

# **Al-Jumu'ah [Friday]**

## **Madinan Period**

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

[1] All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth extols the glory of Allah, the Sovereign, the Holy, the All- Mighty, the All-Wise.

[2] He it is Who has sent to the gentiles<sup>1</sup> a Messenger from among themselves, one who rehearses to them His verses, purifies their lives, and imparts to them the Book and the Wisdom although before that they were in utter error;

[3] and (He has also) sent him to those others who have not yet joined them.<sup>2</sup> He is the Most Mighty, the Most Wise.<sup>3</sup>

*1. Here the word **ummi** (gentile) is used as a Jewish term. Implicit in its use is a subtle irony. In order to appreciate this we ought to recall that the Jews used to look down upon the Arabs and disdainfully called them gentiles. These very Jews are now being told that God the Most Mighty and the Most Wise had raised His Messenger from the ranks of these contemptible gentiles. Since that Messenger did not rise of his own accord but was raised instead by the Mighty and Wise Sovereign of the Universe, the Jews will only harm themselves rather than the Prophet (peace be on him) if they decide to clash with him.*

*2. Muhammad's Messengership is not confined to the Arabs but embraces all other nations and races of the world as well, including those who have not yet joined the ranks of believers but who will do so in the future.*

*3. It is a portentous manifestation of God's power and wisdom that He raised a Prophet of immense greatness in a nation of uncultivated gentiles. His greatness is evidenced by the fact that his teachings are so immensely revolutionary and comprise universal principles of such abiding value that they can unify humanity for all times into one community and serve as the nucleus of its guidance and inspiration.*

[4] Such is Allah's favour: He bestows it on whomsoever He pleases. Allah is the Lord of abounding favour.

[5] The parable of those who were charged with the Torah and then they failed to live up to it is that of a donkey laden with books. Even more evil is the parable of the people who gave the lie to the Signs of Allah.<sup>4</sup> Allah does not direct such wrong-doors to the Right Way.

[6] Tell them: "O you who have become judaised,<sup>5</sup> if you arrogantly fancy that you are Allah's favourites to the exclusion of all people, then wish for death, if you are truthful in your claim."<sup>6</sup>

*4. Those who gave the lie to God's Signs are even worse than donkeys. For donkeys are excusable on the grounds that they are devoid of all understanding. On the contrary, those*

who were given the Torah as a guidance are possessed of understanding. Moreover, they read as well as teach the Torah and, hence, are well aware of its teachings. Despite this, they had deviated from its teachings and deliberately refused to accept Muhammad (peace be on him) as God's Prophet. They did so even though according to their own scripture of the Torah - he was absolutely right in claiming to be a Prophet. Thus their guilt did not consist of not comprehending but of wittingly giving the lie to God's Revelation.

5. The words used here are significant. The audience is not addressed with the words: "O Jews"; they are rather addressed as: "O you who have become Judaized." This because the religion entrusted to the Prophet Moses and to the other Prophets before and after him (peace be on all of them) was none else than Islam. None of these Prophets was a Jew, nor did Judaism exist in their time. The emergence of a distinct religion called Judaism relates to a period long after Moses' time.

6. The Jews of Arabia were not inferior to the Muslims in respect of their numbers and strength; as for their resources, they were vastly superior. Despite all this the Muslims prevailed against them. This can be explained mainly by the fact that far from being afraid to die in God's cause, the Muslims simply yearned to lay down their lives. In sharp contrast, the Jews were not committed to any cause for which they would be prepared to fight and, if need be, to die: neither for God's cause, nor for the sake of their nation, nor for the sake of their life, property and honour. They only wished to live, and live regardless of the quality of that life. This excessive love for life had generated cowardice in their ranks.

[7] But they shall never wish for death because of the (evil) deeds they have committed, Allah is well aware of these evil-doers.

[8] Tell them: "The death from which you flee will certainly overtake you. Then you will be returned to Him Who fully knows what is hidden and what is manifest. Thereupon He will let you know all that you used to do."

[9] Believers, when the call for Prayer is made on Friday, hasten to the remembrance of Allah and give up all trading.<sup>7</sup> That is better for you, if you only knew.

7. The word "remembrance" here signifies the Friday Sermon. This is because the first thing to which the Prophet (peace be on him) paid attention after the **adhan** (Call to Prayer) was not Prayer itself but the Friday Sermon which always preceded the Friday Prayer. Furthermore, the words "hasten to the remembrance of Allah," mean that one should proceed to the Friday Sermon with a sense of urgency and importance, and not that one should literally run to it. The directive "to give up all trading" means that after the Call to Friday Prayer has been made, one should not only give up trading but also concern oneself solely with the Friday service and shun every other occupation. It is also pertinent to mention that Muslim jurists are agreed that every kind of business transaction after the Call to Friday Prayer is forbidden. It is also pertinent to note that according to a **hadith**, children, women, slaves, sick people, and travellers are exempt from the obligation to perform Friday Prayer.

[10] But when the Prayer is ended, disperse in the land and seek Allah's Bounty,<sup>8</sup> and remember Allah much so that you may prosper.<sup>9</sup>

8. This does not mean that everybody is obligated to disperse in the land and engage in seeking their livelihood after the Friday Prayer is over. What is meant is that people may disperse in the land and proceed with their economic activities. It is important to bear in mind the context in which these words occur. The words "disperse in the land and seek Allah's Bounty" follow the directive to stop all business activities after the Call to the Friday Prayer is made. Therefore, when the Prayer is over, it is natural that believers be told that they may proceed with whatever economic activities they wish to.

This is similar to what was said in the Qur'an on another occasion. People were ordered not to engage in hunting when they were in the state of **ihram**. But once they had completed the obligatory requirements of Pilgrimage: "... then hunt" (*al-Ma'idah* 5: 2). This does not mean at all that it was obligatory for such people to hunt; rather, what is meant is that the restrictions on hunting were now terminated and so they may hunt if they so wanted. Those who argue on the basis of this verse that there is no holiday on Friday in Islam, however, put forward a flawed argument. For if the Muslims have to have a weekly holiday it should obviously be on Friday in the same manner that the Jews have it on Saturday and the Christians on Sunday.

9. We have translated this verse as follows: "... so that you may prosper." If we take the Arabic word **la 'alla** used in the verse literally, we would have translated it as: "... perhaps you will prosper." Our present translation, however, is appropriate because here the word **la'alla** is not used to indicate any doubt. In order to comprehend the true purport of **la'alla** (literally, "perhaps") it should be borne in mind that the statement here is analogous to a royal declaration and is couched in terms befitting royalty. The statement is like a boss saying to his subordinates: "Carry out this duty well, and perhaps you will be promoted." The tenor of the address subtly implies a promise in expectation of which subordinates will perform their tasks with full devotion.

[11] Yet no sooner than they saw some trading or amusement, they flocked to it and left you standing by yourself.<sup>10</sup> Tell them: "That which is with Allah is far better than amusement and trading."<sup>11</sup> Allah is the Best Provider of sustenance."<sup>12</sup>

10. This refers to an incident that took place in the early Madinan period of the Prophet's life. A trading caravan had arrived in Madinah from Syria exactly at the time of Friday Prayer and its arrival was announced by the beating of drums. The Prophet (peace be on him) was then delivering his Friday Sermon. The sound of the drums made people impatient with the result that all but 12 persons left the mosque and headed for the caravan.

11. These words indicate a kind of lapse on the part of the Companions. Had the underlying cause of this lapse been their weakness of faith or their wilful preference for worldly benefits over the Hereafter, God's reproach would have been couched in much sterner terms. But what caused the incident was the fact that the Muslims had not yet received any extensive training to live according to Islamic principles. In view of this, the rules pertaining to the Friday Prayer were enunciated much in the manner a teacher would do. This was followed by expressing disapproval of the Companions' actions after which it was declared that the reward they would receive by listening to the Friday Sermon and offering the Friday Prayer would be far greater than anything they could gain from engaging in business and recreation.

12. *God is a much better Provider of sustenance than all those who are ostensibly a means to provide sustenance to God's creatures.*