

Sūrah 48: al-Fath

Period of Revelation

Hadīth concur that it was sent down in Dhul Qa'dah, 6 A.H., at a time when the Prophet was on his return journey to Madinah after concluding the Truce of Hudaibiyah with the disbelievers of Makkah.

Historical Background

The events in connection with which this Sūrah was sent down began life like this: One day the Prophet saw in a dream that he had gone to Makkah with his Companions and had performed the Umrah (smaller pilgrimage) there. Obviously, the Prophet's dream could not be a mere dream and fiction for it is a kind of Divine inspiration as God Himself has confirmed in verse 27 below and said that He Himself had shown that dream to His Messenger. Therefore, it was not merely a dream but a Divine inspiration which the Prophet had to obey and follow.

Apparently, there was no possible way of acting on this inspiration. The disbelieving Quraysh had debarred the Muslims from proceeding to the Ka'bāh for the past six years and no Muslim had been allowed during that period to approach the Ka'bāh for the purpose of performing Hajj and Umrah. Therefore, it could not be expected that they would allow the Prophet to enter Makkah along with a party of his Companions. If they had proceeded to Makkah in the pilgrim garments with the intention of performing umrah, along with their arms, this would have provoked the enemy to war, and if they had proceeded unarmed, this would have meant endangering his own as well as his Companions' lives. Under conditions such as these nobody could see and suggest how the Divine inspiration could be acted upon.

But the Prophet's position was different. It demanded that he should carry out whatever Command his Lord gave fearlessly and without any apprehension and doubt. Therefore, the Prophet informed his Companions of his dream and began to make preparations for the journey. Among the tribes living in the suburbs also he had the public announcement made that he was proceeding for umrah and the people could join him. Those who could only see the apparent conditions thought that he and his Companions were going into the very jaws of death and none of them therefore was inclined to accompany him in the expedition. But those who had true faith in God and His Messenger were least bothered about the consequences. For them this information was enough that it was a Divine inspiration and God's Prophet had made up his mind to carry it into effect. After this nothing could hinder them from accompanying the Messenger of God. Thus, 1,400 of the Companions became ready to follow him on this highly dangerous journey.

This blessed caravan set off from Madinah in the beginning of Dhul Qa'dah, 6 A.H. At Dhul Hulaifah they entered the pilgrims robe with the intention of Umrah, took 70 camels with collars round their necks indicating that they were sacrificial animals; kept only a sword each in sheaths, which the pilgrims to the Ka'bāh were allowed to carry according to the recognized custom of Arabia, but no other weapon. Thus, the caravan set out for the Ka'bāh, the House of God, at Makkah, chanting the prescribed slogan of '*Labbaik, Allahuma labbaik.*' (I respond to you O God I respond to you)

The nature of the relations between Makkah and Madinah in those days was known too well to every Arab. Just the previous year, in Shawwal 5 A.H., the Quraysh mustering the united strength of the Arab tribes had invaded Madinah and the well known Battle of the Trench had taken place. Therefore, when the Prophet along with such a large caravan set off for the home of his blood-thirsty enemy, the whole of Arabia looked up with amazement, and the people also noticed that the caravan was not going with the intention to fight but was proceeding to the House of God in a forbidden month in the pilgrims garb carrying sacrificial animals and was absolutely unarmed.

The Quraysh were confounded at this bold step taken by the Prophet. Dhul Qa'dah was one of those forbidden months which had been held as sacred for pilgrimage in Arabia for centuries. Nobody had a right to interfere with a caravan which might be coming for Hajj or Umrah in the pilgrims garb in this month; so much so that even an enemy tribe could not hinder it from passing through its territory according to the recognized law of the land. The Quraysh therefore were caught in a dilemma, for if they attacked this caravan from Madinah and stopped it from entering Makkah, this would arouse a clamor of protest in the whole country, and all the Arab tribes would have the misgiving that the Quraysh had monopolized the Ka'bāh as exclusively their own, and every tribe would be involved in the mistrust that now it depended on the will of the Quraysh to allow or not to allow anyone to perform Hajj or Umrah in the future and that they would stop any tribe with which they were angry from visiting the Ka'bāh just as they had stopped the Madinese pilgrims. This they thought would be a grave mistake, which would cause the entire Arabia to revolt against them. But, on the other hand, if they allowed Muhammad and his large caravan to enter their city safely, they would lose their image of power in Arabia and the people would say that they were afraid of Muhammad. At last, after a great deal of confusion, perplexity and hesitation they were overcome by their false sense of honour and for the sake of their prestige they took the decision that they would at no cost allow the caravan to enter the city of Makkah.

The Prophet had despatched a man of the Bani Ka'b as a secret agent so that he may keep him fully informed of the intentions and movements of the Quraysh. When the Prophet reached Usfan, he brought the news that the Quraysh had reached Dhi Tuwa with full preparations and they had sent Khalid bin Walid with two hundred cavalry men in advance towards Kura'al-Ghamim to intercept him. The Quraysh wanted somehow to provoke the Prophet's Companions into fighting so that they may tell the Arabs that those people had actually come to fight and had put on the pilgrims garments for Umrah only to deceive others.

Immediately on receipt of this information the Prophet changed his route and following a very rugged, rocky track reached Hudaibiyah, which was situated right on the boundary of the sacred Makkkan territory. Here, he was visited by Budail bin Warqa the chief of the Bani Khuza'ah, along with some men of his tribe. They asked what he had come for. The Prophet replied that he and his Companions had come only for pilgrimage to the House of God and for going round it in worship and not for war. The men of Khuza'ah went and told this to the Quraysh chiefs and counseled them not to interfere with the pilgrims. But the Quraysh were obstinate. They sent Hulays bin Alqamah, the chief of the Ahabish, to the Prophet to persuade him to go back. Their object was that when Muhammad would not listen to Hulays, he would come back disappointed and then the entire power of the Ahabish would be on their side. But when Hulays went and saw that the whole caravan had put on the pilgrims garments, had brought sacrificial camels with festive collars round their necks, and had come for doing reverence to the House of God and not to fight, he returned to Makkah without having any dialogue with the Prophet and told the Quraysh chiefs plainly that those people had no other object but to pay a visit to the Ka'bāh; if they debarred them from it, the Ahabish would not join them in that, because they had not become their allies to support them even if they violated the sacred customs and traditions.

Then the Quraysh sent Urwah bin Mas'ud Thaqafi; he had lengthy negotiations with the Prophet in an effort to persuade him to give up his intention to enter Makkah. But the Prophet gave him also the same reply that he had given to the chief of the Khuza'ah, that they had not come to fight but to do honour to the House of God and carry out a religious duty. Urwah went back and said to the Quraysh: *"I have been to the courts of the Caesar and Khosroes, and the Negus also, but by God, never have I seen any people so devoted to a king as are the Companions of Muhammad to him. If Muhammad makes his ablutions they would not let the water thereof fall on the ground but would rub it on their bodies and clothes. Now you may decide as to what you should do."*

In the meantime when the messages were coming and the negotiations were going on, the Quraysh tried again and again to quietly launch sudden attacks on the Muslim camp in order to provoke the Companions and somehow incite them to war, but every time they did so the Companions' forbearance and patience and the Prophet's wisdom and sagacity frustrated their designs. On one occasion forty or fifty of their men came

at night and attacked the Muslim camp with stones and arrows. The Companions arrested all of them and took them before the Prophet, but he let them go. On another occasion 80 men came from the direction of Tan'im right at the time of the Fajr Prayer and made a sudden attack. They were also caught, but the Prophet forgave them, too. Thus, the Quraysh went on meeting failure after failure in every one of their designs.

At last, the Prophet sent Uthman as his own messenger to Makkah with the message that they had not come to fight but only for pilgrimage and had brought their sacrificial camels along, and they would go back after performing the rite of pilgrimage and offering the sacrifice. But the Quraysh did not agree and withheld Uthman in the city. In the meantime a rumor spread that Uthman had been killed; and when he did not return in time the Muslims took the rumor to be true. Now they could show no more forbearance. Entry into Makkah was different for there was no intention to use force. But when the ambassador was put to death, the Muslims had no alternative but to prepare for war. Therefore, the Prophet summoned all his Companions together and took a solemn pledge from them that they would fight to death. In view of the critical occasion it was not an ordinary undertaking. The Muslims numbered only 1,400 and had come without any weapons, were encamping at the boundary of Makkah, 250 miles away from their own city, and the enemy could attack them in full strength, and could surround them with its allies from the adjoining tribes as well. In spite of this, none from the caravan except one man failed to give his pledge to fight to death, and there could be no greater proof of their dedication and sincerity than that in the cause of God. This pledge is well known in the history of Islām as the pledge of Ridwan.

Later it was known that the news about Uthman was false. Not only did he return but under Suhail bin 'Amr from the Quraysh also arrived a deputation to negotiate peace with the Prophet. Now, the Quraysh no more insisted that they would disallow the Prophet and his Companions to enter Makkah. However, in order to save their face they only insisted that he went back that year but could come the following year to perform the umrah. After lengthy negotiations peace was concluded on the following terms:

1. War would remain suspended for ten years, and no party would indulge in any hostility, open or secret, against the other.
2. If any one during that period from among the Quraysh went over to Muhammad, without his guardian's permission, he would return him to them, but if a Companion of Muhammad came over to the Quraysh, they would not return him to him.
3. Every Arab tribe would have the option to join either side as its ally and enter the treaty.
4. Muhammad and his men would go back that year and could come the following year for Umrah and stay in Makkah for three days, provided that they brought only one sheathed sword each, and no other weapon of war. In those three days the Makkans would vacate the city for them (so that there was no chance of a clash), but they would not be allowed to take along any Makkan on return. When the conditions of the treaty were being settled, the whole of the Muslim army was feeling greatly upset. No one understood the expedience because of which the Prophet was accepting the conditions. No one was farsighted enough to foresee the great benefit that was to result from this treaty. The disbelieving Quraysh looked at it as their victory, and the Muslims were upset as to why they should be humiliated to accepting those mean conditions. Even a statesman of the caliber of Umar says that he had never given way to doubt since the time he had embraced Islām but on this occasion he also could not avoid it. Impatient he went to Abu Bakr and said *"Is he (the Prophet) not God's Messenger, and are we not Muslims, and are they not polytheists? Then, why should we agree to what is humiliating to our Faith?"* He replied *"O Umar, he is surely God's Messenger, and God will never make him the loser."* Unsatisfied he went to the Prophet himself and put the same questions to him, and he also gave him the same replies as Abu Bakr had given. Afterwards Umar continued to offer voluntary prayers and give alms so that God may pardon his insolence that he had shown on that occasion.

Two things in the treaty were highly disturbing for the Muslims first, the second condition, about which they said that it was an expressly unfair condition, for if they had to return a fugitive from Makkah, why should not the Quraysh return a fugitive from Madinah? To this the Prophet replied: *"What use would be he to us, who*

fled from us to them? May God keep him away from us! And if we return the one who flees to us from them, God will create some other way out for him." The other thing that was rankling in their minds was the fourth condition. The Muslims thought that agreeing to it meant that they were going back unsuccessful and this was humiliating. Furthermore, the question that was causing them to feel upset was that they had accepted the condition of going back without performing the pilgrimage to the Ka'bāh, whereas the Prophet had seen in the vision that they were performing tawaf at Makkah. To this the Prophet replied that in his vision the year had not been specified. According to the treaty conditions, therefore, they would perform the Tawaf (encircling of the Ka'bāh) the following year if it pleased God.

Right at the time when the document was being written, Suhail bin 'Amr's own son, Abu Jandal, who had become a Muslim and been imprisoned by the pagans of Makkah somehow escaped to the Prophet's camp. He had fetters on his feet and signs of violence on his body. He implored the Prophet that he help secure his release from imprisonment. The scene only increased the Companions' dejection, and they were moved beyond control. But Suhail bin 'Amr said the conditions of the agreement had been concluded between them although the writing was not yet complete; therefore, the boy should be returned to them. The Prophet admitted his argument and Abu Jandal was returned to his oppressors.

When the document was finished, the Prophet spoke to the Companions and told them to slaughter their sacrificial animals at that very place, shave their heads and put off the pilgrim garments, but no one moved from his place. The Prophet repeated the order thrice but the Companions were so overcome by depression and dejection that they did not comply. During his entire period of apostleship on no occasion had it ever happened that he should command his Companions to do a thing and they should not hasten to comply with it. This caused him a great shock, and he repaired to his tent and expressed his grief before his wife, Umm Salamah. She said, "*You may quietly go and slaughter your own camel and call the barber and have your head shaved. After that the people would automatically do what you did and would understand that whatever decision had been taken would not be changed.*" Precisely the same thing happened. The people slaughtered their animals, shaved their heads or cut their hair short and put off the pilgrim garb, but their hearts were still afflicted with grief.

Later, when this caravan was returning to Madinah, feeling depressed and dejected at the truce of Hudai-biyah, this Sūrah came down at Dajnan (or according to some others, at Kura' al-Ghamim), which told the Muslims that the treaty that they were regarding as their defeat, was indeed a great victory. After it had come down, the Prophet summoned the Muslims together and said: "*Today such a thing has been sent down to me, which is more valuable to me than the world and what it contains.*" Then he recited this Sūrah, especially to Umar, for he was the one who was feeling most dejected.

Although the believers were satisfied when they heard this Divine Revelation, not much longer afterwards the advantages of this treaty began to appear one after the other until every one became fully convinced that this peace treaty indeed was a great victory:

1. In it for the first time the existence of the Islāmic State in Arabia was duly recognized. Before this in the eyes of the Arabs the position of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions was no more than of mere rebels against the Quraysh and other Arab tribes, and they regarded them as the outlaws. Now the Quraysh themselves by concluding this agreement with the Prophet recognized his sovereignty over the territories of the Islāmic State and opened the way for the Arab tribes to enter treaties of alliance with either of the political powers they liked.
2. By admitting the right of pilgrimage to the House of God for the Muslims, the Quraysh also admitted that Islām was not an anti-religious creed, as they had so far been thinking, but it was one of the admitted religions of Arabia, and like the other Arabs, its followers also had the right to perform the rites of Hajj and Umrah. This diminished the hatred in the Arabs hearts that had been caused by the propaganda made by the Quraysh against Islām.
3. The signing of a no-war pact for ten years provided full peace to the Muslims, and spreading to every nook and corner of Arabia they preached Islām with such spirit and speed that within two

years after Hudaibiyah the number of the people who embraced Islām far exceeded those who had embraced it during the past 19 years or so. It was all due to this treaty that two years later when in consequence of the Quraysh's violating the treaty the Prophet invaded Makkah, he was accompanied by an army 10,000 strong, whereas on the occasion of Hudaibiyah only 1,400 men had joined him in the march.

4. After the suspension of hostilities by the Quraysh the Prophet had the opportunity to establish and strengthen Islāmic rule in the territories under him and to turn the Islāmic society into a full fledged civilization and way of life by the enforcement of Islāmic law.
5. Another gain that accrued from the truce with the Quraysh was that being assured of peace from the south the Muslims overpowered all the opponent forces in the north and central Arabia easily. Just three months after Hudaibiyah, Khaiber, the major stronghold of the Jews, was conquered and after it the Jewish settlements of Fadak, Wad-il Qura, Taima and Tabūk also fell to Islām one after the other. Then all other tribes of central Arabia, which were bound in alliance with the Jews and Quraysh, came under the sway of Islām. Thus, within two years after Hudaibiyah the balance of power in Arabia was so changed that the strength of the Quraysh and pagan gave way and the domination of Islām became certain.

These were the blessings that the Muslims gained from the peace treaty which they were looking upon as their defeat and the Quraysh as their victory. However, what had troubled the Muslims most in this treaty, was the condition about the fugitives from Makkah and Madinah, that the former would be returned and the latter would not be returned. But not much long afterwards this condition also proved to be disadvantageous for the Quraysh, and experience revealed what far reaching consequences of it had the Prophet foreseen and then accepted it. A few days after the treaty a Muslim of Makkah, Abu Basir, escaped from the Quraysh and reached Madinah. The Quraysh demanded him back and the Prophet returned him to their men who had been sent from Makkah to arrest him. But while on the way to Makkah he again fled and went and sat on the road by the Red Sea shore, which the trade caravans of the Quraysh took to Syria. After that every Muslim who succeeded in escaping from the Quraysh would go and join Abu Basir instead of going to Madinah, until 70 men gathered there. They would attack any Quraysh caravan that passed the way and cut it into pieces at last, the Quraysh themselves begged the Prophet to call those men to Madinah, and the condition relating to the return of the fugitives of itself became null and void. The Sūrah should be read with this historical background in view in order to fully understand it.

Sūrah 48: al-Fath¹⁴⁰³

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

1. Indeed, We have given you, [O Muhammad], a clear conquest¹⁴⁰⁴
2. That God may forgive for you what preceded of your sin [i.e., errors] and what will follow and complete His favor upon you and guide you to a straight path
3. And [that] God may aid you with a mighty victory.
4. It is He who sent down tranquillity into the hearts of the believers that they would increase in faith along with their [present] faith. And to God belong the soldiers of the heavens and the earth, and ever is God Knowing and Wise.
5. [And] that He may admit the believing men and the believing women to gardens beneath which rivers flow to abide therein eternally and remove from them their misdeeds - and ever is that, in the sight of God, a great attainment -
6. And [that] He may punish the hypocrite men and hypocrite women, and the polytheist men and polytheist women - those who assume about God an assumption of evil nature. Upon them is a misfortune of evil nature; and God has become angry with them and

has cursed them and prepared for them Hell, and evil it is as a destination.

7. And to God belong the soldiers of the heavens and the earth. And ever is God Exalted in Might and Wise.
8. Indeed, We have sent you as a witness and a bringer of good tidings and a warner
9. That you [people] may believe in God and His Messenger and honour him and respect him [i.e., the Prophet] and exalt Him [i.e., God] morning and afternoon.
10. Indeed, those who pledge allegiance to you, [O Muhammad] - they are actually pledging allegiance to God. The hand¹⁴⁰⁵ of God is over their hands.¹⁴⁰⁶ So he who breaks his word only breaks it to the detriment of himself. And he who fulfills that which he has promised God - He will give him a great reward.
11. Those who remained behind of the bedouins will say to you, "Our properties and our families occupied us, so ask forgiveness for us." They say with their tongues what is not within their hearts. Say, "Then who could prevent God at all if He intended for you harm or intended for you benefit? Rather, ever is God, with what you do, Acquainted.
12. But you thought that the Messenger and the believers would never return to their families, ever, and that was made pleasing in your hearts. And you assumed an assumption of evil and became a people ruined."

¹⁴⁰³ *Al-Fath*: The Conquest.

¹⁴⁰⁴ Ibn Mas'ud said, "You [people] consider the conquest to be that of Makkah, but we consider it to be the Treaty of al-Hudaybiyyah." Al Bukhārī reported a similar quotation from al-Barā' bin 'Āzib. Although initially regarded by the companions as a setback, the treaty, in effect, served to promote the spread of Islām, which led to the conquest of Makkah two years later.

¹⁴⁰⁵ See footnote to 2:19.

¹⁴⁰⁶ Meaning that He (Almighty) accepted their pledge.

13. And whoever has not believed in God and His Messenger - then indeed, We have prepared for the disbelievers a Blaze.
14. And to God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. He forgives whom He wills and punishes whom He wills. And ever is God Forgiving and Merciful.
15. Those who remained behind will say when you set out toward the war booty to take it, "Let us follow you." They wish to change the words of God. Say, "Never will you follow us. Thus did God say before." So they will say, "Rather, you envy us." But [in fact] they were not understanding except a little.¹⁴⁰⁷
16. Say to those who remained behind of the bedouins, "You will be called to [face] a people of great military might; you may fight them, or they will submit.¹⁴⁰⁸ So if you obey, God will give you a good reward; but if you turn away as you turned away before, He will punish you with a painful punishment."
17. There is not upon the blind any guilt or upon the lame any guilt or upon the ill any guilt [for remaining behind]. And whoever obeys God and His Messenger - He will admit him to gardens beneath which rivers flow; but whoever turns away - He will punish him with a painful punishment.
18. Certainly was God pleased with the believers when they pledged allegiance to you, [O Muhammad], under the tree,
- and He knew what was in their hearts, so He sent down tranquillity upon them and rewarded them with an imminent conquest¹⁴⁰⁹
19. And much war booty which they will take. And ever is God Exalted in Might and Wise.
20. God has promised you much booty that you will take [in the future] and has hastened for you this [victory] and withheld the hands of people from you - that it may be a sign for the believers and [that] He may guide you to a straight path.
21. And [He promises] other [victories] that you were [so far] unable to [realize] which God has already encompassed.¹⁴¹⁰ And ever is God, over all things, competent.
22. And if those [Makkans] who disbelieve had fought you, they would have turned their backs [in flight]. Then they would not find a protector or a helper.
23. [This is] the established way of God which has occurred before. And never will you find in the way of God any change.
24. And it is He who withheld their hands from you and your hands from them within [the area of] Makkah after He caused you to overcome them. And ever is God of what you do, Seeing.
25. They are the ones who disbelieved and obstructed you from al-Masjid al-Harām while the offering¹⁴¹¹ was pre-

¹⁴⁰⁷ i.e., they only understood the material aspects of life.

¹⁴⁰⁸ To God in Islām.

¹⁴⁰⁹ That of Khaybar, which preceded the conquest of Makkah.

¹⁴¹⁰ i.e., prepared for you or decreed.

¹⁴¹¹ i.e., seventy camels intended for sacrifice and feeding of the poor.

vented from reaching its place of sacrifice. And if not for believing men and believing women whom you did not know - that you might trample [i.e., kill] them and there would befall you because of them dishonour without [your] knowledge - [you would have been permitted to enter Makkah]. [This was so] that God might admit to His mercy whom He willed. If they had been apart [from them], We would have punished those who disbelieved among them with painful punishment

mark [i.e., sign] is on their faces [i.e., foreheads] from the trace of prostration. That is their description in the Torah. And their description in the Gospel is as a plant which produces its offshoots and strengthens them so they grow firm and stand upon their stalks, delighting the sowers - so that He [i.e., God] may enrage by them¹⁴¹³ the disbelievers. God has promised those who believe and do righteous deeds among them forgiveness and a great reward.

26. When those who disbelieved had put into their hearts chauvinism - the chauvinism of the time of ignorance. But God sent down His tranquillity upon His Messenger and upon the believers and imposed upon them the word of righteousness, and they were more deserving of it and worthy of it. And ever is God, of all things, Knowing.
27. Certainly has God showed to His Messenger the vision [i.e., dream] in truth. You will surely enter al-Masjid al-Harām, if God wills, in safety, with your heads shaved and [hair] shortened,¹⁴¹² not fearing [anyone]. He knew what you did not know and has arranged before that a conquest near [at hand].
28. It is He who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to manifest it over all religion. And sufficient is God as Witness.
29. Muhammad is the Messenger of God; and those with him are forceful against the disbelievers, merciful among themselves. You see them bowing and prostrating [in prayer], seeking bounty from God and [His] pleasure. Their

¹⁴¹² i.e., having completed the rites of *‘umrah*.

¹⁴¹³ The given examples depict the Prophet and his companions.