

Part 28 Surah 59 Al-Hashr Verses 11-17

False Promises

The surah now turns back to discuss the event itself, painting a picture of another group that played a role in it, the hypocrites:

Are you not aware of those hypocrites who say to their brethren who disbelieve among the people of earlier revelations, 'If you are driven out, we shall most certainly go with you, and shall never pay heed to anyone against you; and if you are attacked, we shall most certainly come to your aid'? God bears witness that they are indeed liars. (11) If they are driven out, they will not go with them; and if they are attacked, they will not help them. Even if they come to their aid, they will most certainly turn their backs in flight; and in the end they will have no help. (12) You, [believers,] arouse in their hearts a fear more intense than their fear of God, because they are devoid of understanding. (13) They will never fight you even in a body except from within fortified strongholds or from behind walls. Strong is their internal hostility. You may think that they are united when in fact their hearts are at odds with one another, because they are people who will not use their reason. (14) Like those who, a short while before them, had to taste the evil that came from their own doings. Painful suffering is in store for them. (15) Like Satan, who says to man, 'Reject the faith!' Yet when man disbelieves, Satan says, 'I here and now disown you. I fear God, the Lord of all the worlds.' (16) Both will end up in the fire, where they will abide. Such is the reward of the wrongdoers. (17)

The surah reports on what the hypocrites said to the al-Nadir Jews, promising them support, but then letting them down and showing that they cared nothing for their own promises. Every sentence in these verses states a fact, touches hearts, stirs up feelings and establishes a principle of education, knowledge and unshakeable faith.

The first of these establishes a bond of kinship between the hypocrites and the unbelievers from among the people of earlier revelations: "*Are you not aware of those hypocrites who say to their brethren who disbelieve among the people of earlier revelations... (11)'*" The ones to whom the surah refers as people of earlier revelations are unbelievers, and the hypocrites are their brethren, despite the fact that they claim to be Muslims. Then the surah gives a full and vivid picture of the hypocrites' promises and assurances to their brethren: "*If you are driven out, we shall most certainly go with you, and shall never pay heed to anyone against you; and if you are attacked, we shall most certainly come to your aid? ... (11)'*" God, who knows what they truly are, states and confirms otherwise:

"God bears witness that they are indeed liars. (11) If they are driven out, they will not go with them; and if they are attacked, they will not help them. Even if they come to their aid, they will most certainly turn their backs in flight; and in the end they will have no help." (12) Events confirmed that what God stated was true and what they promised their brethren was false.

supporting one another. We may also see the hypocrites closing ranks in one group. However, we are told their true condition by God Himself who says that they are not truly so; it is all deception. This cover is lifted at times to reveal the truth of God's description, exposing conflicts within the same alliance, because those allies have different interests, preferences and directions. Never have the believers been true to their faith without seeing the opposite party revealing such differences and conflicts. The believers need only be determined, show perseverance in adversity, and they will inevitably see that the bonds uniting those followers of falsehood disappear to show their acute differences; this then leads them to scheme against each other.

The hypocrites and the unbelievers from among the people of earlier revelations are able to gain the upper hand against the Muslims when the Muslims are disunited. In this way, the Muslims no longer reflect the true conditions of believers as outlined earlier in the surah. Otherwise, the hypocrites and unbelievers are too weak to be able to gain mastery over believers. Besides, they have different leanings and interests: "*Strong is their internal hostility. You may think that they are united when in fact their hearts are at odds with one another... (14)'*"

The Qur'an wants this fact to be firmly settled in believers' minds so that they know the truth about their enemies and do not stand in awe of them. It thus seeks to influence their feelings and morale on the basis of established fact. When Muslims take the Qur'an seriously, they think little of their enemies, who are God's own enemies. They stand united, in one line. When they do so, no worldly power can match them.

Those who believe in God must know the truth about themselves and their enemies. This is half the battle. The Qur'an puts this truth to them in the context of an event that has already taken place, enlightening them about the true factors that were at play and explaining what it signified and the facts to which it pointed. This explanation was useful to those who witnessed that event as it unfolded. It should provide great enlightenment to future generations who should reflect on it and learn the truth from the One who knows all truth.

In Satan's Footsteps

This evacuation of the al-Nadir from Madinah was not the first of its kind. It was preceded by the evacuation of the Qaynuqa' tribe, to which the following verse most probably refers:

Like those who, a short while before them, had to taste the evil that came from their own doings. Painful suffering is in store for them. (15)

The surah then states a fact explaining what those people, hypocrites and unbelievers from among the people of earlier religions, truly felt: "*You, [believers,] arouse in their hearts a fear more intense than their fear of God, because they are devoid of understanding.*" (13) They feared the believers more than they feared God. Had they truly feared God, they would not have feared anyone else. Only one type of fear can exist in a person's heart; fear of God can never exist side by side with fear of anyone else. All might belongs to God alone. All powers in the universe are subject to His will: "*There is no living creature which He does not hold by its forelock.*" (11: 56) Why, then, would a God-fearing person feel afraid of anyone else? However, the people who do not understand this truth fear God's creatures more than they fear Him. This, "*because they are devoid of understanding.*" (13)

Thus the surah exposes the truth about those people, and adds another general truth. Now, the surah goes on to describe a condition particular to the two parties, the hypocrites and the unbelievers among the people of earlier religions. This condition arises from the fact that they fear the believers more than they fear God: "*They will never fight you even in a body except from within fortified strongholds or from behind walls. Strong is their internal hostility. You may think that they are united when in fact their hearts are at odds with one another, because they are people who will not use their reason*" (14)

Time continues to reveal the absolute accuracy of this delineation of the true character of the hypocrites and the people of earlier revelations whenever and wherever they meet the believers in battle. Recent clashes in the Holy Land between volunteer believers and the Jews have confirmed the accuracy of this description. They would not fight the believers except in their own fortified settlements in Palestine. ¹ Whenever they were exposed, they scuttled away like rats. It is almost as if this verse was referring to what happened recently. All glory belongs to God, the All-Knowing, the All-Aware.

The verse adds other features of their mentality: "*Strong is their internal hostility. You may think that they are united when in fact their hearts are at odds with one another... (14)'*" This picture contrasts with that of the believers who are united by the bond of faith across all generations and whose brotherhood transcends barriers of time, place, race, country and tribe. The hypocrites and unbelievers conversely are in disarray "*because they are people who will not use their reason.*" (14)

Appearances may at times be deceptive so as to give us an impression that the unbelievers among the people of earlier revelations stand in solid alliance,

¹ The author is referring here to the battles that took place in 1948, when groups of Islamic volunteers took part in the war, trying to prevent the establishment of the state of Israel. The Jewish fighters did not fear the Arab armies as much as they feared those volunteers. Editor's note.

The encounter with the Jewish tribe of Qaynuqa' took place after the Battle of Badr, but before the Battle of Uhud. The Qaynuqa' were bound by a treaty with the Prophet and the Muslims. When the Muslims won a great victory against the unbelievers in Badr, the Jews were upset and harboured a grudge against the Muslims. They feared that their position in Madinah would be weakened while the position of the Muslims would be strengthened. The Prophet got wind of what they were whispering to one another and learnt of their ill intentions. He reminded them of the treaty he had signed with them and warned them that their attitude might augur ill. They replied rudely to him, saying: "Muhammad! Do not think too highly of your power. You have only encountered a group who knew little about fighting a war and you managed to score a victory against them. Should you engage us in battle, you will certainly know that we are true fighters."

They followed this with repeated provocations against the Muslims. Reports mention that a Muslim woman took some merchandise to sell at the Qaynuqa' market place, and sat close to a jewellers shop. People there tried to get her to lift her head covering, but she refused. The jeweller held the edge of her dress and fixed it behind her back while she was unaware. When she rose, the lower part of her body was exposed. The Jews around laughed at her, while she cried out in shame. A Muslim was near by and he immediately attacked the jeweller and killed him. The Jews rushed to the Muslim and killed him. The family of the Muslim who was killed appealed to other Muslims for help, and the Muslim community was in anger. Tension rose and there was a confrontation between the Muslim community and the Jewish Qaynuqa' tribe.

The Prophet laid siege to the Qaynuqa' Jews until they gave up and declared that they would accept the Prophet's ruling. 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salul, the chief of the hypocrites, argued with the Prophet on their behalf, citing the fact that for long they were allies of the al-Khazraj Ansari tribe. His true motive, however, was the strong bond between the hypocrites and the unbelievers among the people of earlier religions. The Prophet accepted his pleas and allowed them to leave Madinah, taking with them all their property, except for arms. They left for Syria.

It is to this encounter that the surah refers. It cites it as a comparable case to that of the al-Nadir and the true facts behind the attitude they took towards the Muslim community and the reality of their collaboration with the hypocrites.

The surah also refers to how the hypocrites tried hard to persuade their brethren unbelievers, the Jews of al-Nadir, to put up stiff resistance, and thus led them to their miserable fate. It compares this to a permanent situation in which Satan

always lets down anyone who responds to his persuasion and disbelieves in God. Thus both end up in the worst of all situations:

Like Satan, who says to man, 'Reject the faith!' Yet when man disbelieves, Satan says, 'I here and now disown you. I fear God, the Lord of all the worlds.' (16) Both will end up in the fire, where they will abide. Such is the reward of the wrongdoers. (17)

Satan's role with any human being who responds to his promptings, as described in these verses, is in line with his nature and the aim he defined for himself. It is most singular for any human being to listen to him when he is out to trick them and lead them to their ruin. Yet this is the permanent truth which the surah states as its discussion of the event progresses further. It thus links the individual event with this permanent truth, setting it in real context. The Qur'an does not state abstract theories, true as these may be, because a truth stated in an abstract setting does not influence hearts, feelings and minds. This is the difference between the Qur'anic method that seeks to involve people's hearts and the methods followed by philosophers and those engaged in research.

Thus the surah completes its discussion of the al-Nadir, having put into it a large number of images, facts and directives, linking its local events to great and permanent facts. The surah thus represents a journey taking us far into the real world and into the world of human conscience. It goes far beyond the event itself. Its reporting in God's book is so different from the way it is reported in books written by human beings. The difference is as immeasurable as the difference between anything of man's making and what God makes.