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Surah Al-Mujadila

The Pleading Woman · Madani · 22 ayat — reflections
on surah 58 of the Qur'an

QURAN

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المجادلة — Al-Mujadila, “The Pleading Woman”. Surah 58 of 114, revealed in Madinah, 22 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/58/.

ONE

The surah in brief

Allah hears every complaint, even the whispered plea of a woman disputing over her husband; the surah affirms His all-encompassing hearing and knowledge, forbids the pagan divorce oath of zihar, and warns against secret counsel that harbors hostility to the believers.

The surah opens with a woman, Khawla bint Tha'laba, arguing her case over an unjust pre-Islamic divorce formula (zihar), and it is remarkable that the whole chapter takes its name from her plea because Allah heard her from above the seven heavens and legislated relief. From this act of listening it moves to a broader theme: nothing is hidden from Allah, whether a whispered conversation or a secret alliance. It confronts hypocrites who conspire against the believers and secretly befriend the Prophet's enemies, and closes by drawing a hard line between the party of Allah (hizb Allah), who prevail, and the party of Satan, who lose.

OCCASIONS OF REVELATION

Why it was revealed

These are the occasions (asbāb al-nuzūl) that the authentic collections narrate for verses of this surah. An occasion explains a verse; it does not limit its meaning.

Qur'an 58:1-4

Khawlah bint Tha'labah complained to the Prophet about her husband, who had declared zihar against her after she grew old. 'A'isha, in the same room, could not hear all her words, and Allah revealed "Indeed Allah has heard the statement of her who disputes with you concerning her husband."

"Blessed is the One Whose hearing encompasses all things. I heard some of the words of Khawlah bint Tha'labah"

'A'isha · Sunan Ibn Majah 2063 (grade in repo: sahih)

TWO

Its themes

- Allah hears and sees all
- Justice for the wronged
- Private counsel (najiwa)
- Loyalty and disavowal
- Hypocrisy exposed
- The party of Allah

THREE

Key verses

Allah has indeed heard (and accepted) the statement of the woman who pleads with thee concerning her husband and carries her complaint (in prayer) to Allah: and Allah (always) hears the arguments between both sides among you: for Allah hears and sees (all things).

Qur'an 58:1

That Allah heard the quiet complaint of one grieving woman, and reshaped a ruling because of it, tells you no burden you carry is beneath His attention. Ibn Kathir relays A'isha's awe that Allah heard Khawla when she herself could barely make out her words.

Seest thou not that Allah doth know (all) that is in the heavens and on earth? There is not a secret consultation between three, but He makes the fourth among them, – Nor between five but He makes the sixth, – nor between fewer nor more, but He is in their midst, wheresoever they be: In the end will He tell them the truth of their conduct, on the Day of Judgment. For Allah has full knowledge of all things.

Qur'an 58:7

No three converse in secret but He is their fourth, and no gathering excludes Him. Al-Sa'di reads this as a call to feel Allah's nearness so that your private moments match your public ones.

O ye who believe! When ye are told to make room in the assemblies, (spread out and) make room: (ample) room will Allah provide for you. And when ye are told to rise up, rise up Allah will rise up, to (suitable) ranks (and degrees), those of you who believe and who have been granted (mystic) Knowledge. And Allah is well-acquainted with all ye do.

Qur'an 58:11

Making room for others in a gathering, and knowledge joined to faith, are singled out as things Allah raises people by. The tafsir tradition ties honor here to humility and learning rather than status.

Thou wilt not find any people who believe in Allah and the Last Day, loving those who resist Allah and His Messenger, even though they were their fathers or their sons, or their brothers, or their kindred. For such He has written Faith in their hearts, and strengthened them with a spirit from Himself. And He will admit them to Gardens beneath which Rivers flow, to dwell therein (for ever). Allah will be well pleased with them, and they with Him. They are the Party of Allah. Truly it is the Party of Allah that will achieve Felicity.

Qur'an 58:22

True faith cannot coexist with love for those who war against Allah and His Messenger, even close kin. Those who hold this line are named the party of Allah, and the surah promises they are the ones who prevail.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Al-Mujadila (The Pleading Woman) is a Madinan surah whose opening is one of the most moving vindications of the powerless in the whole Qur'an. Its occasion was the case of Khawla bint Tha'laba, whose husband Aws ibn al-Samit pronounced against her the pagan formula of zihar — declaring her 'like the back of my mother,' which severed the marriage in the old custom while leaving the woman suspended, neither wife nor free. Khawla disputed the matter with the Prophet ﷺ and, receiving no ruling yet, raised her complaint to God — and revelation descended.

'A'isha marveled at it: 'Blessed is He whose hearing encompasses all things — I could hear some of what Khawla said and some escaped me, yet God heard her from above the seven heavens.' The surah takes its name from her pleading (mujadala), and its first verses legislate a way out of zihar that both abolishes the cruelty of the custom and restores the wife.

Its character then broadens from the domestic to the communal. It moves from the intimate answering of a wronged woman, to the etiquette of private counsels and public assemblies, to a sharp delineation of the two parties into which people finally divide: the party of God and the party of Satan. It is a surah in which, by many counts, the name of God appears in every single verse.

How the surah unfolds

It begins with God's own testimony: He has heard the words of the woman who disputes concerning her husband and complains to God, and God hears the exchange between them (58:1). Those who make zihar against their wives — their wives are not their mothers; 'their mothers are none but those who gave them birth'; the pronouncement is an objectionable and false utterance, yet God is Pardoning and Forgiving (58:2). It then sets the expiation (kaffara) before the couple may resume relations: freeing a slave, or fasting two consecutive months, or feeding sixty needy people (58:3–4) — a graded atonement that teaches restraint of the tongue while reuniting the marriage.

The surah warns that those who oppose God and His Messenger will be abased as the deniers before them were (58:5), and reminds that God has counted their deeds though they forgot them, being witness over all things (58:6). It then unveils His encompassing knowledge: there is no secret counsel of three but He is their fourth, nor of five but He is their sixth, nor fewer nor more but He is with them wherever they are (58:7). Certain people, forbidden from conspiratorial whispering, returned to it — plotting sin, transgression, and disobedience to the Messenger, and greeting him with a corrupted greeting (58:8). So the believers are commanded, when they confer privately, to confer in righteousness and piety, not in sin; secret scheming is from Satan, meant to grieve the believers, yet it can harm no one except by God's leave (58:9–10).

There follow two rules of communal manners: when told to make room in the assemblies, make room, and God will make room for you; and when told to rise, then rise, for 'God will raise those who believe among you and those given knowledge by degrees' (58:11). And the believers were briefly instructed to offer a charity before consulting the Messenger privately — a measure that purified intentions and eased his burden, later relaxed once its lesson was learned (58:12–13).

The surah closes on the two parties. It rebukes those who befriended a people upon whom God's anger fell (the hypocrites who allied with hostile factions), swearing false oaths as a shield; their wealth and children will avail them nothing (58:14–17). On the Day they will swear to God as they now swear to men, imagining it profits them — they are the liars, whom Satan has overcome so that they forgot God's remembrance: 'those are the party of Satan (hizb al-shaytan); truly, the party of Satan are the losers' (58:19). By contrast, 'you will not find a people who believe in God and the Last Day loving those who oppose God and His Messenger, even were they their fathers, sons, brothers, or kindred' (58:22); in their hearts God has inscribed faith and supported them with a spirit from Himself — 'those are the party of God (hizb Allah); truly, the party of God are the successful.'

The major themes, in depth

The first theme is that God hears and answers the wronged, however powerless. The surah's whole force lies in its opening: a single poor woman, whom the community could not yet help, was heard by the Lord of the heavens, and revelation changed

the law for her sake. Divine justice, it teaches, reaches into the household and stoops to the marginal; no complaint sincerely raised to God is lost.

The second theme is the reform of a jahili cruelty. Zihar had trapped women in a limbo of the husband's making; the Qur'an names it false and objectionable, forbids treating it as a real divorce, and prescribes a demanding expiation that both restrains the reckless tongue and returns the wife to her rightful place. It is a model of how revelation dismantles an oppressive custom while restoring dignity.

The third theme is the omnipresence of God's knowledge and its effect on speech. 'There is no private counsel of three but He is the fourth of them' (58:7) is among the Qur'an's most vivid statements of God's nearness. The surah draws from it a whole ethic of speech: private words, no less than public ones, are heard by God, so believers must confer in righteousness and abandon the whispering that breeds sin and division.

The fourth theme is loyalty defined by faith, not blood — wala' and bara'. The surah's climax declares that true believers cannot give their inmost love to those who war against God and His Messenger, even their closest kin. Humanity divides not by tribe but by allegiance, into the party of God and the party of Satan, and the surah leaves no doubt which one prospers.

Points of reflection

Al-Mujadila plants a deep confidence in the heart of anyone treated unjustly: the God who answered Khawla still hears. It teaches the wronged to raise their case to Him, and it teaches

the powerful — judges, husbands, leaders — that the One above them is listening to how the weak are treated.

Its counsel on private and public speech remains strikingly practical: guard the tongue in secret councils, keep private conversation free of malice and scheming, and observe humility and courtesy in gatherings, making room for others and rising graciously — for God raises the humble and the knowledgeable in rank.

Above all, the surah asks where one's ultimate loyalty lies. It does not forbid natural affection for kin, but it forbids giving one's deepest allegiance to those who oppose God, even when they are family. To be of the party of God is to let faith, not blood, order one's loves — and in that ordering, the surah promises, lies the only lasting success.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Bring your grievances to Allah directly; He hears what people miss.
2. Assume Allah's presence in every private word and plan.
3. Pair knowledge with faith and give others space, and you are raised.
4. Let your deepest loyalty be to Allah, not to bonds that pull against Him.

Where this reading draws from. Ibn Kathir, al-Sa'di (Taysir al-Karim al-Rahman), al-Qurtubi. A summary is not a tafsir: for the verse-by-verse treatment go to the works themselves, or to the close studies at deen2u.com/tadabbur/.