

Sura 47: Muhammad (Muhammad)

In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy

This Sura was revealed in Medina. It has another name, the Fighting. This is an appropriate name because the main topic of the Sura is fighting.

Verses 1 to 15:

1. *Those who disbelieve and bar people from the way of God, He renders their actions vain.*
2. *But those who believe, do good deeds, and believe in the (Revelation) sent down to Muhammad - for it is the truth from their Lord - He will absolve them of their sins and improve their condition.*
3. *This is because those who reject God follow falsehood while those who believe follow the truth from their Lord. Thus, does God coin for people their lessons using similitudes.*
4. *Therefore, when you encounter the disbelievers (in fight), smite at their necks until, when you have thoroughly subdued them, then bind them firmly and either (confer) a favor afterwards or ransom (them) until the war lays down its burden. That (is the command). If it had been God's will, He could certainly have exacted retribution from them (Himself); but (He lets you fight) in order to test some of you by means of others. But those who are slain in the way of God - He will never let their deeds be wasted.*
5. *He will guide them and improve their condition;*
6. *And admit them to the Garden Which He has made known to them.*
7. *Believers, if you will support (the cause of) God, He will support you, and will make your foothold firm.*
8. *And those who disbelieve perdition is for them; and He will render their actions fruitless.*
9. *That is because they hate that which God has revealed; therefore, He made their actions fruitless.*
10. *Have they not travelled through the land to see the end of those who were before them? God wiped them out. And for the disbelievers there will be the like thereof.*
11. *That is because God is the Patron of those who believe, and because the disbelievers have no patron.*
12. *Verily God will admit those who believe and do good deeds, to gardens beneath which rivers flow; while those who reject God will enjoy (this world) and eat as cattle eat; and the Fire will be their abode.*
13. *And how many a township, stronger than your township (Muhammad) which has cast you out, have We destroyed and they had no helper.*
14. *Is then one who is on a clear (path) from his Lord like those for whom the evil that they do is beautified while they follow their own whims?*
15. *The parable of the Garden which the God conscious are promised; in it are rivers of water unpolluted; rivers of milk whose taste never changes; rivers of wine, a joy to those who drink; and rivers of honey pure and clear. In it there are for them all kinds of fruits and grace from their Lord. (Can those in such bliss) be compared to those who will dwell forever in the Fire. They will be given boiling water to drink, so that it tears their bowels? (47: 1 – 15)*

The Sura starts with an attack on the disbelievers and a threat that all their deeds will be rendered useless, *“Those who disbelieve and bar people from the way of God, He renders their actions vain.”* They may have hoped that these actions will benefit them. These actions may have appeared on the surface as good deeds, but what is the use of a good deed that is not supported by faith? It is important that the intention behind the action would be also good. On the other hand, the believers will be rewarded, *“But those who believe, do good deeds, and believe in the (Revelation) sent down to Muhammad - for it is the truth from their Lord - He will absolve them of their sins and improve their condition.”* Those who believed, did good deeds, and believed in the Book that was revealed to Muhammad (PBUH), because they knew it is the truth from their Lord, those will be treated differently. Their sins will be forgiven and that will make them feel better. They will feel secure, comfortable, confident, content, and peaceful. This will make them lead much more comfortable and happy life. Why is this difference in treatment? Because, *“those who reject God follow falsehood while those who believe follow the truth from their Lord. Thus does God coin for people their lessons using similitudes.”* Falsehood has no roots to hold it down and everything based on it will be transient. The actions that were based on falsehood will fade away. But the truth is firmly rooted. Actions based on the truth will remain solidly intact. Since those who believe followed the truth that came from their Lord, then their deeds will be firmly rooted, God will forgive their sins and will improve their condition.

“Therefore, when you encounter the disbelievers (in fight), smite at their necks until, when you have thoroughly subdued them, then bind them firmly and either (confer) a favor afterwards or ransom (them) until the war lays down its burden.” This verse establishes the rules for the tactics to be followed in wars between Muslims and their enemies. First, they have to fight fiercely until the enemy is subdued; then take those who surrender captives. The captives can be either freed as a favor from the Muslims or they can be freed for a ransom.

“That (is the command). If it had been God's will, He could certainly have exacted retribution from them (Himself); but (He lets you fight) in order to test some of you by means of others.” The history shows that all those who disbelieved and barred people from the path were tyrants. They persecuted the Muslims and spread corruption in the land. God could have destroyed them without a fight, but God wanted to test the believers. This kind of test kindles the flame of gallantry in the believers and motivates them to fight those who are persecuting or attacking them. God wanted to educate the believers to become objective in their views and to rid them of all whims and vain desires. They are fighting to protect the principles that they believe in. They are not fighting for a worldly gain. Another objective of this test is to show that death is inevitable. There is no life that is worth to be lived in humility or under persecution. The test provides an opportunity to those who would rather die martyrs than live slaves. This is also a test to determine those who are worthy of leadership. The test uncovers those who are ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of a worthy cause, those who rid themselves of any shred of selfishness, and those who are interested only in establishing a good life on earth. These were promised a great reward, *“But those who are slain in the way of God - He will never let their deeds be wasted. He will guide them and improve their condition; and admit them to the Garden which He has made known to them.”* The key word here is, *“improve their condition.”* This is a promise that God will look after those who die in His cause to purify their souls and to guide them. They will then be admitted to the paradise that they were promised.

The following verse motivates the believers to fight in the sake of God promising them God's support, "*Believers, if you will support (the cause of) God, He will support you, and will make your foothold firm.*" For the believers to get God's support, they should have the sincere intention to fight only for God's cause. The pure intention to serve God's cause is the condition for gaining God's support whether to die as a martyr or to overcome God's enemy. Sometime the lack of faith or the lack of objectivity clouds the vision and this fact is lost. It has been narrated that Abu Musa (RA) asked the Messenger of God (PBUH), "*Which fight can be considered to be in the sake of God: a person who fights motivated by his courage, a person who fights motivated by his gallantry, or a person who fights because he wants to show off?*" The Messenger (PBUH) replied, "*Only a person who fights so that God's word reign supreme over any other word, is considered to be fighting in the sake of God.*"

One notices that the verse indicates that God will grant victory to the believers then will make their foothold firm, "*He will support you, and will make your foothold firm.*" This is a subtle indication that victory in battle is not the end of the fight between truth and falsehood. The believers need to be cautious because the fight between the truth and falsehood will never end; it will simply take other forms other than armed struggle.

On the other hand, those who disbelieve will meet their fate, "*And those who disbelieve perdition is for them; and He will render their actions fruitless.*" They will be destroyed and their deeds will be rendered fruitless, "*That is because they hate that which God has revealed, therefore He made their actions fruitless.*"

The disbelievers are then directed to reflect on the fate of those who were destroyed before, "*Have they not travelled through the land to see the end of those who were before them? God wiped them out. And for the disbelievers there will be the like thereof.*" They were destroyed because they had no protection. They forfeited the protection of God; and there are no protectors besides Him, "*That is because God is the Patron of those who believe, and because the disbelievers have no patron.*" God is sufficient for the believers as a protecting Patron. Even if the victory over falsehood is delayed, it is forthcoming.

"*Verily God will admit those who believe and do good deeds, to gardens beneath which rivers flow; while those who reject God will enjoy (this world) and eat as cattle eat; and the Fire will be their abode.*" The believers may enjoy the pleasures of the life of this world, but they will get the real and permanent enjoyment in paradise. But those who disbelieve will only get their enjoyment in this life. The pleasures they will enjoy in the life of this world is an enjoyment of low quality; it a material enjoyment void of any high human value; so it is more like cattle's enjoyment of material things.

"*And how many a township, stronger than your township (Muhammad) which has cast you out, have We destroyed and they had no helper.*" This verse was revealed to the Prophet (PBUH) during his trip when he migrated from Mecca to Medina. It brought comfort to the Prophet (PBUH) at this difficult time.

A comparison is then made between the conditions of the believers and the disbelievers, *“Is then one who is on a clear (path) from his Lord like those for whom the evil that they do is beautified while they follow their own whims?”* There is a basic difference between the two groups. The believers were able to see the truth in the guidance that they received from God and they followed it. The vision of the disbelievers, on the other hand, was overclouded by their whims and desires. They followed their whims and desires which led them astray. The difference between the two categories in the reward is then outlined, *“The parable of the Garden which the God conscious are promised; in it are rivers of water unpolluted; rivers of milk whose taste never changes; rivers of wine, a joy to those who drink; and rivers of honey pure and clear. In it there are for them all kinds of fruits and grace from their Lord. (Can those in such bliss) be compared to those who will dwell forever in the Fire. They will be given boiling water to drink, so that it tears their bowels?”*

Verses 16 to 31:

16. *Among them are those who listen to you (Muhammad) and when they go forth from your presence they say to those who have been given knowledge, “What did he say just now?” Those whose hearts have been sealed by God, and they follow their own whims.*
17. *But those who are guided, He increases their guidance, and bestows on them their consciousness of Him.*
18. *Are they then only waiting for the Hour- that it should come upon them suddenly? But some of its signs have already come. But how, when it comes upon them, can they take their warning?*
19. *Know, therefore, that there is no god but God; and ask forgiveness for your sin and for the men and women who believe. God knows how you move about and knows your abode.*
20. *Those who believe say, “Why is not a sura sent down?” But when a sura of unequivocal meaning is revealed, and fighting is mentioned therein, you will see those in whose hearts is a disease looking at you with a look of one who is fainting at the approach of death. But more fitting for them –*
21. *To obey and say what is just, and when the matter is determined - if they are loyal to God it will be better for them.*
22. *Would you then, if you were given the command, to spread corruption in the land and sever your ties of kinship?*
23. *Those are whom God has cursed, so He has made them deaf and blinded their eyes.*
24. *Why do not they reflect on the Quran, or are there locks on the hearts?*
25. *Those who turned back as apostates after guidance was clearly shown to them, Satan has seduced them and gave them false hopes.*
26. *This is because they said to those who hate what God has revealed, “We will obey you in part of (this) matter;” but God knows their secrets.*
27. *Then how (will it be with them) when the angels cause them to die smiting their faces and their backs.*
28. *This is because they followed that which angered God, and they hated God's good pleasure; so He made their deeds useless.*

29. *Or do those, in whose hearts is a disease, think that God will not bring to light their entire rancor?*
30. *Had We so willed, We could have made them known to you, and you should have known them by their marks; but surely you will know them by the tone of their speech. And God knows all that you do.*
31. *And verily We shall try you till We know those of you who strive hard (for the cause of God) and the steadfast, and till We test your record. (47: 16 – 31)*

“Among them are those who listen to you (Muhammad) and when they go forth from your presence they say to those who have been given knowledge, ‘What did he say just now?’ Those whose hearts have been sealed by God, and they follow their own whims.” The verse refers to the hypocrites who used to pretend that they were deeply interested in the Prophet’s (PBUH) speech then they turn around and subtly ridicule what he was saying. Compare this with what the believers were promised, *“But those who are guided, He increases their guidance, and bestows on them their consciousness of Him.”* They will be guided, their consciousness of God will increase, and they will be in awe of God. Juxtapose this against the condition of the hypocrites. They will be led astray, their hearts are sealed, and they will be heedless. The following verse expresses amazement at what the hypocrites were waiting for, *“Are they then only waiting for the Hour- that it should come upon them suddenly? But some of its signs have already come. But how, when it comes upon them, can they take their warning?”* When the Hour comes it will be too late for heeding the warning.

A command was issued to the Prophet (PBUH) and the believers to take the path leading to knowledge, remembrance of God, and seeking His forgiveness, *“Know, therefore, that there is no god but God; and ask forgiveness for your sin and for the men and women who believe. God knows how you move about and knows your abode.”* The believers should know the fundamental fact upon which Islam is based: the belief in the oneness of God. Then they should seek God’s forgiveness. Knowledge is the basis for action. Knowledge is like a tree and action is its fruits. A tree that does not yield fruits is useless. The address is directed to the Messenger (PBUH), knowing that his sins have been all forgiven to emphasize the fact that one of the objectives for asking God’s forgiveness is to express one’s gratitude to God. In addition, the verse is not only directed to the Messenger (PBUH) but to all the believers as well. The last sentence in the verse, *“God knows how you move about and how you dwell in your homes,”* reassures the believers of the nearness of God, His care, and His protection. It also alerts them to the fact they cannot hide any secret from God, because He knows everything.

“Those who believe say, ‘Why is not a sura sent down?’” This may have been an expression of yearning for another sura from the Quran that they loved. Or they may have been looking for an answer to a question that has been posed about fighting in the way of God. However, *“But when a sura of unequivocal meaning is revealed, and fighting is mentioned therein, you will see those in whose hearts is a disease looking at you with a look of one who is fainting at the approach of death.”* The verse continues to describe the reaction of the hypocrites to the revelation of God’s command to fight. The fear fills their heart, they become overwhelmed with panic, and they become on the verge of losing consciousness for fear of death. The recipe for salvation from

such a despicable reaction is then prescribed, *“But more fitting for them - to obey and say what is just, and when the matter is determined - if they are loyal to God it will be better for them.”* Trusting in God and obeying them is the prescription for salvation.

The verse then addresses the hypocrites directly, *“Would you then, if you were given the command, to spread corruption in the land and sever your ties of kinship?”* This was a warning in case their behavior led them to completely abandoning Islam and they became apostates. The consequences for such behavior are then expounded, *“Those are whom God has cursed so He has made them deaf and blinded their eyes.”* Those who continue on the path of hypocrisy will be deprived of God’s mercy, they will be cursed by Him, and they will be made deaf and blind. Why do not they reflect on the Quran? Or their intellect has been locked, it cannot think, *“Why do not they reflect on the Quran, or are there locks on the hearts?”*

“Those who turned back as apostates after guidance were clearly shown to them, Satan has seduced them and gave them false hopes. This is because they said to those who hate what God has revealed, ‘We will obey you in part of (this) matter;’ but God knows their secrets.” The verses uncover the reason behind turning away from Islam by some of the hypocrites. They aligned themselves with the enemy of Muslims. God knows all what they do, and they will be punished severely, *“Then how (will it be with them) when the angels cause them to die smiting their faces and their backs.”* They will receive this punishment because they made the wrong choice, *“This is because they followed that which angered God, and they hated God's good pleasure; so He made their deeds useless.”*

The threat is then posed to the hypocrites that God can very easily expose them, *“Or does those, in whose hearts is a disease, think that God will not bring to light their entire rancor? Had We so willed, We could have made them known to you, and you should have known them by their marks; but surely you will know them by the tone of their speech. And God knows all that you do.”*

God knows everything and He will test the believers to make known those who stand fast and are willing to strive in His way, *“And verily We shall try you till We know those of you who strive hard (for the cause of God) and the steadfast, and till We test your record.”*

Verses 32 to 38:

32. *Those who disbelieved and barred people from the way of God and opposed the messenger after the guidance has been manifested to them, they will not hurt God, and He will make their actions fruitless.*
33. *Believers, obey God, and obey the Messenger, and do not invalidate your deeds.*
34. *Those who disbelieved and barred people from the path of God, then died rejecting God; God will not forgive them.*

35. *So do not falter and cry out for peace when you (will be) the uppermost, and God is with you, and He will not deprive you (of the reward of) your deeds.*
36. *The life of this world is but play and amusement; and if you believe and remain conscious of God, He will reward you, and will not ask you (to give up) your possessions.*
37. *If He were to ask you for all of them, and press you, you would covetously withhold, and He would expose your malice.*
38. *Here you are being invited to spend (of your substance) in the path of God; but among you are some who are niggardly. But any who are niggardly are so at the expense of their own souls. But God is free of all want, and it is you that are needy. If you turn back (from the path), He will substitute in your stead another people; then they would not be like you. (47: 32 – 38)*

“Those who disbelieved and barred people from the way of God and opposed the Messenger after the guidance has been manifested to them, they will not hurt God, and He will make their actions fruitless.” God has decreed that the deeds of those who disbelieved, barred people from the straight path, and fought the Messenger (PBUH) - during his life by carrying arms against him or after his death by fighting his Message – after they have received guidance will be rendered fruitless. Needless to say that they cannot harm God in any way but they cannot inflict any harm on God’s Message or those who are carrying the responsibility of calling to His Message. If they succeed in harming those who call to God’s Message, it will only be for a limited time and for a wisdom which only God knows.

Then the believers were commanded to obey God, the Messenger (PBUH), *“Believers, obey God, and obey the Messenger, and do not invalidate your deeds.”* This command indicates that within the Muslim community at that time there were people who did not comply totally with this principle, so they needed a reminder. They were warned that this may result in invalidating their deeds. True Muslims were shocked by this warning and were extremely cautious; they took all precautions to make sure that they were not part of this group.

The consequences for those who disbelieve and fight the Messenger of God (PBUH) were then explained, *“Those who disbelieved and barred people from the path of God, then died rejecting God; God will not forgive them.”* They have the chance to repent in their life time, but once they die it will be too late. This verse applies to the believers as well. It is a reminder to stay on the straight path. The believers are also warned of certain behaviors, *“So do not falter and cry out for peace when you (will be) the uppermost, and God is with you, and He will not deprive you (of the reward of) your deeds.”* They should not tarry when the call to strive in the path of God was made. They should not lose confidence and try to avoid fighting in the path of God, when the fight was called for. They were defending the truth, so by the help of God, they will have the upper hand over their enemy sooner or later. The pleasures of life should not be a factor to soften their resolve because, *“The life of this world is but play and amusement; and if you believe and remain conscious of God, He will reward you, and will not ask you (to give up) your possessions.”* Life is a game for those who do not live according to God’s project. For those who live according to God’s project, life is a field that one sows to be harvested in the Hereafter. They try to fulfill the undertakings that God has prescribed for those whom He designated to be vicegerents on earth. Their reward will be with God who will not ask them to sacrifice their possessions because God knows the niggardly nature of humankind, *“If He were to ask you for*

all of them, and press you, you would covetously withhold, and He would expose your malice. Here you are being invited to spend (of your substance) in the path of God; but among you are some who are niggardly. But any who are niggardly are so at the expense of their own souls. But God is free of all wants, and it is you that are needy. If you turn back (from the path), He will substitute in your stead another people; then they would not be like you.” These verses show that the requirements of the religion of Islam are tailored to suit the initial natural disposition, the abilities, and the aptitudes of humankind. God knows best His creatures. The verses urge the Muslims to be generous in spending voluntarily in the path of God. However, the believers should realize that God is independent of any need; all of their possessions were given to them as a blessing from God. Niggardliness is a bad policy because any wealth that is spent in the way of God will be rewarded in multitude. God also can easily replace those who turn away with people that are not like them.