

## Sūrah 33: al-Ahzāb

### Period of Revelation

The Sūrah discusses three important events which are: the Battle of the Trench (or Al-Ahzāb: the Confederates) which took place in the month of Shawwal 5 A.H.; the raid on Banū Qurayṭhah which was made in Dhil-Qa'dah 5 A.H.; and the Prophet's marriage with Zaynab which also was contracted in Dhil-Qa'dah 5 A.H.. These historical events accurately determine the period of the revelation of this Sūrah.

### Historical Background

The Islāmic army's setback in the Battle of Uhud (3 A.H.) that resulted from the error of the archers appointed by the Prophet so boosted up the morale of the Arab pagans, the Jews and the hypocrites that they started entertaining the hope that they would soon be able to exterminate Islām and the Muslims completely. Their high state of morale can be judged from the events that occurred in the first year after Uhud. Hardly two months had passed then the tribe of Bani Asad of Najd began to make preparations for a raid on Madinah and the Prophet had to despatch an expedition under Abu Salamah to counteract them. In Safar 4 A.H. some people of the tribes of Adal and Qarah asked the Prophet to send some men to instruct them in Islām. Accordingly six of the Companions were allowed to accompany them for the purpose. But when they reached Raji (a place between Rabigh and Jeddah) they summoned Hudhail against them who killed four of the Companions and took the other two (Khubaib bin Adi and Zayd bin ad-Dathinnah) to Makkah and sold them to the enemy. Then in the same month of Safar on the request of a chief of Bani Amir the Prophet sent another deputation of 40 (according to others 70) preachers consisting of the Ansār young men to Najd. But they were also betrayed. The people of Usayyah, Ri'l and Dhakwan tribes of Bani Sulaim surrounded them suddenly at Bir Maunah and slew all of them. Meanwhile, the Jewish tribe of Banu-Nadheer of Madinah getting encouragement continued to commit breaches of the treaties; so much so that in Rabi'ul Awwal 4 A.H. they plotted against the life of the Prophet himself. Then in Jamadi al-Ula 4 A.H. Bani Thalbah and Bani Muharib the two tribes of Banu Ghatafan started making preparations to attack Madinah and the Prophet had to go to punish them. Thus after their setback at Uhud the Muslims went on encountering repercussions continuously for seven to eight months.

However, it was the Prophet's determination and wisdom and his great Companions' spirit of sacrifice that changed these adverse conditions completely within a short span of time. The economic boycott by the Arabs had made life hard for the people of Madinah. All the polytheistic tribes around Madinah were becoming rebellious. Inside Madinah itself the Jews and the hypocrites were bent upon mischief. But the successive steps taken by a handful of the sincere Muslims under the leadership of the Prophet not only restored the image of strength of Islām in Arabia but also increased it manifold.

### Raids Preceding the Battle of the Trench

The first such step was taken immediately after the Battle of Uhud. The very next day when quite a large number of Muslims lay wounded and the martyrdom of the near and dear ones was being mourned in many houses and the Prophet himself was injured and sad at the martyrdom of his uncle Hamza he called out to the devoted servants of Islām to accompany him in pursuit of the pagans so as to deter them from returning and attacking Madinah again. The Prophet's assessment was absolutely correct. He knew that although the Quraysh had retreated without taking any advantage of their almost complete victory, they would certainly regret their folly when they would halt, consider the whole matter coolly on the way and would return to attack Madinah again. Therefore he decided to go in pursuit of them and 630 of the Muslims at once volunteered to accompany him. When they reached Hamra al-Asad on the way to Makkah and camped there for three days the Prophet came to know through a sympathetic non-Muslim that Abu Sufyan had stayed at ar-Rauha, 36 miles short of Madinah with an army 2,978 strong: they were regretting their error and were in fact planning to return and attack Madinah once again. But when they heard that the Prophet was coming in

pursuit of them with an army, they lost heart and gave up their plan. Thus, not only were the Quraysh deterred by this action, but the other enemies living around Madinah also realized that the Muslims were being led by a person who was highly well informed, wise and resolute, and that the Muslims were ever ready to lay down their lives at his command.

Then as soon as the Bani Asad started making preparations for a raid on Madinah, the Prophet's secret agents gave him timely information about their intention. Thus, before they could come in force to attack Madinah, he sent an army 150 strong, under Abu Salamah (the first husband of Umm Salamah) to punish them. They took Bani Asad by surprise, who fled in panic leaving all their possessions behind, which fell into the Muslim hands.

After this came the turn of the Banu-Nadhheer. The day they plotted against the life of the Prophet, and the secret was disclosed, the Prophet ordered them to leave Madinah within ten days and warned that anyone who remained behind after that would be put to death. Abdullah bin Ubayy, the chief of the hypocrites of Madinah, encouraged them to defy the order and refuse to leave Madinah. He even promised to help them with 2,000 men, and assured them that the Banu Ghatafan from Najd also would come to their aid. Accordingly, the Banu-Nadhheer sent word that they would not leave no matter what the Prophet might do.

As soon as the time limit of ten days come to an end, the Prophet laid siege to their quarters, but none of their supporters had the courage to come to their rescue. At last, they surrendered on condition that every three of them would be allowed to load a camel with whatever they could carry and go away leaving the rest of their possessions behind. Thus, the whole suburbs of the city which were inhabited by the Banu-Nadhheer, and their gardens, their fortresses and other properties fell to the Muslims and the people of this treacherous tribe became scattered in Khaiber, Wad-il-Qura and Syria. Then the Prophet turned his attention to the Banu Ghatafan, who were preparing for a war against Madinah. He took 400 of the Muslims and overtook them at Dhat-ar-Riqa. They were so taken by surprise that they fled their houses without a struggle and took refuge in the mountains.

After this in Shaban 4 A.H., the Prophet went forth to Badr to fight Abu Sufyan. At the end of the Battle of Uhud, he had challenged the Prophet and the Muslims, saying, *"We shall again meet you in combat at Badr next year."* In reply the Prophet announced through a Companion: *"All right: we accept your challenge."* Accordingly, at the appointed time he reached Badr with 1,500 of the Muslims. From the other side, Abu Sufyan left Makkah with an army of 2,000 men, but could not have the courage to march beyond Marr-az-Zahran (modern, Wadi Fātimah). The Prophet waited for him at Badr for eight days; the Muslims during these days did profitable business with a trading party. This incident helped more than restore the image of strength of the Muslims that had been tarnished at Uhud. It also made the whole of Arabia realize that the Quraysh alone could no longer resist Muhammad.

This image and position of the Muslims was further strengthened by another event. Dumat al-Jandal (modern, Al-Jauf) was an important place at the border between Arabia and Syria. When the caravans of the Arabs, trading between Iraq in the south and Syria and Egypt in the north, passed that way, they were harassed and looted by the natives. In Rabi al-Awwal, 5 A.H., the Prophet himself went to punish them with an army of 1,000 men. They could not muster up courage to come out and fight him and, therefore, fled the place. This caused the whole of northern Arabia to dread the power of Islām, and the tribes began to realize that the great power emerging from Madinah was formidable and could no longer be resisted by one or a few of the tribes.

### **The Battle of the Trench**

Such were the conditions when the Battle of the Trench took place. It was in fact a combined raid by many of the Arab tribes who wanted to crush the power of Madinah. It had been instigated by the leaders of the Banu-Nadhheer who had settled in Khaiber after their banishment from Madinah. They went round to the

Quraysh, Ghatafan, Hudhail and many other tribes and induced them to gather all their forces together and attack Madinah jointly. Thus in Shawwal 5 A.H. an unprecedentedly large army of the Arab tribes marched against the small city of Madinah. From the north came Jews of Banu-Nadheer and Bani-Qaynuqah who after their banishment from Madinah had settled in Khaiber and Wad-il-Qura. From the east advanced the tribes of Ghatafan, Bani Sulaim, Fazarah, Murrah, Ashja, Sad Asad etc. and from the south the Quraysh along with a large force of their allies. Together they numbered from ten to twelve thousand men.

Had it been a sudden attack it would have been disastrous. But the Prophet was not unaware of this in Madinah. His intelligence men and the sympathisers of the Islāmic movement and the people influenced by it were present in every tribe who kept him informed of the enemy's movements. Even before the enemy could reach his city he got a trench dug out on the north-west of Madinah in six days and took up a defensive position with 3,000 men in the protection of the Trench. To the south of Madinah there were many gardens (even now there are) so that it could not be attacked from that side. To the east there are lava rocks which are impassable for a large army. The same is the case with the south western side. The attack therefore could be made only from the eastern and western sides of the Uhud which the Prophet had secured by digging a trench. The disbelievers were not at all aware that they would have to counter the trench outside Madinah. This kind of a defensive stratagem was unknown to the Arabs. Thus they had to lay a long siege in winter for which they had not come prepared.

After this, only one alternative remained with the disbelievers: to incite the Jewish tribe of Banū Quraythah who inhabited the south eastern part of the city to rebellion. As the Muslims had entered a treaty with them, that in case of an attack on Madinah they would defend the city along with them. The Muslims had made no defensive arrangement there and had even sent their families to take shelter in the forts situated on that side. The invaders perceived this weakness of the Islāmic defenses. They sent Huyayy bin Akhtab the Jewish leader of the Banu-Nadheer to the Banū Quraythah so as to induce them to break the treaty and join the war. In the beginning they refused to oblige and said that they had a treaty with Muhammad who had faithfully abided by it and given them no cause for complaint. But when Ibn Akhtab said to them, look I have summoned the united force of entire Arabia against him: this is a perfect opportunity to get rid of him. If you lose it you will never have another opportunity. The anti Islāmic Jewish mind prevailed over every moral consideration and the Banū Quraythah were persuaded to break the treaty.

The Prophet received news of this. He at once told Sad bin Ubadah, Sad bin Muadh, Abdullah bin Rawahah and Khawwat bin Jubair chiefs of the Ansār to go and find out the truth. He advised them that if they found Banū Quraythah still loyal to the treaty they should return and say so openly before the Muslim army; however if they found that they were bent upon treachery they should only inform him so that the common Muslims would not be disheartened. On reaching there the Companions found the Banū Quraythah fully bent on mischief. They told the Companions openly that there is no agreement and no treaty between us and Muhammad. At this they returned to the Islāmic army and submitted their report to the Prophet, saying, “*Adal and Qarah.*” That is, “*The Quraidbah are bent upon doing what the Adal and Qarah had done with the preachers of Islam at Raji.*”

This news spread among the Muslims and caused great consternation among them, for they had been encircled and their city had been endangered on the side where there existed no defensive arrangement and where they had also sent their families to take shelter in the forts. This further increased the activities of the hypocrites and they started making psychological attacks to break the morale of the Muslims. One said, “*How strange! We were being foretold that the lands of Caesar and Chosroes would fall to us, but here we are that not one of us can go out even to relieve himself.*” Another one asked for permission to leave his post at the Trench so that he could go and protect his own house which was in danger. Another one started making secret propaganda to the effect: “*Settle your affair with the invaders yourselves and hand over Muhammad to them.*” This was a highly critical hour of trial, which exposed every person who harbored any hypocrisy in his heart. Only the true and sincere Muslims remained firm and steadfast in their resolve and devotion.

The Prophet at that critical moment initiated peace negotiations with the Banu Ghatafan and tried to persuade them to accept one third of the fruit harvest of Madinah and withdraw. But when he asked Sad bin Ubadah and Sad bin Muadh, chief of the Ansār, for their opinion about the conditions of peace, they said, “O Messenger of God: Is it your personal wish that we should agree on these conditions, or is it God’s Command that we have no option but to accept it? Or, are you giving this proposal only in order to save us from the enemy?” The Prophet replied, “I am proposing this only to save you: I see that the whole of Arabia has formed a united front against you. I want to divide the enemy.” At this the two chiefs protested; saying, “if you want to conclude this pact for our sake, kindly forget it. These tribes could not subdue us under tribute when we were polytheists. Now that we have the honour of believing in God and His Messenger, will they make us sink to this depth of ignominy? The sword now shall be the arbiter till God passes His judgment between them and us.” With these words they tore up the draft for the treaty which had not yet been signed.

In the meantime Nuaim bin Masud, a member of the Ashja branch of the Ghatafan tribe, became a Muslim and came before the Prophet and submitted: “No one as yet knows that I have embraced Islām: You can take from me whatever service you please.” The Prophet replied: “Go and sow the seeds of discord among the enemy.” So, first of all, Nuaim went to the Quraidhah with whom he was on friendly terms, and said to them, “The Quraysh and the Ghatafan can become wearied of the siege and go back, and they will lose nothing, but you have to live here with the Muslims. Just consider what will be your position if the matter turns that way. Therefore, I would advise you not to join the enemy until the outsiders should send some of their prominent men as hostages to you.” This had the desired effect upon the Banū Quraythah and they decided to demand hostages from the united front of the tribes. Then he went to the chiefs of the Quraysh and the Ghatafan and said to them, “The Banū Quraythah seem to be slack and irresolute. Maybe they demand some men as hostage from you, and then hand them over to Muhammad to settle their affair with him. Therefore, be very firm and cautious in your dealing with them.” This made the leaders of the united front suspicious of Banū Quraythah, and they sent them a message, saying, “We are tired of the long siege; let there be a decisive battle; let us, therefore, make a general assault simultaneously from both the sides.” The Banū Quraythah sent back the word, saying, “We cannot afford to join the war unless you hand over some of your prominent men to us as hostages.” The leaders of the united front became convinced that what Nuaim had said was true. They refused to send hostages. And the Banū Quraythah, on the other side, also felt that Nuaim had given them the correct counsel. Thus, the strategy worked: it divided the enemy against itself.

The siege was prolonged for more than 25 days. It was winter. The supply of food and water and forage was becoming more and more scarce everyday and division in the camp was also a great strain on the state of morale of the besiegers. Then, suddenly one night a severe windstorm accompanied by thunder and lightning hit the camp. It added to the cold and darkness. The wind overthrew the tents and put the enemy in disarray. They could not stand this severe blow of nature. They left the battleground even during the night and returned to their homes. When the Muslims awoke in the morning, there was not a single enemy soldier to be seen on the battlefield. The Prophet, finding the battlefield completely empty, said: “The Quraysh will never be able to attack you after this: now you will take the offensive.” This was a correct assessment of the situation. Not only the Quraysh but the united front of all the enemy tribes had made their final assault against Islām and had failed. Now they could no longer dare invade Madinah; now the Muslims were on the offensive.

### Social Reforms

Though the period of two years between the Battles of Uhud and the Trench was a period of disturbance and turmoil and the Prophet and his Companions could hardly relax in peace and security even for a day the work of reform as a whole and the reconstruction of the Muslim society continued uninterrupted. This was the time when the Islāmic laws pertaining to marriage and divorce were complemented; the law of inheritance was introduced drinking and gambling were prohibited and the new laws and regulations concerning many other aspects of the economic and social life were enforced.

In this connection an important thing that needed to be reformed was the question of the adoption of a son. Whoever was adopted by the Arabs as a son was regarded as one of their own offspring; he got share in inheritance; he was treated like a real son and real brother by the adopted mother and the adopted sister; he

could not marry the daughter of his adopted father and his widow after his death. And the same was the case if the adopted son died or divorced a wife. The adopted father regarded the woman as his real daughter-in-law. This custom clashed in every detail with the laws of marriage, divorce and inheritance enjoined by God in Sūrahs al-Baqarah and an-Nisā. It made a person who could get no share in inheritance entitled to it at the expense of those who were really entitled to it. It prohibited marriage between the men and the women who could contract marriage perfectly lawfully. And above all it helped spread the immoralities which the Islāmic Law wanted to eradicate. For a real mother and a real sister and a real daughter cannot be like the adopted mother, the adopted sister and the adopted daughter however one may try to sanctify the adopted relations as a custom. When the artificial relations endowed with customary sanctity are allowed to mix freely like the real relations it cannot but produce evil results. That is why the Islāmic law of marriage, divorce, the law of inheritance and the law of the prohibition of adultery required that the concept and custom of regarding the adopted son as the real son should be eradicated completely.

This concept, however could not be rooted out by merely passing a legal order saying the adopted son is not the real son. The centuries old prejudices and superstitions cannot be changed by mere word of mouth. Even if the people had accepted the command that these relations were not the real relations they would still have looked upon marriage between the adopted mother and the adopted son, the adopted brother and the sister, the adopted father and the daughter and the adopted father-in-law and the daughter-in-law loathsome and detestable. Moreover there would still exist some freedom of mixing together freely. Therefore it was inevitable that the custom should be eradicated practically and through the Prophet himself. For no Muslim could ever conceive that a thing done by the Prophet himself and done by him under God's Command could be detestable. Therefore a little before the Battle of the Trench the Prophet was inspired by God that he should marry the divorced wife of his adopted son Zayd bin Harithah and he acted on this Command during the siege of the Banū Qurayshah which had immediately followed the Battle of Trench.

### **Storm of Propaganda at the Marriage of Zaynab**

As soon as the marriage was contracted, there arose a storm of propaganda against the Prophet. The polytheists, the hypocrites and the Jews, all were burning with jealousy at his triumphs which followed one after the other. The way they had been humbled within two years after Uhud, in the Battle of the Trench, and in the affair of the Quraidhah, had made them sore at heart. They had also lost hope that they could ever subdue him on the battlefield. Therefore, they seized the question of this marriage as a Godsend for themselves and thought they would put an end to his moral superiority, which was the real secret of his power and success. Therefore, stories were concocted that Muhammad, God forbid, had fallen in love with his daughter-in-law, and when the son had come to know of this, he divorced his wife, and the father married his daughter-in-law. The propaganda, however, was absurd on the face of it. Zaynab was the Prophet's first cousin. He had known her from childhood to youth. So, there could be no question of his falling in love with her at first sight. Then he himself had arranged her marriage with Zayd under his personal influence, although her whole family had opposed it. They did not like that a daughter of the noble Quraysh should be given in marriage to a freed slave. Zainab herself was not happy at this arrangement. But everyone had to submit to the Prophet's command. The marriage was solemnized and a precedent was set in Arabia that Islām had raised a freed slave to the status of the Quraysh nobility. If the Prophet had in reality any desire for Zainab, there was no need of marrying her to Zayd; he himself could have married her. But in spite of all this, the shameless opponents invented stories of love, spread them with great exaggeration and publicized them so vehemently that even some Muslims also began to accept them as true.

### **Preliminary Commandments of the Veil**

The fact that the tales invented by the enemies also became topics of conversation among the Muslims was a clear sign that the element of sensuality in society had crossed all limits. If this malady had not been there it was not possible that minds would have paid any attention whatever to such absurd and disgusting stories about a righteous and pure person like the Prophet. This was precisely the occasion when the reformative

commandments pertaining to the law of Hijab or Purdah were first enforced in the Islāmic society. These reforms were introduced in this Sūrah and complemented a year later in Sūrah an-Nūr when a slander was made on the honour of Ā'isha. (For further details see introduction to Sūrah an-Nūr).

### Domestic Affairs of the Prophet

There were two other problems which needed attention at that time. Though apparently they pertained to the Prophet's domestic life it was necessary to resolve them for the domestic and mental peace of the person who was exerting every effort to promote the cause of God's Religion and was day and night absorbed in this great mission. Therefore God took these two problems also officially in His own hand.

The first problem was that economically the Prophet at that time was in straitened circumstances. During the first four years he had no source of income whatever. In 4 A.H. after the banishment of the Banu-Nadhīr a portion of their evacuated lands was reserved for his use by the Command of God but it was not enough for his family requirements. On the other hand the duties of the office of Prophethood were so onerous that they were absorbing all his energies of the mind and body and heart and every moment of his time and he could not make any effort at all for earning his livelihood. In conditions such as these when his wives happened to disturb his mental peace because of economic hardships he would feel doubly strained and taxed. The other problem was that before marrying Zaynab he had four wives already in the houses: Saudah, Ā'isha, Hafsa and Umm Salamah. Zaynab was his fifth wife. At this the opponents raised the objection. The Muslims also started entertaining doubts that as for others it had been forbidden to keep more than four wives at a time but how the Prophet himself had taken a fifth wife also.

### Subject Matter and Topics

These were the questions that were engaging the attention of the Prophet and the Muslims at the time Sūrah Al-Ahzāb was revealed and replies to the same form the subject matter of this Sūrah.

A perusal of the theme and the background shows that the Sūrah is not a single discourse which was sent down in one piece but it consists of several injunctions, commandments and discourses which were sent down one after the other in connection with the important events of the time and then were put together in one Sūrah. Its following parts stand out clearly distinguished from one another:

1. Verses 1-8 seem to have been sent down before the Battle of the Trench. Their perusal keeping the historical background in view shows that at the time of their revelation Zayd had already divorced Zaynab. The Prophet was feeling the necessity that the concepts and customs and superstitions of ignorance concerning the adoption of the son should be eradicated and he was also feeling that the delicate and deep sentiments the people cherished about the adopted relations merely on emotional grounds would not be rooted out until he himself took the initiative to eradicate the custom practically. But at the same time he was hesitant and considering seriously that if he married the divorced wife of Zayd then the hypocrites, the Jews and the polytheists who were already bent on mischief would get a fresh excuse to start a propaganda campaign against Islām. This was the occasion of the revelation of v. 1-8.
2. In verses 9-27 an appraisal has been made of the Battle of the Trench and the raid against the Banū Qurayshah. This is a clear proof that these verses were sent down after these events. The discourse contained in v. 28-35 consists of two parts. In the first part God has given a notice to the wives of the Prophet who were being impatient of the straitened circumstances to the effect: **"..If you should desire the worldly life and its adornment, then come, I will provide for you and give you a gracious release. But if you should desire God and His Messenger and the home of the Hereafter - then indeed, God has prepared for the doers of good among you a great reward."**

3. In the second part initial steps were taken towards the social reforms whose need was being felt by the minds moulded in the Islāmic pattern themselves. In this regard reform was started from the house of the Prophet himself and his wives were commanded to avoid behaving and conducting themselves in the ways of the pre Islāmic days of ignorance to remain in their houses with dignity and to exercise great caution in their conversation with the other men. This was the beginning of the Commandments of the Veil.
4. Verses 36-48 deal with the Prophet's marriage with Zainab. In this section the opponents' objection about this marriage have been answered; the doubts that were being created in the minds of the Muslims have been removed; the Muslims have been acquainted with the Prophet's position and status; and the Prophet himself has been counselled to exercise patience on the false propaganda of the disbelievers and the hypocrites.
5. In verse 49 a clause of the law of divorce has been laid down. This is a unique verse which was sent down on some occasion probably in connection with the same events.
6. In verses 50-52 a special regulation of marriage has been laid down for the Prophet which points out that he is an exception to the several restrictions that have been imposed on the other Muslims in regard to marital life.
7. In verses 53-55 the second step was taken towards social reform. It consists of the following injunctions: Restriction on the other men to visit the houses of the Prophet's wives; Islāmic etiquette concerning visits and invitations; the law that only the near relatives could visit the wives in their houses; as for the other men, they could speak to or ask them a thing from behind a curtain; the injunction that the Prophet's wives were forbidden for the Muslims like their mothers; and none could marry any of them after him.
8. In verses 56-57 warning was given to stop criticizing the Prophet's marriage and his domestic life, and the believers instructed not to indulge in fault finding like the enemies of Islām, but to invoke the blessings of God for their Prophet; moreover, they were instructed that they should avoid falsely accusing one another even among themselves, not to speak of the person of the Prophet.
9. In verse 59 the third step for social reform was taken. All the Muslim women were commanded that they should come out well covered with the outer garments and covering their faces whenever they came out of their houses for a genuine need.

After this till the end of the Sūrah the hypocrites and other foolish and mean people have been rebuked for the propaganda that they were carrying on at that time against Islām and the Muslims.

**Sūrah 33: al-Ahzāb**<sup>1101</sup>

In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate,  
the Most Merciful

1. O Prophet, fear God and do not obey the disbelievers and the hypocrites. Indeed, God is ever Knowing and Wise.
2. And follow that which is revealed to you from your Lord. Indeed God is ever, with what you do, Acquainted.
3. And rely upon God; and sufficient is God as Disposer of affairs.
4. God has not made for a man two hearts in his interior. And He has not made your wives whom you declare unlawful<sup>1102</sup> your mothers. And He has not made your claimed [i.e., adopted] sons your [true] sons. That is [merely] your saying by your mouths, but God says the truth, and He guides to the [right] way.
5. Call them<sup>1103</sup> by [the names of] their fathers; it is more just in the sight of God. But if you do not know their fathers - then they are [still] your brothers in religion and those entrusted to you. And there is no blame upon you for that in which you have erred but [only for] what your hearts intended. And ever is God Forgiving and Merciful.
6. The Prophet is more worthy of the believers than themselves,<sup>1104</sup> and his wives are [in the position of] their mothers. And those of [blood] relationship are more entitled [to inheritance] in the decree of God than the [other] believers and the emigrants, except that you may do to your close associates a kindness [through bequest]. That was in the Book<sup>1105</sup> inscribed.
7. And [mention, O Muhammad], when We took from the prophets their covenant and from you and from Noah and Abraham and Moses and Jesus, the son of Mary; and We took from them a solemn covenant.
8. That He may question the truthful about their truth.<sup>1106</sup> And He has prepared for the disbelievers a painful punishment.
9. O you who have believed, remember the favor of God upon you when armies came to [attack] you and We sent upon them a wind and armies [of angels] you did not see. And ever is God, of what you do, Seeing.
10. [Remember] when they came at you from above you and from below you, and when eyes shifted [in fear], and hearts reached the throats, and you assumed about God [various] assumptions.

<sup>1101</sup> *Al-Aḥzāb*: The Companies or The Combined Forces, referring to the alliance of disbelieving Arab tribes against the Muslims in Madinah for the battle called "*al-Aḥzāb*" or "*al-Kbunduq*" (the Trench).

<sup>1102</sup> By the expression "You are to me like the back of my mother." Such an oath taken against approaching one's wife was a pre-Islāmic practice declared by God to be a sin requiring expiation as described in 58:3-4.

<sup>1103</sup> Those children under your care.

<sup>1104</sup> He is more worthy of their obedience and loyalty and is more concerned for them than they are for one another.

<sup>1105</sup> The Preserved Slate (*al-Lawḥ al-Mahfūḥ*).

<sup>1106</sup> i.e., that He may ask the prophets what they conveyed to their people and what response they received. "The truthful" may also refer to those who believed in the message conveyed by the prophets and imparted it to others.



11. There the believers were tested and shaken with a severe shaking.
12. And [remember] when the hypocrites and those in whose hearts is disease said, "God and His Messenger did not promise us except delusion,"
13. And when a faction of them said, "O people of Yathrib,<sup>1107</sup> there is no stability for you [here], so return [home]." And a party of them asked permission of the Prophet, saying, "Indeed, our houses are exposed [i.e., unprotected], while they were not exposed. They did not intend except to flee.
14. And if they had been entered upon from all its [surrounding] regions and fitnah [i.e., disbelief] had been demanded of them, they would have done it and not hesitated over it except briefly.
15. And they had already promised God before not to turn their backs [i.e., flee]. And ever is the promise to God [that about which one will be] questioned.
16. Say, [O Muhammad], "Never will fleeing benefit you if you should flee from death or killing; and then [if you did], you would not be given enjoyment [of life] except for a little."
17. Say, "Who is it that can protect you from God<sup>1108</sup> if He intends for you an ill or intends for you a mercy?" And they will not find for themselves besides God any protector or any helper.
18. Already God knows the hinderers<sup>1109</sup> among you and those [hypocrites] who say to their brothers, "Come to us,"<sup>1110</sup> and do not go to battle, except for a few,<sup>1111</sup>
19. Indisposed<sup>1112</sup> toward you. And when fear comes, you see them looking at you, their eyes revolving like one being overcome by death. But when fear departs, they lash you with sharp tongues, indisposed toward [any] good. Those have not believed, so God has rendered their deeds worthless, and ever is that, for God, easy.
20. They think the companies have not [yet] withdrawn.<sup>1113</sup> And if the companies should come [again], they would wish they were in the desert among the bedouins, inquiring [from afar] about your news. And if they should be among you, they would not fight except for a little.
21. There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of God an excellent pattern<sup>1114</sup> for anyone whose hope is in God and the Last Day and [who] remembers God often.
22. And when the believers saw the companies, they said, "This is what God and His Messenger had promised us, and God and His Messenger spoke the truth." And it increased them only in faith and acceptance.

<sup>1107</sup> The name by which al-Madinah was known before the arrival of the Prophet.

<sup>1108</sup> i.e., prevent the will of God from being carried out.

<sup>1109</sup> Those who dissuade others from supporting the Prophet in battle.

<sup>1110</sup> Rather than joining the Prophet.

<sup>1111</sup> Who went out of ulterior motives.

<sup>1112</sup> Literally, "stingy," i.e., unwilling to offer any help.

<sup>1113</sup> In their excessive fear the cowardly hypocrites could not believe the enemy forces had been defeated.

<sup>1114</sup> An example to be followed.

23. Among the believers are men true to what they promised God. Among them is he who has fulfilled his vow [to the death], and among them is he who awaits [his chance]. And they did not alter [the terms of their commitment] by any alteration -
24. That God may reward the truthful for their truth and punish the hypocrites if He wills or accept their repentance. Indeed, God is ever Forgiving and Merciful.
25. And God repelled those who disbelieved, in their rage, not having obtained any good. And sufficient was God for the believers in battle, and ever is God Powerful and Exalted in Might.
26. And He brought down those who supported them among the People of the Scripture<sup>1115</sup> from their fortresses and cast terror into their hearts [so that] a party [i.e., their men] you killed, and you took captive a party [i.e., the women and children].
27. And He caused you to inherit their land and their homes and their properties and a land which you have not trodden.<sup>1116</sup> And ever is God, over all things, competent.
28. O Prophet, say to your wives, “If you should desire the worldly life and its adornment, then come, I will provide for you and give you a gracious release.
29. But if you should desire God and His Messenger and the home of the Hereafter - then indeed, God has prepared for the doers of good among you a great reward.”
30. O wives of the Prophet, whoever of you should commit a clear immorality - for her the punishment would be doubled two fold, and ever is that, for God, easy.
31. And whoever of you devoutly obeys God and His Messenger and does righteousness - We will give her her reward twice; and We have prepared for her a noble provision.
32. O wives of the Prophet, you are not like anyone among women. If you fear God, then do not be soft in speech [to men],<sup>1117</sup> lest he in whose heart is disease should covet, but speak with appropriate speech.
33. And abide in your houses and do not display yourselves as [was] the display of the former times of ignorance. And establish prayer and give zakāh and obey God and His Messenger. God intends only to remove from you the impurity [of sin], O people of the [Prophet’s] household, and to purify you with [extensive] purification.
34. And remember what is recited in your houses of the verses of God and wisdom.<sup>1118</sup> Indeed, God is ever Subtle and Acquainted [with all things].
35. Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and

<sup>1115</sup> The Jews of Banū Qurayyah, who had violated their treaty with the Muslims.

<sup>1116</sup> i.e., that taken in subsequent conquests.

<sup>1117</sup> The meaning has also been given as “You are not like any among women if you fear God. So do not be soft in speech...”

<sup>1118</sup> The teachings of the Prophet or his *sunnah* (sayings and practices).

- patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember God often and the women who do so - for them God has prepared forgiveness and a great reward.
36. It is not for a believing man or a believing woman, when God and His Messenger have decided a matter, that they should [thereafter] have any choice about their affair. And whoever disobeys God and His Messenger has certainly strayed into clear error.
37. And [remember, O Muhammad], when you said to the one on whom God bestowed favor and you bestowed favor,<sup>1119</sup> "Keep your wife and fear God," while you concealed within yourself that which God is to disclose.<sup>1120</sup> And you feared the people,<sup>1121</sup> while God has more right that you fear Him.<sup>1122</sup> So when Zayd had no longer any need for her, We married her to you in order that there not be upon the believers any discomfort [i.e., guilt] concerning the wives of their claimed [i.e., adopted] sons when they no longer have need of them. And ever is the command [i.e., decree] of God accomplished.
38. There is not to be upon the Prophet any discomfort concerning that which God has imposed upon him.<sup>1123</sup> [This is] the established way of God with those [prophets] who have passed on before. And ever is the command of God a destiny decreed.
39. [God praises] those who convey the messages of God<sup>1124</sup> and fear Him and do not fear anyone but God. And sufficient is God as Accountant.
40. Muhammad is not the father of [any] one of your men, but [he is] the Messenger of God and seal [i.e., last] of the prophets. And ever is God, of all things, Knowing.
41. O you who have believed, remember God with much remembrance
42. And exalt Him morning and afternoon.
43. It is He who confers blessing upon you,<sup>1125</sup> and His angels [ask Him to do so] that He may bring you out from darknesses into the light. And ever is He, to the believers, Merciful.
44. Their greeting the Day they meet Him will be, "Peace." And He has prepared for them a noble reward.
45. O Prophet, indeed We have sent you as a witness and a bringer of good tidings and a warner.

<sup>1119</sup> Referring to the Prophet's freed slave, Zayd bin Hārithah.

<sup>1120</sup> i.e., God's command to the Prophet to marry Zaynab after Zayd divorced her. This was to demonstrate that a man may marry a woman formally married to his adopted son.

<sup>1121</sup> i.e., feared their saying that the Prophet had married the (former) wife of his son (which is prohibited by God in the case if a true, begotten son).

<sup>1122</sup> By making known His command.

<sup>1123</sup> Or permitted to him.

<sup>1124</sup> i.e., the prophets (peace be upon them all) and after them, the followers of the final prophet, Muhammad, who honestly convey God's message to the people.

<sup>1125</sup> i.e., God cares for you and covers you with His mercy. An additional meaning is that He praises you in the presence of the angels.

46. And one who invites to God, by His permission, and an illuminating lamp.
47. And give good tidings to the believers that they will have from God great bounty.
48. And do not obey the disbelievers and the hypocrites but do not harm them, and rely upon God. And sufficient is God as Disposer of affairs.
49. O you who have believed, when you marry believing women and then divorce them before you have touched them [i.e., consummated the marriage], then there is not for you any waiting period to count concerning them. So provide for them and give them a gracious release.
50. O Prophet, indeed We have made lawful to you your wives to whom you have given their due compensation<sup>1126</sup> and those your right hand possesses from what God has returned to you [of captives] and the daughters of your paternal uncles and the daughters of your paternal aunts and the daughters of your maternal uncles and the daughters of your maternal aunts who emigrated with you and a believing woman if she gives herself to the Prophet [and] if the Prophet wishes to marry her, [this is] only for you, excluding the [other] believers. We certainly know what We have made obligatory upon them concerning their wives and those their right hands possess, [but this is for you] in order that there will be upon you no discomfort [i.e., difficulty]. And ever is God Forgiving and Merciful.
51. You, [O Muhammad], may put aside whom you will of them<sup>1127</sup> or take to yourself whom you will. And any that you desire of those [wives] from whom you had [temporarily] separated - there is no blame upon you [in returning her]. That is more suitable that they should be content and not grieve and that they should be satisfied with what you have given them - all of them. And God knows what is in your hearts. And ever is God Knowing and Forbearing.
52. Not lawful to you, [O Muhammad], are [any additional] women after [this], nor [is it] for you to exchange them for [other] wives, even if their beauty were to please you, except what your right hand possesses. And ever is God, over all things, an Observer.
53. O you who have believed, do not enter the houses of the Prophet except when you are permitted for a meal, without awaiting its readiness. But when you are invited, then enter; and when you have eaten, disperse without seeking to remain for conversation. Indeed, that [behavior] was troubling the Prophet, and he is shy of [dismissing] you. But God is not shy of the truth. And when you ask [his wives] for something, ask them from behind a partition. That is purer for your hearts and their hearts. And it is not [conceivable or lawful] for you to harm the Messenger of God or to marry his wives after him, ever. Indeed, that would be in the sight of God an enormity.
54. Whether you reveal a thing or conceal it, indeed God is ever, of all things, Knowing.

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<sup>1126</sup> i.e., bridal gifts (*mahr*).

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<sup>1127</sup> Those mentioned in the previous verse as being lawful to the Prophet or his wives to which he was married.

55. There is no blame upon them [i.e., women] concerning their fathers or their sons or their brothers or their brothers' sons or their sisters' sons or their women or those their right hands possess [i.e., slaves].<sup>1128</sup> And fear God. Indeed God is ever, over all things, Witness.
56. Indeed, God confers blessing upon the Prophet, and His angels [ask Him to do so]. O you who have believed, ask [God to confer] blessing upon him and ask [God to grant him] peace.
57. Indeed, those who abuse God and His Messenger - God has cursed them in this world and the Hereafter and prepared for them a humiliating punishment.
58. And those who harm believing men and believing women for [something] other than what they have earned [i.e., deserved] have certainly born upon themselves a slander and manifest sin.
59. O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves [part] of their outer garments.<sup>1129</sup> That is more suitable that they will be known<sup>1130</sup> and not be abused. And ever is God Forgiving and Merciful.<sup>1131</sup>
60. If the hypocrites and those in whose hearts is disease<sup>1132</sup> and those who spread rumors in al-Madīnah do not cease, We will surely incite you against them; then they will not remain your neighbors therein except for a little.
61. Accursed wherever they are found, [being] seized and massacred completely.
62. [This is] the established way of God with those who passed on before; and you will not find in the way of God any change.
63. People ask you concerning the Hour. Say, "Knowledge of it is only with God. And what may make you perceive? Perhaps the Hour is near."
64. Indeed, God has cursed the disbelievers and prepared for them a Blaze.
65. Abiding therein forever, they will not find a protector or a helper.
66. The Day their faces will be turned about in the Fire, they will say, "How we wish we had obeyed God and obeyed the Messenger."
67. And they will say, "Our Lord, indeed we obeyed our masters and our dignitaries,<sup>1133</sup> and they led us astray from the [right] way.
68. Our Lord, give them double the punishment and curse them with a great curse."
69. O you who have believed, be not like those who abused Moses; then God

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<sup>1128</sup> It is permissible for a woman to appear before these people without complete covering and to be alone with them. The brothers of both parents (uncles) are included as "fathers" or "parents," according to *hadith*.

<sup>1129</sup> The *jilbab*, which is defined as a cloak covering the head and reaching to the ground, thereby covering the woman's entire body.

<sup>1130</sup> As chaste believing women.

<sup>1131</sup> Or "and God was forgiving and Merciful" of what occurred before this injunction or before knowledge of it.

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<sup>1132</sup> Referring here to those who commit adultery or fornication.

<sup>1133</sup> Also interpreted to mean "our noble ones and our elders [i.e., distinguished scholars]."

cleared him of what they said. And he, in the sight of God, was distinguished.

70. O you who have believed, fear God and speak words of appropriate justice.
71. He will [then] amend for you your deeds and forgive you your sins. And whoever obeys God and His Messenger has certainly attained a great attainment.
72. Indeed, We offered the Trust<sup>1134</sup> to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man [undertook to] bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant.<sup>1135</sup>
73. [It<sup>1136</sup> was] so that God may punish the hypocrite men and hypocrite women and the men and women who associate others with Him and that God may accept repentance from the believing men and believing women. And ever is God Forgiving and Merciful.

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<sup>1134</sup> The acceptance of obligations and obedience to God.

<sup>1135</sup> Coveting its reward while forgetting the penalty for failure to keep his commitment.

<sup>1136</sup> The reason for which mankind was permitted to carry the Trust.