

Section 1: Immunity Declared

Surah At-Tawbah – Verse 1

بَرَاءَةٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ إِلَى الَّذِينَ عَاهَدْتُمْ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

1. “(This is a declaration of) immunity from Allah and His Messenger towards those of the polytheists with whom you made covenant.”

Some Points Necessary to Be Noted

1– In the Islamic traditions, the name of this Surah has been introduced as ‘Bar’at’ and ‘Tawbah’. This fact makes it clear that this Surah is not a part of Surah Al-’Anfal, but it is an independent one.

2– The content of this Surah has a tone of indignation. For this reason it has begun without the holy phrase Bismillah. By this sign we understand that the holy phrase Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim at the beginning of every Surah belongs to that very Surah and is a part of it. Thus, this holy phrase has not been located as a ceremonial phrase at the beginning of every Surah.

3– The declaration of Bar’at (immunity) was for the infidels’ perjury which has been referred to in verses 7 and 8 of the current Surah. In Islam, the general law is that promises should be fulfilled, and as long as the opposite party is faithful to the treaty, it should be kept, too.

Moreover, in that circumstance, it was for the reason of their weakness that the Muslims had to accept that treaty, else, the desire of the Muslims was the destruction of idolism as rapidly as possible.

Some Details Upon These Verses

In the eighth year A.H., Mecca was conquered, but the pagans still continued coming into Meccan to

perform their worshipping rites which was, of course, a mixture of superstitions and aberrations.

Among their customs it was seen that they used to give in charity the clothing with which they had circumambulated. Once it happened that a woman desired to perform some more circumambulations after finishing her first circumambulation, but, since she had no more clothes with her, she had to circumambulate nakedly while people were watching her.

That circumstance was not tolerable for the Prophet (S) and the Muslims, who were in a very high degree of power. The Prophet (S) was waiting for the command of Allah until when this Surah was revealed in Medina.

The Messenger of Allah (S) commissioned Abū-Bakr to convey some verses of it unto the people of Mecca. The Prophet (S) chose him, maybe, for the reason that he was an old man and people were not sensitive to him.

But, after Abū-Bakr had left Medina towards Mecca, Angel Gabriel appeared to the Holy Prophet (S) and brought a Message from Allah denoting that the recital of those verses of the Qur'ān should be conveyed either by the Holy Prophet himself or by the one who is of him. As soon as the divine command was received, the Prophet (S) called Hadrat Ali (as) and instructed him to do it. He said:

“I am his and he is mine.”

It was so that, in the midst of the way, Ali (as) took away the verses from him and went into Mecca where he recited them unto the pagans.

The details of the recitation of the verses of this Surah by Ali (as) are recorded in the books of the Sunnites, too. Some Prophet's companions such as: Abū-Bakr himself, Ali (as), Ibn-'Abbās, 'Anas-ibn-Malik and Jubair-ibn-'Abdillah'Ansari have narrated them and quoted them inside a lot of Islamic sources.¹

Some of the Sunnite writers have tried to pretend this fact as an ordinary matter so that it would not be counted as a kind of privilege for Hadrat Ali (as).

They have considered the mission of recitation of the verses given to Ali (as) as a manner of complying with his request, not as a privilege for him; while for complying with any one's request, a safe mission might be given to him, not the recitation of the verses of declaration of Bar'at (immunity) from pagans, in the region of infidelity and by a person who had killed many of the idolaters in different wars and where a lot of the people were carrying his hatred in their hearts.

When Allah commanded Moses (as) to go toward Pharaoh in order to invite him to Unity, he (as) said:

“My Lord! Verily I killed one of them, so I fear lest they should slay me;”²

Then he asked Him to send his brother Aaron with him as an aider. But, Ali (as), who had killed a large number of the chiefs of pagans, went alone towards them and recited the verses of immunity unto them with the utmost calmness. This event happened in a sensitive place, i.e. Muna, where the site of the last lapidation was located near-by.

The subjects which were revealed and were announced unto pagans by Ali (as) were as follows:

- 1- Acquittal declared, and treaties cancelled.
- 2- The prohibition of pagans participating in Hajj from the following year.
- 3- The prohibition of circumambulation around the Ka'bah in the state of nakedness.
- 4- The prohibition of pagans entering the Sacred Mosque.

The holy phrase: "***(This is a declaration of) immunity from Allah*** " indicates that this acquittal is from the side of Allah.

And the, phrase: "***and His Messenger*** ", mentioned immediately after it, means that the strings of promises and treaties were cut off, respites were ended, and agreements were cancelled.

The addressee 'you' in the sentence: "***towards those of the polytheists with whom you made covenant*** " is both the Messenger of Allah (S) and the Muslims. Thus, it means that they should declare immunity unto the polytheists between whom and them there was an agreement, because Allah (s.w.t.) and His Messenger (S) are quit of them.

The objective meaning here is that Allah (s.w.t.) and His Messenger (S) are quit of giving a promise to them and, after that, fulfilling it, because the polytheists who made covenants with them broke their promises.

If someone asks how it is permissible for the Prophet (S) to break his promise, the answer is that it is permissible for the Prophet (S) to break his promise by one of the following ways:

- 1) The fulfilment of the promise was conditioned that there would not come any other command from Allah, the Exalted, upon it, and since there came down a revelation instructing that there would remain no covenant thereafter, the Messenger of Allah (S) broke the covenant.
- 2) Since treachery and perjury was made manifest from the side of idolaters, Allah, the Exalted, instructed His Prophet (S) to break their covenant, too.
- 3) That covenant was not a permanent (and an absolute) treaty, but it was bound over a definite point of time and for a certain length of time, so that when its term was ended that covenant would be broken, either.

It has also been pointed out in some traditions that the Messenger of Allah (S) had conditioned the above mentioned matters with them in the treaty. It has also been narrated that the idolaters broke their promise or decided to break it.

Then, Allah, the Glorified, commanded His Prophet to break their covenant, too Next to that, through the following verse, Allah, the Glorified, addressing the idolaters, says:

“So go about in the earth...”

Explanations

1- Fulfilment the promise, yes; but surrendering to plots, never. The verse says:

“(This is a declaration of) immunity from Allah and His Messenger towards those of the polytheists with whom you made covenant.”

2- The legislator is Allah,3 of course, but in conduct and action, Allah and the Messenger of Allah are mentioned beside each other:

“...from Allah and His Messenger...”

3- It is true that legally we have to be faithful to our treaties, but heartily immunity from polytheists and those who deviated from the straight path is a religious principle in Islam.4

4- If a treaty is cancelled because of fear from a plot and a treachery, it should be announced to the opposite party, in order that they might not be seized unawares.

5- Immunity is a sign of sharp conclusiveness and authority; while being silent before plots and breach of covenants is a sign of weakness and abasement.

Surah At-Tawbah – Verse 2

فَسِيحُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ أَرْبَعَةَ أَشْهُرٍ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّكُمْ غَيْرُ مُعْجِزِي اللَّهِ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ مُخْزِي
الْكَافِرِينَ

2 “So go about in the earth freely for four months, and know that you can not make futile Allah, and that Allah degrades the infidels.”

The Qur’anic phrase: ***“So go about in the earth freely...”*** addresses the pagans of Mecca meaning that they could go about freely, and with peace of mind, in the land of Mecca and, being in easy circumstances. They were allowed to supply their necessities during that time when they were in security

from the swords of the Muslims.

Then, it continues saying: “...**for four months...**” which means when this time was ended and the pagans did not embrace Islam, the string of their covenant would be broken and the security of life and wealth would be removed from them.

“...and know that you can not make futile Allah...”

That is, they should know that they could not escape from Allah, since wherever they might be they were under the Power and Command of Allah.

“...and that Allah degrades the infidels.”

This part of the verse means that they should also know that Allah will bring disgrace to the unbelievers.

Regarding the question that which months were the four months that Allah respited the pagans, most commentators have said that this time had been from the beginning of Shaww[☞] until the end of Muharram, because these verses were revealed in Shaww[☞].

Surah At-Tawbah – Verse 3

وَأَذَانٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ إِلَى النَّاسِ يَوْمَ الْحَجِّ الْأَكْبَرِ أَنَّ اللَّهَ بَرِيءٌ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ
وَرَسُولُهُ فَإِنْ تُبْتُمْ فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ وَإِنْ تَوَلَّيْتُمْ فَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّكُمْ غَيْرُ مُعْجِزِي اللَّهِ وَبَشِّرِ
الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ

3. “And (this) is proclamation from Allah and His Messenger to the people on the day of the great pilgrimage that Allah and His Messenger are quit of the polytheists. Yet if you repent, that will be better for you, and if you turn back, then know that you can not make futile Allah; and inform those who disbelieve of a painful punishment.”

Once more the Qur'[☞] announces the cancellation of the treaties of pagans with a stronger emphasis. It even assigns the date of its proclamation when the verse says:

“And this is proclamation from Allah and His Messenger to the people on the day of the great pilgrimage that Allah and His Messenger are quit of the polytheists...”

In fact, by this public proclamation in the land of Mecca and on that great day, Allah has shut the enemies' ways of seeking pretext, and cut off the tongue of slanderers so that they might not say that they were seized unawares and were attacked unduly.

Then the verse addresses the pagans themselves and, through a kind of encouragement and warning, uses effort to guide them. At first, it implies that if they repent and return to Allah, with desisting from idolatry, it will be better for them. The verse says:

“... Yet if you repent, that will be better for you...”

That is, if they embrace Islam, the religion of Unity, it is good for their own selves both in this world and the next one. And, if they contemplate properly, they will understand that, under its ray, all disturbances will turn to peace and arrangement, and it is not so that their right belief brings any benefit for Allah (s.w.t.) and the Prophet (S).

After that statement, the Qur’ān warns the zealous and stubborn opponents, saying that if they disobey this command, which supplies their own happiness, they should know that they can never weaken Allah, nor are they able to go outside of His Might. The verse continues saying:

“...and if you turn back, then know that you can not make futile Allah...”

Finally, the verse alarms those who resist obstinately not to believe, and says:

“...and inform those who disbelieve of a painful punishment.”

Surah At-Tawbah – Verse 4

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ عَاهَدْتُمْ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَنْقُصُواكُمْ شَيْئًا وَلَمْ يُظَاهِرُوا عَلَيْكُمْ أَحَدًا
فَاتِمُّوا إِلَيْهِمْ عَهْدَهُمْ إِلَىٰ مُدَّتِهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَّقِينَ

4. “Except those of the polytheists with whom you made covenant, and who have not failed you in anything nor have supported anyone against you. Then fulfil their treaty with them until (the end of) their term; surely Allah loves the pious ones.”

This unilateral cancellation of pagans’ covenants related only to those pagans from whom some signs of perjury, or preparation of perjury, had been appeared. Therefore, in this holy verse, one group of the polytheists have been excepted. The Qur’ān says:

“Except those of the polytheists with whom you made covenant, and who have not failed you in anything nor have supported anyone against you...”

Thus, the command of Allah about conducting with this group is as follows:

“... Then fulfil their treaty with them until (the end of) their term...”

The reason of this exception is stated that Allah loves the pious ones, those who avoid any perjury and transgression.

It says:

“...surely Allah loves the pious ones.”

Surah At-Tawbah – Verse 5

فَإِذَا انْسَلَخَ الْأَشْهُرُ الْحُرُمُ فَاقْتُلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ حَيْثُ وَجَدْتُمُوهُمْ وَخُذُوهُمْ
وَاحْصُرُوهُمْ وَأَقْعُدُوا لَهُمْ كُلَّ مَرْصَدٍ فَإِنْ تَابُوا وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَءَاتَوْا الزَّكَاةَ
فَخَلُّوا سَبِيلَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

5. “Then when the sacred months are drawn away, slay the polytheists wherever you find them, and seize them and besiege them and lie in wait for them in every ambush. But if they repent and perform the prayer and pay the poor-rate, (zakāt) then leave their way free to them; verily Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.”

In this verse, the duty of Muslims towards pagans after their respite, which was four months, has been stated, where the most intensive instruction has been issued upon them. It says:

“Then when the sacred months are drawn away, slay the polytheists wherever you find them...”

Next to that, it continues saying:

“...and seize them...” in order to take them captives.

The verse, then adds that they must be put in the circle of besiege. It says:

“...and besiege them...”

After that, the verse extends the statement against them, and says:

“...and lie in wait for them in every ambush...”

This harshness of action is for the sake that Islam’s plan is to root out idolatry from the whole points of the earth, since idolatry is not a creed or religion which could be respected.

But, this harshness and severity is not in the sense that the way of return is shut to them, but whenever and wherever they decide they can change their direction. That is why, immediately next to that, the Qur’an adds:

“...But if they repent and perform the prayer and pay the poor-rate, (zakāt) then leave their way free to them...”

As for the reason of this opportunity, it is said that Allah is Forgiving and Merciful, and He does not repel from Himself the one who returns to Him. The verse ends with the following phrase:

“...verily Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.”

Surah At-Tawbah – Verse 6

وَإِنْ أَحَدٌ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ اسْتَجَارَكَ فَأَجِرْهُ حَتَّى يَسْمَعَ كَلَامَ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ أَبْلِغْهُ مَأْمَنَهُ
ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

6. “And if any of the polytheists seeks protection from you, grant him protection till he hears the Word of Allah; then do convey him to his place of security; that is because they are a people who do not know.”

This verse means that if after passing four months of respite one of the idolaters, against whom you were commanded to fight, comes to you and asks for security to hearken to your invitation and to the reasoning of the Qur’ān, do respite him and explain your aim to him. Then do respite him to listen to the Word of Allah and to contemplate over it. The verse says:

“And if any of the polytheists seeks protection from you, grant him protection till he hears the Word of Allah...”

The manner in which the Qur’ān has appointed only the Word of Allah and has said: ***“...till he hears the word of Allah...”*** is for the reason that the most important proofs lie in the very Word of Allah.

Then the verse continues saying:

“...then do convey him to his place of security...”

This part of the verse means that if the one embraced Islam, he would obtain the goodness and prosperity of two worlds; and if the one did not embrace Islam, you should not kill him in order to avoid deceiving him, but you should send him to his own home where he has security of life and wealth.

The concluding phrase of the holy verse is as follows:

“...that is because they are a people who do not know.”

This phrase means that this respite is for the sake that such people are some ones who do not know the

Faith and the reasons of Islam. Then, you should respite them so that they hear, contemplate well and become cognizant.

-
1. Musnad Ahmad-I-Hanbal, vol. 3, pp. 213 and 283; and vol. 1 pp. 151 and 330 – Mustadrak Sahihayn, vol. 3, p. 51 – Tafsir-i-Al-Maner, vol. 10, p. 57 – Tafsir-i-Tabari, vol. 10, p. 46 – Tafsir-i-Ibn-I-Kathir, vol. 2, pp. 322 and 333 – Ihghagh-ul-Haghgh, vol. 5, p. 368 – Fadail-ul-Khamsah, vol. 2, p. 342 – The names of 73 authors who have recorded this event in their commentary books, like Fakhr-i-Razi and Rafi, are mentioned in Al-Qadir, vol. 6, p. 338
 2. Surah Al-Qasas, No. 28, verse 33
 3. Surah Al-Kahf, No. 18, verse 26 says: "...and He does not make any one His associate in His Judgement."
 4. This fact is current whether it is in the favour and grace, as in this Surah, verse No. 74 says: "... Allah and His Messenger enriched them out of His grace..."; or in allegiance the Qur'an says: " Verily those who swear their fealty unto you do but swear fealty unto Allah..." (Surah Al-Fath, No. 48, verse 10); or in obedience: "Whoever obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allah..." (Surah An-Nis, No. 4, verse 80); or in immunity, like this verse. (Tafsir-I-Atyab-ul-Bayn)

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/enlightening-commentary-light-holy-quran-vol-6/section-1-immunity-declared>