

# **Al-Ma'idah** [The Table]

## **Madinan Period**

*In the name Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate*

[1] Believers! Honour your bonds! <sup>1</sup> All grazing beasts of the flock are permitted to you<sup>2</sup> except those which are recited to you hereinafter; but you are not allowed to hunt in the state of *ihram* (the state of Pilgrim Sanctity). Indeed Allah decrees as He wills.

[2] Believers! Neither desecrate the symbols of (devotion to) Allah<sup>3</sup> nor the holy month, nor the animals of offering, nor the animals wearing collars indicating they are for sacrifice, nor ill-treat those who have set out for the Holy House seeking from their Lord His bounty and good pleasure. But once you are free from Pilgrimage obligations, you are free to hunt. Do not let your wrath against the people who have barred you from the Holy Mosque move you to commit undue transgressions;<sup>4</sup> rather, help one another in acts of righteousness and piety, and do not help one another in sin and transgression. Fear Allah: Surely Allah is severe in retribution.

1. *People are asked to abide by the limitations and prohibitions laid down in the Qur'an.*
2. *The Arabic word an 'am (cattle) denotes camels, oxen, sheep and goats, whereas the word bahimah means all grazing quadrupeds. The terms in which the injunction is conveyed are bahimat al-an 'am (all grazing beasts of the flock). Hence the permission is of wider import and embraces all grazing quadrupeds of the cattle type, i.e. those which do not possess canine teeth, which feed on plants rather than animals, and which resemble the cattle. This implication was elucidated by the Prophet (peace be on him) and is embodied in a tradition in which he prohibited those beasts which kill and eat animals. Likewise, the Prophet (peace be on him) also prohibited birds with claws and those that feed on carrion.*
3. *Whatever characteristically represents either a particular doctrine, creed, way of thought or conduct is recognized as its symbol. For example, official flags, uniforms of the armed forces, coins, notes and stamps are symbols used by governments. Cathedrals, altars and crosses are symbols of Christianity. A special bunch of hair on the head, a special kind of bead-rosary and the temple are symbols of Hinduism. A turban, bracelet and kirpan (a special dagger kept by the Sikhs) are symbols of the Sikh religion. The hammer and sickles are the symbols of Communism. The followers of these ideologies are required to treat these symbols with respect. If a person insults any symbol associated with a particular ideology it is regarded as an act of hostility; and if the person concerned is himself a follower of that ideology then that insult is considered to be tantamount to abandonment of, and revolt against, it. The expression sha'a'ir Allah refers to all those rites which, in opposition to polytheism and outright unbelief and atheism, are the characteristic symbols of exclusive devotion to God.*
4. *The unbelievers had prevented the Muslims from visiting the Ka 'bah. In fact, in violation of the ancient usage of Arabia they had even deprived them of their right to make Pilgrimage, As a result, the Muslims felt inclined to prevent the pagan tribes too from making Pilgrimage by not letting them pass along the routes to Makkah which lay close to the Islamic domains,*

*and to attack their trading caravans during the time of Pilgrimage (Hajj). God prevented them from carrying out this plan through this revelation.*

[3] Forbidden to you are carrion, blood, the flesh of swine, the animal slaughtered in any name other than Allah's, the animal which has either been strangled, killed by blows, has died of a fall, or by goring or devoured by a beast of prey - unless it be that which you yourselves might have slaughtered while it was still alive-and forbidden to you also that which was slaughtered at the altars.<sup>5</sup> You are also forbidden to seek knowledge of your fate by divining arrows. All these are sinful acts. This day the unbelievers have fully despaired of your religion. Do not fear them; but fear Me.<sup>6</sup> This day I have perfected for you your religion, and have bestowed upon you My Bounty in full measure, and have been pleased to assign for you Islam as your religion.<sup>7</sup> (Follow, then, the lawful and unlawful bounds enjoined upon you.) As for he who is driven by hunger, without being wilfully inclined to sin, surely Allah is All-Forgiving<sup>8</sup> All-Compassionate.

*5. The word nusub signifies all the places consecrated for offerings to others than the One True God, regardless of whether they are images of wood, stone or anything else.*

*6. "This day" here does not signify a particular day or a specific date. It refers to that period of time when these verses were revealed. In our usage, too, expressions like "today" or "this day" often have the sense of the "present time". "This day the unbelievers have fully despaired of your religion" refers to the fact that the Muslims' religion had developed into a full-fledged system of life, reinforced by the authority and governmental power which it had acquired. The unbelievers who had hitherto resisted its establishment had now despaired of being able to destroy Islam and of forcing the believers to return to their former state of ignorance. The believers, therefore, no longer needed to fear other humans: they should fear God alone. They were told that they would not be treated lightly if they failed to carry out His commands, especially as there was no longer any justifiable excuse for such failure.*

*7. The "perfection of religion" mentioned in this verse refers to making it a self-sufficient system of belief and conduct, and an order of social life providing its own answers to the questions with which man is confronted so that in no circumstance would one need to look for guidance to any extraneous source. The bounty referred to in the statement: "I have bestowed upon you My bounty in full measure," is the bounty of true guidance. The statement: "I have been pleased to assign for you Islam as your religion" means that since the Muslims had proved by their conduct and their striving that they were honest and sincere about the commitment they had made to God in embracing Islam- the commitment to serve and obey Him - He had accepted their sincerity and created the conditions in which they were no longer yoked in bondage to anyone but Him. Thus the Muslims were no longer prevented from living in submission to God because of extraneous constraints just as there were no constraints preventing them from subscribing to true beliefs.*

*8. See surah al-Baqarah 2: n. 52 above.*

[4] They ask you what has been made lawful to them. Say that all clean things have been made lawful to you,<sup>9</sup> and such hunting animals as you teach, training them to hunt, teaching them the knowledge Allah has given you – you may eat what they catch for you<sup>10</sup> - but invoke the name of Allah on it.<sup>11</sup> Have fear of Allah (in violating His Law). Allah is swift in His reckoning.

9. The questioners wanted a list of what was lawful so that they could treat everything else as prohibited, but the Qur'an provided them instead with a list of what is prohibited and then left them with the guiding principle that all "clean things" are lawful. This meant a complete reversal of the old religious outlook according to which everything that had not been declared lawful was considered prohibited. The lawfulness of things has been tied, however, to the stipulation of their being "clean" so that no one can argue for the lawfulness of things which are unclean. The question which arises at this point is: How are we to determine which things are clean? The answer is that everything is clean apart from those things which can be reckoned as unclean either according to any of the principles embodied in the Law or which are repellent to man's innate sense of good taste or which civilized human beings have generally found offensive to their natural feelings of cleanliness and decency.

10. The expression "hunting animals" signifies hounds, cheetahs, hawks and all those beasts and birds which men use in hunting. It is a characteristic of animals which have been trained to hunt that they hold the prey for their masters rather than devour it. It is for this reason that while the catch of these trained animals is lawful, that of others is prohibited.

11. Hunters should pronounce the name of God at the time of dispatching animals to the hunt. The verse under discussion makes it clear that it is necessary to pronounce the name of God while dispatching a hound to the hunt. If a man later finds the prey alive he should slaughter it. But if he does not find it alive it will still be lawful to eat it since the name of God had already been pronounced. The same rule applies with regard to shooting arrows in hunting.

[5] This day all clean things have been made lawful to you. The food of the People of the Book is permitted to you, and your food is permitted to them." And permitted to you are chaste women, be they from among the believers, or from among those who have received the Book before you,<sup>13</sup> provided you become their protectors in wedlock after paying them their bridal-due, rather than going around committing fornication and taking them as secret-companions. The work of he who refuses to follow the Way of faith will go to waste, and he will be among the utter losers in the Hereafter.

12. The food of the People of the Book includes the animals slaughtered by them. The rule that "our food is lawful to them and theirs lawful to us" signifies that there need be no barriers between Muslims and the People of the Book regarding food. Muslims may eat with them and they with Muslims. But this general proclamation of permission is preceded by a reiteration of the statement: "All clean things have been made lawful to you." This indicates that if the People of the Book do not observe those principles of cleanliness and purity which are considered obligatory by the Law or if their food includes prohibited items, then one should abstain from eating them. If, for instance, they either slaughter an animal without pronouncing the name of God or if they slaughter it in the name of anyone other than God it is not lawful for us to eat the flesh of that animal.

13. This expression signifies the Jews and the Christians. As for non-Muslim women, Muslims may marry only Christians and Jews, and of them only those who have been characterized as muhsanat (i.e. "well-protected women".) A Muslim who avails of this permission has, however, been cautioned to guard his faith against any possible detrimental influences of his Jewish or Christian wife.

[6] Believers! When you stand up for Prayer wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe your heads, and wash your feet up to the ankles.<sup>14</sup> And if you are in the state of ritual impurity, purify yourselves (by taking a bath). But if you are either ill, or travelling, or have satisfied a want of nature or have had (intimate) contact with women and find no water, then have recourse to clean earth and wipe your faces and your hands therewith.<sup>15</sup> Allah does not want to lay any hardship upon you; rather He wants to purify you and complete His favours upon you so that you may give thanks.

*14. The explanation of this injunction by the Prophet (peace be on him) indicates that washing of the face includes rinsing one's mouth and inhaling water into the nostrils. Unless this is done the washing of the face is not considered complete. Likewise, since the ears are part of the head, "wiping the head" includes wiping one's hands over the external and internal parts of the ears as well. Moreover, before starting to wash the other parts one should first wash one's hands so that the instruments of washing are themselves clean.*

*15. For explanation see surah al- Nisa 4: nn. 41, 43 above.*

[7] Remember Allah's favour upon you and His covenant which He made with you when you said: "We have heard and we obey." So do fear Allah. Allah has full knowledge even of that which is hidden in the breasts of people.

[8] Believers! Be upright bearers of witness for Allah, and do not let the enmity of any people move you to deviate from justice. Act justly, that is nearer to God-fearing. And fear Allah. Surely Allah is well aware of what you do.

[9] Allah has promised those who believe and do righteous deeds forgiveness from sins and a great reward.

[10] As for those who disbelieve and give the lie to Our Signs, they are destined for the Blazing Flame.

[11] Believers! Remember Allah's favour upon you. When a certain people decided to stretch their hands against you,<sup>16</sup> He restrained their hands from you. Do fear Allah. Men of faith should put their trust only in Allah.

*16. This alludes to the incident reported by 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas when a group of Jews invited the Prophet (peace be on him) and a number of his close Companions to dinner. They had in fact hatched a plot to pounce upon the guests and thus undermine the very foundation of Islam. But by the grace of God the Prophet (peace be on him) came to know of the plot at the eleventh hour and did not go to that dinner.*

[12] Surely Allah took a covenant with the Children of Israel, and We raised up from them twelve of their leaders,<sup>17</sup> and Allah said: "Behold, I am with you; if you establish Prayer and pay *Zakah* and believe in My Prophets and help them, and lend Allah a goodly loan, I will certainly efface from you your evil deeds, and will surely cause you to enter the Gardens beneath which rivers flow. Whosoever of you disbelieves thereafter has indeed gone astray from the Right Way."<sup>18</sup>

[13] Then, for their breach of the covenant We cast them away from Our Mercy and caused their hearts to harden. (And now they are in such a state that) they pervert words from their context and distort their meaning, and have forgotten a good portion of the teaching they were imparted, and regarding all except a few of them you continue to learn that they committed acts of treachery. Pardon them, then, and overlook their deeds. Surely Allah loves those who act benevolently.

[14] We also took a covenant from those who said: "We are Christians (*Nasara*)"; but they forgot a good portion of the teaching they had been imparted. Wherefore We aroused enmity and spite between them till the Day of Resurrection, and ultimately Allah will tell them what they used to do.

*17. The word naqib in Arabic denotes supervisor and censor. There were twelve tribes among the Israelites and each tribe was required to appoint one of its members as a naqib so that he might look after the affairs of his fellow-tribesmen and try to prevent them from becoming victims of irreligiousness and moral corruption.*

*18. Sawa al-sabil (Right Path) is the designated highway that would lead to one's destination. Straying from the "Right Path" would take one off the highway as a result of which one might wander about and get lost.*

[15] People of the Book! Now Our Messenger has come to you: he makes clear to you a good many things of the Book which you were wont to conceal, and also passes over many things.<sup>19</sup> There has now come to you a Light from Allah, and a Clear Book

[16] through which Allah shows to all who seek to please Him the paths leading to safety. He brings them out, by His leave, from darkness to Light and directs them on to the Straight Way.

[17] Indeed those who said: "Christ, the son of Mary, he indeed is God," were guilty of unbelief. Say, (O Muhammad): "Who could have overruled Allah had He so willed to destroy Christ, the son of Mary and his mother, and all those who are on earth?" For to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them; He creates what He wills.<sup>20</sup> Allah is All-Powerful.

[18] The Jews and the Christians say: "We are Allah's children and His beloved ones." Ask them: "Why, then, does He chastise you for your sins?" You are the same as other human beings He has created. He forgives whom He wills and chastises whom He wills. And to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them. To Him is the eventual return.

*19. God discloses some of the dishonest and treacherous dealings of the People of the Book, He, however, discloses only those dealings which He deems necessary to strengthen the cause of the true faith and ignores the disclosure of those which are not indispensable.*

*20. That is, they had started believing that Jesus was God just because he was conceived without a father, although God creates whomsoever He will in the manner He pleases. Divinity cannot be claimed for anyone simply because God has created him in an extraordinary manner.*

[19] People of the Book! After a long interlude during which no Messengers appeared there has come to you Our Messenger to elucidate the teaching of the true faith lest you say: "No bearer of glad tidings and no warner has come to us." For now there indeed has come to you a bearer of glad tidings and a warner. Allah is All- Powerful.<sup>21</sup>

[20] Remember when Moses said to his people: "My people, recall Allah's favour upon you when He raised Prophets among you and appointed you rulers, and granted to you what He had not granted to anyone else in the world.

[21] My people! Enter the holy land which Allah has ordained for you;<sup>22</sup> and do not turn back for then you will turn about losers."

[22] They answered: "Moses, therein live a ferocious people: we will not enter unless they depart from it; but if they do depart from it then we will surely enter it."

[23] Two from among these men who were frightened but upon whom Allah had bestowed His favour<sup>23</sup> said: "Enter upon them through the gate - for if you do enter - you will be the victors. And put your trust in Allah if indeed you are people of faith."

*21. The People of the Book should bear in mind that if they disregard the injunctions of God, He can chastise them as He wills, for He is All-Powerful and All-Mighty.*

*22. This signifies Palestine which at the time was inhabited by idolatrous and immoral groups of people. After their exodus from Egypt, God designated this land for the Israelites and commanded them to go forth to Palestine and conquer it.*

*23. One of these holy men was Joshua, son of Nun, who succeeded the Prophet Moses as his caliph. The other was Caleb, who became the right-hand man of Joshua. When after their 40-year wandering the Israelites entered Palestine these two were the only Companions of Moses who were alive.*

[24] Nevertheless they said: "O Moses! Never shall we enter it as long as they are there. Go forth, then, you and your Lord, and fight both of you. As for us, we will remain sitting here."

[25] Thereupon Moses said: "My Lord! I have control over none but my own self and my brother; so make a distinction between us and the transgressing people,"

[26] Allah said: "This land will now be forbidden to them for forty years and they will remain wandering about on the earth. Do not grieve over the condition of these transgressing people."<sup>24</sup>

[27] Narrate to them in all truth the story of the two sons of Adam. When both of them made an offering and it was accepted from one of them and was not accepted from the other, the latter said: "I will surely kill you." Thereupon the former said: "Allah only accepts offerings from the God-fearing.

[28] Even if you stretch forth your hand against me to kill me, I will not stretch forth my hand to kill you.<sup>25</sup> surely, I fear Allah, the Lord of the entire Universe.

*24. The purpose of referring to this event becomes clear if we reflect upon the context. The purpose seems to be to bring home to the Israelites that the punishment to which they would be subjected if they adopted a rebellious attitude towards Muhammad (peace be on him) would be even more severe than the one to which people were subjected in the time of Moses.*

*25. This does not mean that his brother assured him that when the latter stepped forward to kill him he would keep his hands tied and instead of defending himself he would stretch out his neck to be cut down. What this statement amounts to is an assurance on his part that even though his brother was intent on killing him, he himself had no such intention towards his brother.*

[29] I would desire that you be laden with my sin and with your own sin, and thus become among the inmates of the Fire. That indeed is the right recompense of the wrong-doers."

[30] At last his evil soul drove him to the murder of his brother, and he killed him, whereby he himself became one of the losers.

[31] Thereupon Allah sent forth a raven who began to scratch the earth to show him how he might cover the corpse of his brother. So seeing he cried: "Woe unto me! Was I unable even to be like this raven and find a way to cover the corpse of my brother?" Then he became full of remorse at his doing.<sup>26</sup>

[32] Therefore We ordained for the Children of Israel that he who slays a soul unless it be (in punishment) for murder or for spreading mischief on earth shall be as if he had slain all mankind; and he who saves a life shall be as if he had given life to all mankind. And indeed again and again did Our Messengers come to them with clear directives, yet many of them continued to commit excesses on earth.

*26. The purpose of mentioning this particular incident is to subtly reproach the Jews for the plot they had hatched to assassinate the Prophet (peace be on him) and some of his illustrious Companions (see n. 16 above). The resemblance between the two incidents is evident. These people wanted to kill the Prophet (peace be on him) out of sheer jealousy. The errant son of Adam also killed his brother and did so for the same reason.*

[33] Those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger, and go about the earth spreading mischief<sup>27</sup>- indeed their recompense is that they either be done to death, or be crucified, or have their hands and feet be cut off from the opposite sides or they be banished from the land. Such shall be their degradation in this world; and a mighty chastisement lies in store for them in the World to Come

[34] except for those who repent before you have overpowered them. Know well that Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate.<sup>28</sup>

*27. The word "land" here signifies either the country or territory wherein the responsibility of establishing law and order has been undertaken by an Islamic state. The expression "to wage war against Allah and His Messenger" denotes war against the righteous order established by the Islamic state. According to Islamic jurists the people to whom reference has been made here are organized and armed bands of criminals who commit robbery and indulge in plunder.*

*28. If they give up subversion and abandon their activities to disrupt or overthrow the righteous order, and if their subsequent conduct shows that they have indeed become peace-loving, law-abiding citizens of good character, they need not be subjected to the punishments mentioned here even if any of their former crimes against the state should come to light. If their crimes include violation of the rights of others they may not be absolved of their guilt. If, for instance, they have either killed a person, or seized someone's property or committed any other crime against human life or property they will be tried according to the criminal law of Islam. They will, however, not be accused of either rebellion and high treason or of waging war against God and His Messenger.*

[35] Believers! Fear Allah and seek the means to come near to Him,<sup>29</sup> and strive hard in His Way; maybe you will attain true success.

[36] For those who disbelieved –even if they had all that is in the earth and the like of it with it and they had offered it all as ransom from chastisement on the Day of Resurrection, it will not be accepted of them. A painful chastisement lies in store for them.

[37] They will wish to come out of the Fire, but they will not. Theirs will be a long-lasting chastisement.

[38] As for the thief - male or female – cut off the hands of both.<sup>30</sup> This is a recompense for what they have done, and an exemplary punishment from Allah, Allah is All-Mighty All-Wise.

[39] But he who repents after he has committed wrong, and makes amends, Allah will graciously turn to him.<sup>31</sup> Truly Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate.

*29. People are urged to solicit all means which might bring them close to God and enable them to please Him.*

*30. The injunction is to cut off one not both hands. There is consensus among jurists that in the event of the first theft the right hand should be cut off. Theft is applicable only to acts involving the seizure by stealth of someone else's property. The punishment of cutting off a hand should, however, not be applied in cases where the value of the article stolen is less than that of a shield. In the time of the Prophet (peace be on him) its value was ten dirhams. Moreover, there are several things the theft of which would not necessitate cutting off a hand. For instance, theft of fruit, vegetables, food, a bird, paltry things, an item from the public treasury, etc, will not warrant cutting off a hand.*

**31.** *Forgiveness on the part of God does not mean that the hand of the thief should not be cut off. It rather means that he who repents and becomes righteous by purging his soul of the sin of stealing will be spared the wrath of God, Who will remove the stain of that sin from him. But if after his hand has been cut-off the person concerned does not purge himself of evil intent and continues to nurture the same impure feelings which had led to his stealing and thus to the cutting off of his hand) it is evident that even though his hand has been severed from his body, stealing remains ingrained in his soul. The result will be that he will continue to merit God's wrath as he did before his hand was cut off, The Qur'an, therefore, directs the thief to seek pardon from God and to try to reform himself. Judicial punishment does not automatically purify a person's soul. Purity of soul can be achieved only by repentance and turning to God.*

[40] Do you not know that to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth? He chastises whom He wills and forgives whom He wills. Allah is All-Powerful.

[41] O Messenger! Do not be grieved on account of those who vie with one another in disbelieving, even though they be those who say with their mouths: "We believe," but their hearts have no faith; or they be Jews who have their ears eagerly turned to falsehood and spy for other people who did not chance to come to you, who pervert the words of Allah, taking them out of their proper context in order to distort their meaning. They say to people: "If such and such teaching is given to you, accept it; if you are not given that, then avoid it."<sup>32</sup> You can be of no avail to him whom Allah wills to fall into error.<sup>33</sup> Those are the ones whose hearts Allah does not want to purify. For them there is degradation in this world and a mighty chastisement in the Next.

**32.** *This refers to the Jews who went about telling the ignorant masses that they should follow the teachings of the Prophet (peace be on him) only if they conformed to Jewish teachings.*

**33.** *God's will to put someone to the test means that God confronts him in whom He sees the growth of evil with opportunities to commit evils so that he might go through the struggle between good and evil within himself. If the person is not yet fully inclined towards evil, his latent potentialities to resist evil are revived. But if he has become excessively inclined towards evil, and goodness has been totally crushed from within his being, then every such test is bound to entangle him still more tightly in evil. His well-wisher will now be powerless to rescue him.*

[42] They are listeners of falsehood and greedy devourers of unlawful earnings. If they come to you (for your judgement), you may either judge between them or turn away from them. And were you to turn away from them they shall not be able to harm you; and were you to judge between them judge with justice. Surely Allah loves the just.<sup>34</sup>

[43] Yet how will they appoint you a judge when they have the Torah with them, wherein there is Allah's judgement - and still they turn away from it? The fact is, they are not believers.

[44] Surely We revealed the Torah, wherein there is Guidance and Light. Thereby did Prophets-who had submitted themselves (to Allah) - judge for the Judaized folk; and so did the scholars and jurists." They judged by the Book of Allah for they had been entrusted to

keep it and bear witness to it. So, (O Jews), do not fear human beings but fear Me, and do not barter away My signs for a trivial gain. Those who do not judge by what Allah has revealed are indeed the unbelievers.

*34. Until then the Jews had not become full-fledged subjects of the Islamic state. Their relations with that state were simply based on agreements, They were, therefore, not legally bound to submit their disputes either to the Prophet (peace be on him) for adjudication or to the judges appointed by him. But in cases where it seemed detrimental to their interests to have their disputes settled according to their own religious law they approached the Prophet (peace be on him) in the hope that the Prophet would give a different ruling and they would thereby escape the application of their own religious law.*

[45] And therein We had ordained for them: "A life for a life, and an eye for an eye, and a nose for a nose, and an ear for an ear, and a tooth for a tooth, and for all wounds, like for like. But whosoever foregoes it by way of charity, it will be for him expiation." Those who do not judge by what Allah has revealed are indeed the wrong-doers.

[46] And We sent Jesus, the son of Mary, after those Prophets, confirming the truth of whatever there still remained of the Torah. And We gave him the Gospel wherein is Guidance and Light, and which confirms the truth of whatever there still remained of the Torah, and a Guidance and Admonition for the God-fearing.

[47] Let the followers of the Gospel judge by what Allah has revealed therein, and those who do not judge by what Allah has revealed are the transgressors.<sup>36</sup>

**35.** Rabbani = religious scholars, theologians. Ahbar = religious jurists.

*36. Here three verdicts are issued against those who do not judge in accordance with the Law revealed by God. The first is that they are kafir (unbelievers); the second, that they are zalim (wrong-doers); and the third, that they are fasiq (transgressors). This clearly means that anyone who, in disregard of God's commandments and of the laws revealed by Him, pronounces judgements according to man-made laws - whether made by himself or by others - is an unbeliever, a wrong-doer and a transgressor, A man who is convinced that the injunctions of God are right but makes judgements contrary to them in practice is not an unbeliever in the sense that he ceases to be a member of the Islamic community, but he is guilty of adulterating his faith by blending it with kafir, zalim and fasiq. In the same manner, those who deviate from the injunctions of God in all matters are unbelievers, wrong-doers and transgressors. For those who are obedient in some respects and disobedient in others, the blending of faith and submission to God with the opposite attributes of unbelief, wrongdoing and transgression in their lives will be exactly in proportion to the mixture of their obedience to, and their deviation from, God's commands.*

[48] Then We revealed the Book to you, (O Muhammad), with Truth, confirming whatever of the Book was revealed before, and protecting and guarding over it.<sup>37</sup> Judge, then, in the affairs of men in accordance with the Law that Allah has revealed, and do not follow their desires in disregard of the Truth which has come to you. For each of you We have appointed a Law and a way of life. And had Allah so willed, He would surely have made you one single community; instead, (He gave each of you a Law and a way of life) in order to test you by what He gave you. Vie, then, with one another in good works. Unto Allah is the return of all

of you; and He will then make you understand the truth concerning the matters on which you disagreed.

*37. This points to a fact of major significance. It could also have been said that the Qur'an confirms all those parts of the earlier Scriptures which are still extant in their true and original form. But the sense has been conveyed by employing the word "the Book rather than "the previous Books". This expression indicates that the Qur'an and all those Books sent down by God at various times and in different languages in reality constitute one and the same Book. Their Author is one and the same; their aim and purpose are the same; their teaching is the same; and the knowledge which they seek to impart to mankind is the same, The difference between these Books lies in their modes of expression, and this was necessarily so since they were addressed to different audiences. To say that the Qur'an is muhaymin on al-kitab means that it preserves all the true teachings of the earlier books of Divine provenance; that it has secured them from loss.*

[49] Therefore, judge between them, (O Muhammad), by what Allah has revealed and do not follow their desires, and beware lest they tempt you away from anything of what Allah has revealed to you. And if they turn away, then know well that Allah has indeed decided to afflict them for some of their sins. For surely many of them are transgressors.

[50] (If they turn away from the Law of Allah) do they desire judgement according to the Law of Ignorance? <sup>38</sup> But whose judgement can be better than Allah's for those who have certainty of belief?

[51] Believers! Do not take Jews and Christians for your allies. They are the allies of each other. And among you he who takes them for allies, shall be regarded as one of them. Allah does not guide the wrong-doers.

[52] Indeed you see that those afflicted with the disease of hypocrisy race towards them, saying: "We fear lest some misfortune overtakes us." And it may happen that Allah will either bring you a decisive victory or bring about something else from Himself and then they will feel remorseful at their hypocrisy which they have kept concealed in their breasts,

*38. The word jahiliyah (literally "ignorance") is used as an antonym of Islam. Islam is the way of 'ilm (true knowledge), since it is God Himself Who has shown this way and His knowledge embraces everything. In contrast is the way that diverges from Islam –the way of Ignorance (jahiliyah). The pre-Islamic period in Arabia is designated as jahiliyah because this was the era when human beings derived their norms from either superstitious beliefs, conjectures and imagination or from their desires. Whenever such an attitude is adopted, it is bound to be designated as Ignorance.*

[53] while those who believe will exclaim: "Are these the self-same people who solemnly swore by Allah that they were with you?" All their acts have gone to waste and now they are the losers.

[54] Believers! If any of you should ever turn away from your faith, remember that Allah will raise up a people whom He loves and who love Him; a people humble towards the believers,

and firm towards the unbelievers,<sup>39</sup> who will strive hard in the way of Allah and will not fear the reproach of the reproacher. This is the favour of Allah which He grants to whom He wills. Allah is All- Resourceful, All-Knowing.

[55] Only Allah, His Messenger, and those who believe and who establish Prayer, pay *Zakah*, and bow down (before Allah) are your allies.

*39. To be "humble towards the believers" signifies that a person should never use his strength against the believers. His native intelligence, shrewdness, ability, influence, wealth, physical prowess, should not be used either for suppressing, persecuting or causing harm to the Muslims. Among themselves, the Muslims should always find him gentle, merciful, sympathetic and mild-tempered. On the contrary, to be "firm towards the unbelievers," means that a believer, by virtue of the intensity of his faith, the sincerity of his conviction, strict adherence to his principles, his strength of character and his insight and perspicacity born of faith, should be firm as a rock in his dealing with the opponents of Islam, so that they find it impossible to dislodge him. There should be no doubt in their minds that the believer would rather lay down his life than compromise his position as regards his principles by yielding to external pressures.*

[56] All those who accept Allah and His Messenger and the believers as their allies should remember that the party of Allah will be triumphant.

[57] Believers! Do not take for your allies those who make a mockery and sport of your faith, be they those given the Book before you or other unbelievers. Fear Allah if you indeed believe.

[58] And when you are called to pray, they take it for a mockery and sport.<sup>40</sup> That because they are a people who do not understand.

[59] Say to them: "People of the Book! Do you hate us for anything else except that we believe in Allah, and in the teaching which has been revealed to us and in the teaching which was revealed before? Indeed most of you are transgressors."

[60] Then say to them: "Shall I tell you about those whose retribution with Allah will be even worse? They are the ones whom Allah has cursed, and have incurred His wrath and some of whom were changed into apes and swine, and who served the false deities." Such have an even worse rank and have strayed farther away from the Right Path.

[61] Whenever they come to you they say: "We believe," whereas in fact they come disbelieving, and go away disbelieving, and Allah knows all that they hide.

[62] You will see many of them hastening towards sin and transgression and devouring unlawful earnings. Evil indeed is what they do.

[63] Why is it that their scholars and jurists do not forbid them from sinful utterances and devouring unlawful earnings? Indeed they have been contriving evil.

*40. When they hear the call to Prayer the unbelievers make fun of it by mimicry; they pervert its words to ridicule it, and utter disparaging and taunting remarks about it.*

[64] The Jews say: "The Hand of Allah is fettered."<sup>41</sup> It is their own hands which are fettered,<sup>42</sup> and they stand cursed for the evil they have uttered. No, His hands are outspread; He spends as He wills. Surely the Message that has been revealed to you from your Lord has increased many of them in their insurgence and unbelief, and so We have cast enmity and spite among them until the Day of Resurrection. And as often as they kindle the fire of war, Allah extinguishes it; and they go about trying to spread mischief on earth, whereas Allah does not love those who spread mischief.

[65] Had the People of the Book only believed and been God-fearing, We should surely have effaced from them their evil deeds and caused them to enter the Gardens of Bliss.

[66] Had the People of the Book observed the Torah and the Gospel and all that had been revealed to them from their Lord, sustenance would have been showered over them from above and would have risen from beneath their feet. Some among them certainly keep to the Right Path, but many of them do things that are evil.

[67] O Messenger! Deliver what has been revealed to you from your Lord, for if you fail to do that, you have not fulfilled the task of His messengership. Allah will certainly protect you from the evil of men. Surely Allah will not guide the unbelievers (to succeed against you).

*41. To say that someone's hands are tied, in Arabic usage, means that he is niggardly, that something prevents him from being generous and bountiful.*

*42. They accused God of miserliness from which they themselves suffered and for which they had become notorious.*

[68] Say to them: "People of the Book! You have no solid ground to stand on unless you establish the Torah and the Gospel and all that had been revealed to you from your Lord." Indeed the Message revealed to you from your Lord will lead to the aggravation of insurgence and unbelief in many of them, so do not grieve for those who disbelieve.

[69](Know well, none has an exclusive claim to the Truth.) For all those who believe in Allah and in the Last Day and do good deeds - whether they are Muslims or Jews or Sabaeans or Christians-neither fear shall fall upon them, nor shall they have any reason to grieve.<sup>43</sup>

[70] We took a covenant from the Children of Israel and sent to them many Messengers. But whenever any Messenger brought to them something that did not suit their desires, they gave the lie to some of them and killed the others,

[71] thinking that no harm would come from it. Thus they became blind and deaf (to the Truth). Thereafter Allah turned towards them in gracious forgiveness; but many of them became even more deaf and blind (to the Truth). Allah sees all that they do.

[72] And surely they disbelieved when they said: "Christ, the son of Mary, is indeed God"; whereas Christ had said: "Children of Israel! Serve Allah, Who is your Lord and my Lord." Allah has forbidden Paradise to those who associate anything with Him in His Divinity and their refuge shall be the Fire. No one will be able to help such wrong-doers.

*43. For further explanation see Surah al-Baqarah 2: 62, n. 26 above.*

[73] Those who said: "Allah is one of the Three," certainly they disbelieved, for there is no god save the One God. And if they do not give up this claim, all who have disbelieved among them shall be subjected to painful chastisement.

[74] Will they not, then, turn to Allah in repentance, and ask for His forgiveness? Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate.

[75] The Messiah, son of Mary, was no more than a Messenger, before whom many Messengers have passed away; and his mother adhered wholly to truthfulness, and they both ate food (as other mortals do), See how We make Our signs clear to them; and see where they are turning away!<sup>44</sup>

[76] Say: "Do you serve, instead of Allah, that which has no power either to harm or benefit you, whereas Allah alone is All-Hearing, All-Knowing?"

[77] Say: "People of the Book! Do not exceed the proper limits in your religion at the cost of Truth, and do not follow the caprices of the people who strayed before, and caused others to go astray, and strayed far away from the Right Path."

*44. In these few words the Christian doctrine of the Divinity of Jesus Christ is repudiated. The true nature of the Messiah is clear from the indications given here: he was merely a human being, he was one born from the womb of a woman, who had a known genealogy, who possessed a physical body, who was subject to all the limitations of a human being and had all the attributes characteristic of human beings, Jesus slept, ate, felt the discomfort of heat and cold and was so human that he was even tested by Satan. How could any reasonable person believe that such a being was either God or a partner or associate of God in His Godhead?*

[78] Those of the Children of Israel who took to unbelief have been cursed by the tongue of David and Jesus, the son of Mary, for they rebelled and exceeded the bounds of right.

[79] They did not forbid each other from committing the abominable deeds they committed.<sup>45</sup> Evil indeed was what they did.

[80] And now you can see many of them taking the unbelievers (instead of the believers) for their allies. Indeed they have sent forth evil for themselves. Allah is angry with them, and they shall abide in chastisement.

[81] For had they truly believed in Allah and the Messenger and what was sent down to him, they would not have taken the unbelievers (instead of believers) for their allies, But many of them have altogether rebelled against Allah.

[82] Of all people you will find the Jews and those who associate others with Allah in His Divinity to be the most hostile to those who believe; and you will surely find that of all people they who say: "We are Christians," are closest to feeling affection for those who believe. This because there are Worshipful priests and monks among them, and because they are not arrogant.

[83] And when they hear what has been revealed to the Messenger you see that their eyes overflow with tears because of the Truth that they recognize and they say: "Our Lord! We do believe; write us down, therefore, with those who bear witness (to the Truth).

*45. The corruption of any nation begins with the corruption of a few individuals. If the collective conscience of that nation is alive, the pressure of public opinion keeps the people in check and prevents the nation as a whole from becoming corrupted. But if instead of censuring such individuals, the nation leaves them free to behave corruptly, the corruption that was originally confined to a few persons continues to spread till it engulfs the whole nation. It was this which ultimately caused the degeneration of Israel.*

[84] And why should we not believe in Allah and the Truth which has come down to us when we do fervently desire that our Lord should include us among the righteous?"

[85] So Allah rewarded them for these words with the Gardens beneath which rivers flow so that they would abide there forever. Such is the reward of the people who do good.

[86] Those who disbelieved and gave the lie to Our Signs are rightfully the inmates of the Blazing Flame.

[87] Believers! Do not hold as unlawful the good things which Allah has made lawful to you,<sup>46</sup> and do not exceed the bounds of right. Allah does not love those who transgress the bounds of right.

[88] And partake of the lawful, good things which Allah has provided you as sustenance, and refrain from disobeying Allah in Whom you believe.

[89] Allah does not take you to task for the oaths you utter vainly, but He will certainly take you to task for the oaths you have sworn in earnest. The expiation (for breaking such oaths) is either to feed ten needy persons with more or less the same food as you are wont to give to your families, or to clothe them, or to set free from bondage the neck of one man; and he who does not find the means shall fast for three days. This shall be the expiation for your oaths whenever you have sworn (and broken them), and do keep your oaths. Thus does Allah make clear to you His commandments; maybe you will be grateful.

*46. This verse embodies two directives. The first is that man should not arrogate to himself the authority to proclaim things either lawful or unlawful according to his own wishes. Only that which God has held to be lawful is lawful, and only that which God has declared unlawful is unlawful. If human beings were to declare certain things either lawful or unlawful on their own authority they would not be following the law of God but their own laws. The second directive is that they should not adopt the course of world-renunciation and abstention from worldly pleasures as the Christian monks, Hindu mendicants, Buddhist bhikshus and illuminationst mystics did.*

[90] Believers! Intoxicants, games of chance, idolatrous sacrifices at altars, and divining arrows are all abominations, the handiwork of Satan. So turn wholly away from it that you may attain to true success.<sup>47</sup>

[91] By intoxicants and games of chance Satan only desires to create enmity and hatred among you, and to turn you away from the remembrance of Allah and from Prayer. Will you, then, desist?

[92] Obey Allah and obey the Messenger, and beware. But if you turn away, then know well that Our Messenger had merely to deliver the Message clearly.

[93] There will be no blame on those who believe and do righteous deeds for whatever they might have partaken (in the past) as long as they refrain from the things prohibited, and persist in their faith and do righteous deeds, and continue to refrain from whatever is forbidden and submit to Divine commandments, and persevere in doing good, fearing Allah. Allah loves those who do good.

*47. Two injunctions had already been revealed concerning the prohibition of intoxicants. (See Surah al-Baqarah 2:219 and Surah al-Nisa' 4:43.) Before the revelation of the last injunction, the Prophet (peace be on him) had warned people that intoxicants were highly displeasing to God. Hinting at the possibility of their being prohibited, he counselled people to dispose of intoxicants if they had any. A little later the present verse was revealed and the Prophet (peace be on him) then proclaimed that those who had intoxicants should neither consume nor sell them; instead, they should destroy them. No sooner than this proclamation was made that intoxicating liquors were poured into the streets of Madinah.*

[94] Believers, Allah will surely try you with a game which will be within the range of your hands and lances so that He might mark out those of you who fear Him, even though He is beyond the reach of perception. A painful chastisement awaits whosoever transgresses the bounds set by Allah after His firm warning.

[95] Believers! Do not kill game while you are in the state of Pilgrim Sanctity.<sup>48</sup> Whoever of you kills it wilfully there shall be a recompense, the like of what he has killed in cattle – as shall be judged by two persons of equity among you – to be brought to the Ka 'bah as an offering, or feed the needy as an expiation, or its equivalent in fasting in order that he may taste the grievousness of his deed. Allah has pardoned whatever has passed; but Allah will exact a penalty from him who repeats it. Allah is All-Mighty, He is fully capable of exacting retribution.

[96] The game of the water and eating thereof are permitted to you as a provision for those of you (Who are settled) and for those on a journey; but to hunt on land while you are in the state of Pilgrim Sanctity is forbidden for you. Beware, then, of disobeying Allah to Whom all of you shall be mustered.

*48. When a person is in the state of Pilgrim Sanctity (ihram) it is prohibited for him both to hunt and to assist in hunting animals. Indeed, even if an animal has been hunted for him by someone else he may not eat it. However, if someone hunts an animal for himself and makes a gift of it to such a person, there is no harm in his eating it. There is, however, an exception to this injunction against killing animals when one is in the state of ihram, and that is with regard to harmful animals. Snakes, scorpions, mad dogs and such other animals which cause injury to human beings may be killed even by those in the state of ihram.*

[97] Allah has appointed the Ka‘bah, the Sacred House, as a means of support for (the collective life of) people, and has caused the holy month (of Pilgrimage), and the animals of sacrificial offering and their distinguishing collars to assist therein. This is so that you may know that Allah is aware of all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth; and that Allah has knowledge of everything.

[98] Know well that Allah is severe in retribution, and that Allah is also All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate.

[99] The Messenger is bound only to deliver the Message, where after Allah knows well all that you disclose and all that you conceal.

[100] (O Messenger), say to them: “The bad things and the good things are not equal, even though the abundance of the bad things might make you pleased with them.<sup>49</sup> People of understanding, beware of disobeying Allah; maybe you will attain true success.”

[101] Believers! Do not ask of the things which, if made manifest to you, would Vex you; for,<sup>50</sup> if you should ask about them while the Qur'an is being revealed, they will be made manifest to you. Allah has pardoned whatever happened in the past. He is All-Forgiving, All-Forbearing.

*49. This verse enunciates a standard of evaluation and judgement quite distinct from the standards employed by superficial people. For the latter, a hundred dollars would be worth more than five dollars, since the figure hundred is more than five. But according to this verse, if those hundred dollars have been earned in a manner entailing the disobedience of God, the entire amount becomes unclean. If, on the contrary a man earns five dollars while obeying God then this amount is clean; and anything which is unclean, whatever its quantity, cannot be worth that which is clean.*

*50. People used to ask the Prophet (peace be on him) many questions which were of no practical relevance to either religious or day-to-day affairs. Hence they were given this directive.*

[102] Indeed some people before you had asked such questions and in consequence fell into unbelief.

[103] Allah has neither appointed (cattle consecrated to idols such as) *Bahirah*, *Sa'ibah* *Wasilah* nor *Ham*;<sup>51</sup> but those who disbelieve forge lies against Allah and of them most have no understanding (and therefore succumb to such superstitious).

[104] When they are asked: "Come to what Allah has revealed, and come to the Messenger," they reply: "The way of our forefathers suffices us." (Will they continue to follow their forefathers) even though their forefathers might have known nothing, and might have been on the wrong way?

**51.** *Here is a mention of some of the superstitious practices of the Arabs of the jahiliyah: period. Bahirah was the name of a female camel which had already borne five young, the last of which was a male. The practice was to slit the ear of such a camel and then let her loose. Thereafter no one could ride her, use her milk, slaughter her or shear her hair. She was entitled to graze and drink water wherever she liked. Sa'ibah was the name of either a male or female camel which had been let loose after consecration as a mark of gratitude in fulfilment of a vow taken for either the recovery from some ailment or delivery from some danger. In the same way the female camel which had given birth ten times, and each time to a female, was let loose. As for Wasilah if the first kid born to a goat was a male, it was slaughtered in the name of the deities; but if it was a female, it was kept by the owners for themselves. If twins were born and one of them was a male and the other a female goat, the male was not slaughtered but rather let loose in the name of the deities. This male goat was called wasilah. There was also another category known as ham: If the young of camels in the second degree of descent had become worthy of riding they were let loose, Likewise, if ten offspring had been borne by a female camel she was also let loose and called ham.*

[105] Believers, take heed as regards your own selves. If you are rightly-guided, the error of he who strays will not harm you.<sup>52</sup> To Allah will all of you return; then He will let all of you know what you did.

[106] Believers! When death approaches you, let two persons of equity<sup>53</sup> among you act as witnesses when you make your bequest; or let two of those from others than yourselves act as witnesses if you are on a journey when the affliction of death befalls you. Then if any doubt occurs you shall detain both of them (in the mosque) after the Prayer, and they shall swear by Allah: "We shall neither sell our testimony in return for any gain even though it concerns any near of kin nor shall we conceal our testimony which we owe to Allah, for then we should become among the sinners."

**52.** *What is stressed here is that rather than occupying oneself unduly with examining faults in the belief and conduct of others, one should pay greater attention to a critical examination of one's own conduct. This verse, however, in no way means that a person should be occupied only with his own salvation and should remain unconcerned with the reform of others. Abu Bakr removed this misconception in one of his sermons when he remarked; "You recited this verse but interpret it erroneously, I have heard the Messenger of Allah (peace be on him) say that when people see corruption but do not try to change it, and when they see a wrong-doer commit wrong but do not prevent him from doing so, it is not unlikely that God's chastisement will seize them all. By God, it is incumbent upon you that you bid what is good and forbid what is evil or else God will grant power over you to those who are the worst among you. They will greatly chastise you and then when your righteous ones pray to God, their prayers will not be answered."*

**53.** *That is, pious, straightforward and trustworthy Muslims.*

[107] Then if it is discovered later that the two are guilty of such sin, then two others shall stand in their place from among those against whom the two had sinfully deposed, and swear by Allah: "Our testimony is truer than the testimony of the other two, and we have not transgressed in our statement; for then indeed we would become sinners."

[108] Thus it is more likely that they will either bear the right testimony or else they will at least fear that their oaths may be rebutted by other oaths. Have fear of Allah and pay heed. Allah does not direct the disobedient to the Right Way.

[109] The Day when Allah will gather together the Messengers and say: "What answer were you given?"<sup>54</sup> They will reply: "We have no real knowledge of it. You alone fully know all that lies beyond the reach of perception."

[110] Imagine, then, when Allah will say: "Jesus, son of Mary, recall My favour upon you and your mother, and when I strengthened you with the spirit of holiness so that you talked to people in the cradle and also when you became of age; and when I taught you the Book and Wisdom, and the Torah and the Gospel; and when, by My leave, you fashioned from clay the likeness of a bird and you breathed into it, and by My leave it became a bird; and you healed, by My leave, the blind by birth and the leprous; and when, by My leave, you caused the dead to come to life."<sup>55</sup> And recall when I restrained the Israelites from you when you came to them with clear proofs whereupon those of them who disbelieved said: "This is nothing but plain magic."

*54. On the Day of judgement the Prophets will be asked: what was the response of the people of the world to their call?*

*55. That is, with God's command Jesus restored people to life from the state of death.*

[111] And recall when I revealed to the disciples to believe in Me and in My Messenger, they said: "We do believe, and we bear witness that indeed we are the ones who submit to Allah."

[112] Also recall<sup>56</sup> when the disciples asked: "Jesus, son of Mary, has your Lord the power to send down to us a repast from the heaven?" Thereupon Jesus said: "Fear Allah if you do indeed have faith."

[113] They said: "We desire to partake of it that our hearts be satisfied and we know that you did speak the truth to us, and that we are its witnesses."

[114] Jesus, son of Mary then prayed: "O Allah, our Lord, send down to us a repast from the heavens that shall be a festival for the first of us and for the last of us and a Sign from You. And provide us with sustenance for You are the Best Provider of sustenance."

[115] Allah said: "I shall indeed send it down to you; then I shall afflict whoever among you disbelieves with a chastisement wherewith I will afflict none (else) in the world."

[116] And imagine when thereafter Allah will say: "Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to people: 'Take me and my mother for gods beside Allah?'"<sup>57</sup> and he will answer: "Glory to You! It was not for me to say what I had no right to. Had I said so, You would surely have known it. You know all what is within my mind whereas I do not know what is within Yours. You, indeed You, fully know all that is beyond the reach of perception."

*56. Since the disciples have been mentioned here, the continuity of the subject is interrupted for a moment in order to introduce another incident connected with the disciples. This clearly shows that Jesus' direct disciples considered him merely a human being and a servant of God; they did not entertain any notion that their master was either God or God's partner or son. Jesus, too, had presented himself to them as a servant of God and made no claim to having Divine status or authority.*

*57. The Christians were not content merely with deifying Jesus and the Holy Spirit. They even turned Mary, the mother of Jesus, into a full-fledged object of worship. The Bible does not contain even the remotest suggestion that Mary was in any way either divine or superhuman. During the first three centuries after the Messiah, such a concept was totally alien to Christian thinking. Towards the end of the third century of the Christian era, however, some theologians of Alexandria employed, for the first time, the expression "Mother of God" in connection with Mary. Subsequently, belief in Mary's Divinity and the practice of Mariolatry spread among Christians.*

[117] I said to them nothing except what You commanded me, that is: "Serve Allah, my Lord and your Lord. I watched over them as long as I remained among them; and when You did recall me, then You Yourself became the Watcher over them. Indeed, You are witness over everything.

[118] If You chastise them, they are Your servants; and if You forgive them, You are the All-Mighty, the All-Wise,"

[119] Thereupon Allah will say: "This day truthfulness shall profit the truthful. For them are Gardens beneath which rivers flow. There they will abide forever, Allah is well-pleased with them, and they well-pleased with Allah. That indeed is the mighty triumph,"

[120] To Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth and all that is in them and He has full power over everything.