anything of this comes to pass), a good deed is recorded in their favour. Allah does not cause the work of the doers of good to go to waste.

[121] Likewise, each amount they spend, be it small or large, and each journey they undertake, shall be recorded in their favour so that Allah may bestow upon them reward for their good deeds.

[122] It was not necessary for the believers to go forth all together (to receive religious instruction), but why did not a party of them go forth that they may grow in religious understanding, and that they may warn their people when they return to them, so that they may avoid (erroneous attitudes)?<sup>43</sup>

*43. This did not necessitate the en masse migration of the Bedouins to Madinah in quest of knowledge. If just a few drawn from each desert village and tribe had visited Madinah to study Islam, and tried to create an awakening and consciousness among their people upon their return, the situation could have been remedied. Replacement of ignorance with enlightenment of faith would have cured them of hypocrisy which had prevented them from fulfilling their obligations as Muslims despite having embraced Islam.*

[123] Believers! Fight against the unbelievers who live around you;<sup>44</sup> and let them find in you sternness.<sup>45</sup> Know that Allah is with the God-fearing.

[124] And whenever a new surah is revealed some of the hypocrites ask the believers (in jest): "Whose faith has increased because of this?" As for those who believe, it will certainly increase their faith, and they are joyful over that.

[125] But those whose hearts are affected with the disease (of hypocrisy), every new *surah* added a fresh abomination to their abomination. They remained unbelievers till their death.

[126] Do they not see that they are tried every year once or twice?<sup>46</sup> Yet they neither repent nor take heed.

[127] And whenever a *surah* is revealed, they glance at each other as though saying: "Is anyone watching?" Then they slip away. Allah has turned away their hearts for they are a people who are bereft of understanding.

[128] There has come to you a Messenger of Allah from among yourselves, who is distressed by the losses you sustain, who is ardently desirous of your welfare and is tender and merciful to those that believe.

[129] Yet, if they should turn away, then tell them: "Allah is sufficient for me; there is no god but He. In Him I have put my trust. He is the Lord of the Mighty Throne."

*44. On reading the verse in conjunction with the succeeding passage it appears that the reference is to fighting against those whose hypocrisy was clearly established and whose interaction with different sections of the Islamic population had caused much damage.*

*45. The lenient policy adopted towards the hypocrites so far should now be given up.*

*46. Not a year passes when the claim of the hypocrites to be believers is not tested once or twice and invariably found to be hollow.*