

## Section 6: The Tabuk Expedition

### Surah At-Tawbah – Verse 38

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَا لَكُمْ إِذَا قِيلَ لَكُمْ انفِرُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَثَابْلَتُمُ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ  
أَرْضِيْتُمْ بِالْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا مِنَ الْآخِرَةِ فَمَا مَتَاعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا فِي الْآخِرَةِ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ

38. “O’ you who have Faith! What (excuse) have you that when it is said to you: ‘Go forth in Allah’s way’, you should incline heavily to the ground? Are you contented with the life of this world instead of the Hereafter? But the enjoyment of the life of this world, compared with the Hereafter, is but little.”

#### Occasion of Revelation

It has been narrated by Ibn-‘Abb s, as well as some others, that this verse and the verse after it have been sent down about the ‘Battle of Tab k’.

Some Islamic narrations indicate that the Prophet of Islam (S) usually did not make manifest the war decisions and his final aims concerning them for Muslims before the beginning of war in order that the Islamic martial secrets would not be handed to the enemy.

But, the situation was different about ‘the Battle of Tab k, where in advance he announced clearly that they were going to fight against the Romans. That fight against the Emperor of Eastern Byzantine, of course was not a simple matter, and Muslims should be completely prepared for that great war.

In addition to that, the distance between Medina and the country of the Romans was very long and, all things apart, it was summer, the hot season, and the time of harvest for both corns and fruits.

All these affairs with together made the problem of going toward the battlefield extraordinary difficult for

the Muslims, so much so that some of them showed hesitation in accepting the Prophet's invitation.

It was in those circumstances that these couple of verses were sent down and, with a very sharp and decisive tone, warned Muslims to be aware of danger, and made them ready to participate in that great war.

As it was cited in the occasions of revelation, the abovementioned verse is about the circumstance of the Battle of Tabuk.

Tabuk is a region between Medina and Syria where the bound of Sa'udi Arabia is located now, and, at that time, it was close to the lands of the Emperor of Eastern Byzantine, which was dominated over Syria. This event happened in the ninth A.H. viz. about one year after the occurrence of Mecca Conquest.

With the most intensive manner, the Qur'an invites people unto Holy Struggle. Sometimes it applies some encouraging words, and sometimes some scorning words, and sometimes it threatens them. It addresses people differently and through various ways in order to make them ready. Here, in this verse, at first it says:

**"O' you who have Faith! What (excuse) have you that when it is said to you. 'Go forth in Allah's way', you should incline heavily to the ground?..."**

Then, with a reproaching tone, and, referring to the life of this fleeting world and also the vast eternal life in the coming world, it says:

**"...Are you contented with the life of this world instead of the Hereafter?..."**

Did you do it while the advantages and the amount of the life of this world in comparison with the life in Hereafter is very little? The verse says:

**"...But the enjoyment of the life of this world, compared with the Hereafter, is but little."**

How might a wise person submit such a detrimental exchange? And how does he lose an extraordinary worthy thing for reaching to a worthless little thing?

## **Surah At-Tawbah – Verse 39**

إِلَّا تَنْفِرُوا يُعَذِّبُكُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا وَيَسْتَبْدِلُ قَوْمًا غَيْرَكُمْ وَلَا تَخْرُوْهُ شَيْئًا وَاللَّهُ عَلَىٰ  
كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

**39. "If you do not go forth, He will chastise you with a painful chastisement, and He will substitute in your place a people other than you, and you will not harm Him anything, for Allah is All-Powerful over everything."**

Then, the Qur'an promotes the reproaching tone higher into an earnest form of threat and implies that if Muslims do not move towards the battlefields of Holy Struggle, Allah will punish them with a painful punishment. The verse says:

**"If you do not go forth, He will chastise you with a painful chastisement..."**

So, if they think that by their going aside and turning their backs to the battlefields the wheels of the development of Islam may stop and the light of the religion of Allah will tend to be extinguished, they are in a tremendous error, because Allah can substitute a group of people other than them who will be faithful, decided, and obedient to the command of Allah. The verse says:

**"...and He will substitute in your place a people other than you..."**

These people will be a group of persons who are different from them from any point of view. They will be different from them not only from the view point of personality, but also from the view points of faith, decision, courage, and obedience.

Some commentators believe that this holy phrase is an indication to Iranians or people of Yemen.<sup>1</sup>

Then the verse adds that, by this way, they can not harm anything unto Allah and His pure religion. The verse continues saying:

**"...and you will not harm Him anything, for Allah is All-Powerful over everything."**

This is a reality, not an imaginary utterance, nor an afar hope, because Allah (s.w.t.) is powerful over everything and whenever He will upon the triumph of His pure religion, no doubt, it will happen. The verse ends:

**"...for Allah is All-Powerful over everything."**

## **Surah At-Tawbah – Verse 40**

إِلَّا تَنْصُرُوهُ فَقَدْ نَصَرَهُ اللَّهُ إِذَا أَخْرَجَهُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا ثَانِيَ اثْنَيْنِ إِذْ هُمَا فِي الْفَارِ إِذْ يَقُولُ لِصَاحِبِهِ لَا تَحْزَنْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَنَا فَأَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ سَكِينَتَهُ عَلَيْهِ وَأَيَّدَهُ بِجُنُودٍ لَمْ تَرَوْهَا وَجَعَلَ كَلِمَةَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا السُّفْلَى وَكَلِمَةُ اللَّهِ هِيَ الْعُلْيَا وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

**40. “If you do not help him, yet Allah has helped him already, when those who disbelieved expelled him, he was the second of the two, when they both were in the cave, when he said unto his companion: ‘Do not grieve, surely Allah is with us’. Then Allah sent down on him His tranquillity and strengthened him with hosts which you did not see, and He made the word of those who disbelieved the lowest; and the word of Allah is the highest, and Allah is the Mighty, the Wise.”**

This verse contains a hint to the dangerous plan of polytheists for slaying the Prophet (S). In the event of the Night fixed for the execution of the Conspiracy, every tribe sent a vigorous person ready to stab at him.

They decided to attack at night and slay the Prophet (S). He put Ali–ibn–Abi Talib (as) in bed instead of himself and, by night, he went towards the Cave of Thur accompanied with Abu–Bakr.

The pagans chased the Prophet (S) as far as the threshold of the Cave, but, seeing the spider’s webs at the gate of the Cave, they changed their mind and returned.

Thus, after three days staying there, the Prophet (S) left for Medina. During that time, Abu–Bakr’s slave, ‘Umir–ibn–Fahrah, brought food for them. At the same time, Ali (as) was preparing the necessities of traveling to Medina.

After three days, three camels were supplied ready at the Cave and the Prophet (S), Abu–Bakr, and a guide started for Medina.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, Allah’s helps in the past are some admonitions for today; and if they do not help the religion of Allah, He helps His Messenger even by sending spider’s webs. The verse says:

**“If you do not help him, yet Allah has helped him already, when those who disbelieved expelled him, he was the second of the two, when they both were in the cave, when he said unto his companion: ‘Do not grieve, surely Allah is with us’. Then Allah sent down on him His tranquillity and strengthened him with hosts which you did not see...”**

Of course, the Will of Allah is superior to and higher than any decisions and desires. The verse says:

**“...and the word of Allah is the highest...”**

And, the transgressive forces, with all their specializations and possibilities, will be impotent before the true believers who have tranquillity and certainty. The holy verse says:

**“...and He made the word of those who disbelieved the lowest; and the word of Allah is the highest, and Allah is the Mighty, the Wise.”**

## **Surah At-Tawbah – Verse 41**

انفِرُوا خَفَافاً وَثِقَالاً وَجَاهِدُوا بِأَمْوَالِكُمْ وَأَنفُسِكُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

**41. “Go forth light and heavy! and strive in Allah’s way with your possessions and your selves, this is better for you if you know.”**

The objective meaning of the Arabic couple of words: /xifفِف/ and /ثِيقَل/, mentioned in the verse, is either of the following opposite terms: ‘light and heavy’, ‘bachelor and married’, ‘poor and rich’, ‘on horseback and on foot’, ‘young and old’, ‘to have a large family and to have a small family’, ‘of ease and of discomfort’ and ‘trade and farming’.

It is cited in Fi-Zilل, a commentary of the Qurآن, that when some old persons such as: ‘Abع-’Ayyعb’Ansعri, Miqdعd, and Abع-Talhah, who became ready to go towards the battle-fields, were told that they were too old to go to fight, they often recited the abovementioned verse.

However, when the command of general mobilization for battlefield is issued, do not pretext any barrier. The verse says:

**“Go forth light and heavy!...”**

And do know that everything should be devoted to the religion, including wealth and life, not only either of them. The verse continues saying:

**“...And strive in Allah’s way with your possessions and your selves, this is better for you if you know.”**

Therefore, striving with life for the poor and striving with both wealth and life for the rich is obligatory.

## **Surah At-Tawbah – Verse 42**

لَوْ كَانَ عَرَضاً قَرِيباً وَسَفَرَاً قَاصِداً لَاتَّبَعُوكَ وَلَكِنْ بَعْدَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الشُّكْرَةُ وَسَيَحْلِفُونَ  
بِاللَّهِ لَوْ أَسْتَطَعْنَا لَخَرَجْنَا مَعْكُمْ يُهْلِكُونَ أَنفُسَهُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ إِنَّهُمْ لَكَاذِبُونَ

**42. “Had there been a near gain, and an easy journey, certainly they would have followed you, but the distance was too far to them; yet they will swear by Allah: ‘Had we been able, we would**

***certainly have gone out with you', they destroy themselves. And Allah knows that verily they are liars."***

The Qur'an refers this meaning to the lazy persons who are weak in faith and resort to kinds of pretext in order to refrain from attending in this great course.

The Qur'an says to the Prophet (S) that if there was an available booty and the journey was short they would accept his invitation and hasten to sit at that prepared table, so that they could reach the worldly material. It says:

***"Had there been a near gain, and an easy journey, certainly they would have followed you..."***

But, now that the way is very far and difficult for them, they act listlessly and seek pretexts. The verse continues saying:

***"...but the distance was too far to them..."***

It is surprising that they did not suffice to pretexts, but they would come to the Prophet (S) and swear by Allah that if they could they would certainly had gone out with the Prophet (S). Therefore, they expressed that the reason that they did not come forth was their incapability and lack of power. The holy verse continues saying:

***"...yet they will swear by Allah: 'Had we been able, we would certainly have gone out with you'..."***

In fact, by means of these deeds and telling those lies, they destroyed themselves. The verse says:

***"...they destroy themselves..."***

But Allah knows well that they are not truthful. The verse says:

***"...And Allah knows that verily they are liars."***

They are completely capable to act but since the table is not so rich and there is a difficult program in front of them, they resort to false oaths.

This circumstance was not confined to the Battle of Tabuk and the age of the Prophet (S). In any society, there are often some lazy, or 'hypocritic and greedy' persons who are always waiting for the moments of victory and efficacious opportunities to come.

At that time, they often substitute themselves deceitfully in the first line and shout to introduce themselves to others that they are the first strivers, the best strugglers, and the most sympathetic people, in order that they enjoy the consequences of the existing triumph without incurring any trouble.

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1. Majma‘-ul-Bayan.
  2. Narrated from Durr-ul-Manthar
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