

## **Sura 5: Al-Maidah (The Table Spread)**

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

The Quran was revealed to the Prophet (PBUH) to build a nation, to establish a state, and to organize a society. It laid down the rules that organize the relationships between the different members of the community, between the individual and the state, and between the Muslim state and the rest of the world. This Sura addresses, as do the previous three long Suras, a number of different topics. The underlying theme that binds all these Suras is the original goal that the Quran is trying to accomplish: building a nation, establishing a state and organizing a community on the basis of a special faith, a faith in which only God, the Lord, has the dominion and is the source of all the laws and rules which regulate life.

#### **Verses: 1 to 11**

1. *You who believe, fulfill the obligations. Four-footed animals are made lawful to you (for food), except that which is recited to you (herein), game are unlawful while you are performing Pilgrimage; surely God decrees what He desires.*
2. *So, you who believe do not violate the sanctity of God's rites, the Sacred Month, the animals brought for sacrifice, the garlands which are used to mark out such animals, nor the people going to the Sacred House to seek the grace and pleasure of their Lord; but when you have completed the rites of Pilgrimage you may hunt. Do not let your hatred for the people who barred you from the Sacred Mosque lead you to transgression; help one another to do what is right and good and do not help one another towards sin and hostility. Be conscious of God, for His punishment is severe.*
3. *You are forbidden to eat carrion; blood; pig's meat; any animal over which any name other than God's has been invoked; any animal which has been killed by strangling, or by a violent blow or a fall, or gored or savaged by a beast of prey, unless you are still able to slaughter it (in the correct manner); or that which has been sacrificed on idolatrous altars. You are also forbidden to allot shares (of meat) by drawing marked arrows, this is a transgression. Today the disbelievers have lost all hope that you will give up your religion. Do not fear them but fear Me. Today I have perfected your religion for you, completed My blessing upon you, and have chosen Islam as your religion; but if any of you is forced by hunger to eat forbidden food, with no inclination to sinning, then God is All-Forgiving and Giver of Mercy.*
4. *They ask you, Prophet, what is lawful for them. Say, "All good things are lawful for you." (This includes) what you have taught your trained hunting animals (to catch) in the manner directed to you by God, so eat what they catch for you, but first pronounce God's name over it. Be conscious of God, He is swift in reckoning.*
5. *Today all good things have been made lawful for you. The food of the People of the Scripture is lawful for you as your food is lawful for them. So are chaste believing women as well as chaste women of the people who were given the Scripture before you, as long as you have given them their bridal-gifts and married them, not taking them as lovers or secret mistresses. The deeds of anyone who rejects faith will come to nothing, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers.*
6. *You who believe, when you get ready for prayer, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, wipe your heads, wash your feet up to the ankles and, if you are in a state of*

*major ritual impurity cleanse your whole body. If any of you is sick or on a journey, or has just relieved himself, or had intimate contact with a woman, and finds no water, then take some clean sand and wipe your face and hands with it. God does not wish to place any burden on you, He only wishes to cleanse you and perfect His blessing on you, so that you may be thankful.*

7. *Remember God's blessing on you and the covenant which He ratified with you, when you said, "We hear and we obey." Be conscious of God, God has full knowledge of the secrets of the heart.*
8. *You who believe, be steadfast in your devotion to God and bear witness impartially. Do not let the hatred of others make you swerve away from justice, act justly, for that is closer to piety. Be conscious of God. God is Totally-Aware of all that you do.*
9. *God has promised forgiveness and a great reward to those who believe and do good deeds.*
10. *Those who disbelieve and deny Our revelations will be companions of Hell.*
11. *You who believe, remember God's blessing on you when a certain people were about to raise their hands against you and He restrained them. Be conscious of God, and let the believers put their trust in Him. (5:1-11)*

*"You who believe, fulfill the obligations. Four-footed animals are made lawful to you (for food), except that which is recited to you (herein), game are unlawful while you are performing Pilgrimage; surely God decrees what He desires."* For life to continue and prosper on earth, man has to endure certain controls. These controls are necessary to organize the relationship between individuals, between the individual and people whether of kin or foreign, between the individual and living things, and between the individual and God. Islam delineates these controls clearly and traces them back to God's ordinance so that they would be respected and obeyed. These controls are not left to the whims and desires of human beings or fashioned to serve certain interests. These controls are meant to serve the interest of people everywhere and at all times. The Quran calls these controls "obligations," and it commands those who believe to fulfill these obligations.

This opening implies that the word "obligations" has a wider scope than what may appear at first glance. It indicates that the word "obligations" describes all constraints that need to be observed in the course of human life. The first obligation is to believe in the Oneness and uniqueness of God. It involves understanding and accepting the implications of having one and only One God. All other obligations spring out from this fundamental obligation.

The obligation to believe in God was originally administered to Adam (PBUH) by God. The obligation is stated in the following verse, *"We said, 'Get you down all from here; and if, as is sure, there comes to you guidance from Me, whosoever follows My guidance, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.'" (2:38)* This was the condition stated for Adam (PBUH) and his descendants to become the vicegerents of God on earth. The condition for being vicegerents is to follow God's guidance and to fulfill the first obligation that Adam (PBUH) was commanded to fulfill. The command to fulfill this obligation was renewed to all of Adam's (PBUH) descendants in the verse, *"When your Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves, (saying), 'Am I not your Lord (who cherishes and sustains you)?' - They said, 'Yes, we do testify.' (This), lest you should say on the*

*Day of Judgment, 'Of this we were never mindful' (7:172).* This is a covenant which God has taken from each and every one of the children of Adam (PBUH). This covenant was declared when the children of Adam (PBUH) were in their father's loins. We may not understand how this happened, but we have no right to ask how, God knows best His creation.

The verses continue to list the rest of the obligations which believers are commanded to fulfill. *"So, you who believe do not violate the sanctity of God's rites, the Sacred Month, the animals brought for sacrifice, the garlands which are used to mark out such animals, nor the people going to the Sacred House to seek the grace and pleasure of their Lord; but when you have completed the rites of Pilgrimage you may hunt. Do not let your hatred for the people who barred you from the Sacred Mosque lead you to transgression; help one another to do what is right and good and do not help one another towards sin and hostility. Be conscious of God, for His punishment is severe. You are forbidden to eat carrion; blood; pig's meat; any animal over which any name other than God's has been invoked; any animal which has been killed by strangling, or by a violent blow or a fall, or gored or savaged by a beast of prey, unless you are still able to slaughter it (in the correct manner); or that which has been sacrificed on idolatrous altars. You are also forbidden to allot shares (of meat) by drawing marked arrows, this is a transgression. Today the disbelievers have lost all hope that you will give up your religion. Do not fear them but fear Me. Today I have perfected your religion for you, completed My blessing upon you, and have chosen Islam as your religion; but if any of you is forced by hunger to eat forbidden food, with no inclination to sinning, then God is All-Forgiving and Giver of Mercy."*

The obligations also include following the commands which outline what has been prohibited, what has been made lawful, and when and where to do certain tasks. These obligations have been decreed by God alone, and as such they have to be obeyed. All four-footed animals are lawful except that which is listed in these verses. Prohibitions include three categories: some things are prohibited at all times, others are only prohibited at specific times, and a third category includes certain things which are prohibited in specific places.

During Pilgrimage hunting is prohibited. Pilgrimage is a journey to God, during which one abandons the routine that one follows in regular daily life. The Sacred Mosque is a place of security and safety not only for people but also for all living beings. The time of Pilgrimage is a period of spiritual training in which the human being comes to understand and appreciate his/her relationship with other living things. Believers should take this opportunity to shed the material links to the world which they have been used to in their normal lives. Believers are asked to observe the rituals of Pilgrimage and to respect the sanctity of the Sacred Months. The Sacred Months include the months of Rajab, Zi Al-Qi'da, Zi Al-Hijja, and Muharram. God commanded that fighting is prohibited during these months. Animals brought by people performing Pilgrimage to be offered as sacrifice should only be used for that purpose. When one has completed the rituals, then one can hunt. Observing these obligations ensures a safe and secure environment for all living beings. The verses urge the believers to purify their hearts of hatred even towards those who barred them from visiting the Sacred House before. Safety and security should be extended to the hearts of the believers to replace hatred and transgression. Fulfilling this obligation requires an enormous amount of self-discipline.

The list of the prohibitions continues, *"You are forbidden to eat carrion; blood; pig's meat; any animal over which any name other than God's has been invoked; any animal which has been*

*killed by strangling, or by a violent blow or a fall, or gored or savaged by a beast of prey, unless you are still able to slaughter it (in the correct manner); or that which has been sacrificed on idolatrous altars. You are also forbidden to allot shares (of meat) by drawing marked arrows, this is a transgression. Today the disbelievers have lost all hope that you will give up your religion. Do not fear them but fear Me. Today I have perfected your religion for you, completed My blessing upon you, and have chosen Islam as your religion; but if any of you is forced by hunger to eat forbidden food, with no inclination to sinning, then God is All-Forgiving and Giver of Mercy.*” Carrion, blood and pig’s meat have been prohibited. This was discussed before and whether we understand the rationale behind the prohibition of these items or not, we have to respect the command. The prohibition has been made by God and God prohibits only bad things. The list includes *“any animal over which any name other than God’s has been invoked.”* The reason behind this is that this practice contravenes the belief in the Oneness of God.

The list of prohibitions continues, *“Any animal which has been killed by strangling, or by a violent blow or a fall, or gored or savaged by a beast of prey, unless you are still able to slaughter it (in the correct manner); or that which has been sacrificed on idolatrous altars. You are also forbidden to allot shares (of meat) by drawing marked arrows.”* The practice of using marked arrows to make certain decisions is a kind of gambling, thus it is prohibited.

Exception is made when one is forced to eat any of these unlawful things for fear of losing one’s life. Scholars differed on how much to eat in such situations. The discussion of this issue can be found in books on Islamic jurisprudence. It is quite sufficient to state the fact that this religion provides easy tools to implement practical solutions which address everyday life problems.

Let us contemplate the verse, *“Today the disbelievers have lost all hope that you will give up your religion. Do not fear them but fear Me. Today I have perfected your religion for you, completed My blessing upon you, and have chosen Islam as your religion;”* This verse was the last verse to be revealed to the Prophet (PBUH). It came to announce that God’s message has been revealed in its complete and final form. When ‘Umar (RA) heard this verse he was saddened because he understood the implications of the proclamation that the message has been completed. He knew that this meant that the Prophet (PBUH) has fulfilled the trust and delivered the message, so he would be departing soon. The insertion of this verse in the middle of a list that outlines the things that have been rendered unlawful shows that these prohibitions are actually a blessing from God. It also indicates that all aspects of human life including rituals, all types of dealings, prohibitions, or commands are all components of the message. The message is indivisible and it is a depiction of the divine project. This divine project details the way of life that God has chosen for His servants. Believers should voluntarily accept the divine project in its totality and refuse all other manmade programs. Those who advocate abandoning God’s divine project in favor of manmade systems are actually transgressing their limits.

With the completion of the Message, the disbelievers have lost any hope in being able to distort the message or stop people from joining the ranks of the believers. God has guaranteed the integrity of the Message. Muslims may be defeated in a battle or they may suffer a period of decline but Islam will always be the final Message for humanity. The believers should not fear anyone except God Himself. This is an address to all believers at all times and places, those who

adopt that which God has chosen for them. This address shows the believers that the way to security and safety is to adopt a way of life that is congruent with the divine project.

*“They ask you, Prophet, what is lawful for them. Say, “All good things are lawful for you.” (This includes) what you have taught your trained hunting animals (to catch) in the manner directed to you by God, so eat what they catch for you, but first pronounce God’s name over it. Be conscious of God, He is swift in reckoning. Today all good things have been made lawful for you. The food of the People of the Scripture is lawful for you as your food is lawful for them. So are chaste believing women as well as chaste women of the people who were given the Scripture before you, as long as you have given them their bridal-gifts and married them, not taking them as lovers or secret mistresses. The deeds of anyone who rejects faith will come to nothing, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers.”* These verses came to provide an answer to a question that was posed by some believers who wanted to know what edible things were lawful and what things were forbidden. The question indicates the mindset of a people who are happy of the fact that they are being addressed by God for the first time. They appreciated the great blessing that has been bestowed on them. So, they wanted to be extremely careful not to displease God by committing any unlawful act. They wanted to make sure that they did only what is rendered lawful by God. This shows the impact that Islam had on the psyche of new Muslims. They felt that they were given a new life, a life free from the bad practices which were prevalent before Islam. So, they asked the question: what edible things are lawful? The answer came to state that all good things are lawful. Thus, Islam came only to forbid eating things that are bad to humans. These are things which a decent human being would normally refrain from eating. Then an allowance was given: the animals hunted by trained animals or birds like hawks and hunting dogs are allowable. The main condition is that these trained hunting animals do not eat the prey they hunt. They only catch them and deliver them intact to their masters. If they eat, even a small piece of the prey, then it becomes forbidden. The verses reminded them that training animals to hunt is a God given skill, as all other types of knowledge. The believers were told to invoke the name of God when they release the hunting animal. This is a substitute for invoking the name of God when the prey is slaughtered. Then they are also reminded to be always conscious of God. The link between observing the laws of the lawful and forbidden and God consciousness was thus stated.

The verses continued to list the lawful things, stressing the fact that what is lawful is good for humans. The following item on the list of lawful things deals with taking Christian and Jewish (people of the Scripture) women, who were living in the Muslim community and had a protection contract between them and the Muslim state, as wives. Islam did not only allow them to practice their religion freely but also permitted cross-marriages between Muslim men and Christian and Jewish women. This shows Islam’s attitude towards these religious minorities. It encouraged them to be part of the community and treated them with love and kindness. Islam also made the food of the people of the Scripture lawful for Muslims, so all can participate in community social functions. The marriage contract between a Muslim man and a woman from the people of the Scripture is governed by the same rules that govern the marriage of a Muslim man to a Muslim woman. The man gives the woman her bridal gift with the intention of entering into a marriage contract not as a gift to a lover or a mistress. All these rules and obligations are accepted as part of faith and fulfillment of these obligations is a sign of true faith. The deeds of those who chose to reject these obligations will be in vain.

*“You who believe, when you get ready for prayer, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, wipe your heads, wash your feet up to the ankles and, if you are in a state of major ritual impurity cleanse your whole body. If any of you is sick or on a journey, or has just relieved himself, or had intimate contact with a woman, and finds no water, then take some clean sand and wipe your face and hands with it. God does not wish to place any burden on you, He only wishes to cleanse you and perfect His blessing on you, so that you may be thankful.”* It is not a coincidence that verses talking about rituals of prayers and purification were mentioned in connection with rules dealing with the lawful and the unlawful. This integration of topics points to the fact that rituals of prayers and purification are among the “good things” that God made lawful for Muslims. Prayers should be as enjoyable as other good things in life because when Muslims pray, they should enjoy the pleasure of communicating with God in a state of purity, cleanliness, and devotion. The second message that one gets from this discourse is that Islam deals with human life as a whole. All human activities are done to serve God. One should not treat the acts of worship any different than other activities of life. Life should be treated as a whole with no artificial segregation between acts of worship and other human activities. The scholars of Jurisprudence artificially categorized obligations into “rituals of worship” and “dealings.” This division does not reflect the essence of the divinely inspired Islamic law. All obligations whether those which deal with rituals or those which deal with daily life activities should be treated on equal footings. Obligations describing what is lawful in everyday dealings between people are as sacred as obligations regarding rituals of worship.

Prayers are a means of communication with God. A Muslim has to be prepared both physically and spiritually for this meeting. The physical preparation is described in this verse and involves a ritual wash. There are two types of ritual cleansing acts: Wudu and Ghusl. Wudu involves washing the face, the hands to the elbows, and wiping the heads and washing the feet to the ankles. Ghusl involves washing the whole body. Performing Wudu or Ghusl depends on the condition of the person. Instructions when a Muslim has to perform Wudu or Ghusl are explained. A Muslim, whether a male or a female, has to perform only Wudu after experiencing what is referred to as the “smaller event.” This is alluded to in the verse using the term “relieved himself.” In this case only Wudu is required as an act of cleansing. A Muslim has to perform the ritual wash of Ghusl when he or she experienced the condition which is referred to as the “bigger event.” This is alluded to in the verse using the term “touched women” which is a delicate way of describing intimate sexual contact between a man and a woman. In this case, Ghusl is required.

The verse continued to describe an alternative purification ritual called “Tayamum.” Muslims can take recourse to this alternative in the following special cases:

- When water is unavailable.
- When a person is sick in such a way that using water for either Wudu or Ghusl will cause bodily harm.
- When a person is travelling on the road and in need to perform Wudu or Ghusl.

Tayamum is performed by letting the palms touch a clean part of the earth usually sand or dust, removing the dust or sand from the palms and wiping the face and hands using the palms, one or two times depending on which school of Jurisprudence one wants to follow.

Questions arose regarding the meaning of the term “touched women” and whether it means simply touching women or does it mean having sexual intercourse. Whether the man or the woman experienced sexual pleasure from the touch or not? Different scholars have different views regarding the interpretation of this term. Different views also exist regarding the cases where sickness is the reason for replacing Wudu or Ghusl by Tayamum. Is Tayamum allowed only in cases when using water is deemed harmful to the body, or is it permissible in case of any sickness? Is it permissible to take recourse to Tayamum even in cases where there is doubt that water may cause harm? Probably yes.

The verse ends with a statement that these rules were mandated to purify the believers and prepare them for communication with God, not to cause them any inconvenience. It is clear that Wudu and Ghusl prepare the Muslim both physically and spiritually for the prayers. However, Tayamum only prepares the Muslim spiritually. The special circumstances in which Wudu or Ghusl can be replaced by Tayamum are described above. Although Islam emphasizes the importance of physical as well as spiritual hygiene; accepting Tayamum as an alternative, shows that Islam emphasizes the importance of spiritual hygiene when physical hygiene is difficult to attain. While there are situations when physical hygiene is not possible to achieve, means for spiritual hygiene are always available. It is also important to note that while there are exemptions for performing the ritual wash needed for the prayer, Islam is keen on providing every tool which enables Muslims to perform prayers.

*“Remember God’s blessing on you and the covenant which He ratified with you, when you said, ‘We hear and we obey.’ Be conscious of God, God has full knowledge of the secrets of the heart.”* Muslims who heard the Quran addressing them, valued the blessings of God. They witnessed the changes that were happening to their lives and their communities because of these blessings. One of these blessings was the fact that they were made a party in a covenant with God. What an honor! However, one should always remember that God knows all what goes on inside our breasts. This is an allusion to the secrets of the heart that one may harbor.

*“You who believe, be steadfast in your devotion to God and bear witness impartially. Do not let the hatred of others make you swerve away from justice, act justly, for that is closer to piety. Be conscious of God. God is Totally-Aware of all that you do.”* In a previous verse, the believers were admonished not to let the hatred of some people make them transgress against their enemy. In this verse, the tolerant attitude of Islam is extended. It admonished the believers not to let the hatred of others make them swerve away from justice. It may be easy not to transgress physically against one’s enemy but it is much harder to treat one’s enemy fairly. Yet the believers were commanded to establish justice even when they were in dispute with the people they hate. A support was promised to strengthen the believers in this endeavor. They should strive to become conscious of God. It is the duty of this nation to be steadfast in its devotion to God for the benefit of humankind. Muslims were able to play that role when Islam was their way of life. Muslims faltered in their responsibility when Islamic values became mere slogans.

*“God has promised forgiveness and a great reward to those who believe and do good deeds. Those who disbelieve and deny Our revelations will be companions of Hell. You who believe, remember God’s blessing on you when a certain people were about to raise their hands against*

*you and He restrained them. Be conscious of God, and let the believers put their trust in Him.”*  
 This is the reward that awaits those who chose to carry out their responsibility. This reward is a manifestation of divine justice. Those who believed and did good deeds will be rewarded differently from those who chose to disbelieve and do wicked deeds. The verse brings assurance to the believers of God’s support.

## **Verses: 12 to 26**

12. *God took a covenant from the Children of Israel. We made twelve leaders arise among them, and God said, “I am with you: if you establish prayer, pay the prescribed alms, believe in My messengers and support them, and lend God a good loan, I will absolve you of your sins and admit you into Gardens graced with flowing streams. Any of you who now ignore this (covenant) will go astray from the right path.”*
13. *But they broke their pledge, so We cursed them and hardened their hearts. They distort the meaning of (revealed) words and have forgotten some of what they were told to be mindful of. You (Prophet) will continue to find them - barring a few - ever bent on deceit. Pardon them and forbear, God loves those who do good.*
14. *We also took a covenant from those who say, “We are Christians,” but they too forgot a part of what they were told to be mindful of, so We stirred up enmity and hatred among them until the Day of Resurrection, when God will tell them what they have done.*
15. *People of the Scripture, Our Messenger has come to reveal to you much of what you concealed of the Scripture, and to pardon much (of what you have done). A light has now come to you from God, and a Book making things clear.*
16. *With which God guides to the ways of peace those who follow what pleases Him, bringing them from darkness out into light, by His will, and guiding them to a straight path.*
17. *Indeed, they have disbelieved who say, “God is the Messiah, the son of Mary”. Say, “If it had been God’s will, could anyone have prevented Him from destroying the Messiah, the son of Mary, together with his mother and everyone else on earth?” To God belongs the dominion of the heavens and earth and all that is in between; He creates whatever He wills. God has power over everything.*
18. *The Jews and the Christians say, “We are the children of God and His beloved ones.” Say, “Then why does He punish you for your sins? You are merely human beings, part of His creation. He forgives whoever He pleases and punishes whoever He pleases. The dominion of the heavens and earth and all that is between them belongs to Him: to Him is the final destination.”*
19. *People of the Scripture, Our Messenger has now come to you, after an interval of cessation of the messengers, to make things clear for you in case you should say, “No one has come to give us good news or to warn us.” So someone has come to you, to give you good news and warn you; God has the power to do all things.*
20. *And when Moses said to his people, “My people, remember God’s blessings on you, how He raised prophets among you, made you kings, and gave you what He had not given any other people.*
21. *My people, enter the holy land which God assigned for you, and do not turn your back for then you will be losers.”*

22. *They said, "Moses, in this land are a people of exceeding strength; never shall we enter it until they leave it; when they leave, then shall we enter."*
23. *Two men whom God has blessed among those who were afraid (to disobey) said, "Enter upon them through the gate, for when you have entered you shall surely be victorious, and put your trust in God if you are true believers."*
24. *They said, "Moses, we shall never enter it so long as they are in it; go therefore you and your Lord, and fight, we will stay here."*
25. *He said, "My Lord, I have no authority (upon any) but my own self and my brother; therefore, judge between us and the transgressors."*
26. *God said, "Therefore will the land be forbidden to them for forty years (during which) they will wander the earth aimlessly. Do not grieve over the transgressors." (5:12-26)*

*"God took a covenant from the Children of Israel. We made twelve leaders arise among them, and God said, 'I am with you: if you establish prayer, pay the prescribed alms, believe in My messengers and support them, and lend God a good loan, I will absolve you of your sins and admit you into Gardens graced with flowing streams. Any of you who now ignore this (covenant) will go astray from the right path.' But they broke their pledge, so We cursed them and hardened their hearts. They distort the meaning of (revealed) words and have forgotten some of what they were told to be mindful of. You (Prophet) will continue to find them - barring a few - ever bent on deceit. Pardon them and forbear, God loves those who do good. We also took a covenant from those who say, 'We are Christians,' but they too forgot a part of what they were told to be mindful of, so We stirred up enmity and hatred among them until the Day of Resurrection, when God will tell them what they have done."* God took a covenant from the Jews. This covenant had two components: a condition to be fulfilled and a reward to be awarded. The verse gives the details of the covenant and the way it was made. God appointed twelve leaders from among the Israelites to represent the twelve tribes who constituted the offspring of Jacob (PBUH). The leaders of the tribes took the covenant on behalf of the twelve tribes. In the covenant, God promised the Israelites that He is with them. This was a great promise. Those who have God on their side will never be conquered; they will never lose their way; and they will never be unhappy. In short, those who have God on their side have got everything. However, this is conditional on the performance of specific duties. The first duty is to establish prayers. The word "establish" go beyond "perform." Establishing prayers means that prayers should be performed in the best way possible, it should become a tool to prevent the person from committing sins and wicked deeds. The second duty is to pay the prescribed Alms. This is an expression of gratitude to God for His blessings in increasing the provision and wealth. It is also a tool to establish social justice and ensure that the needs of the poor are satisfied. The third duty is to believe in all God's messengers. All messengers came with the same message from God. If we deny one messenger, then it is as if we deny all of them and we deny God. This belief should be reflected on the deeds of the individual. Actively supporting the messengers is definitely among these deeds. Belief is not a lip service to be paid to a set of articles of faith or empty rituals to be performed but it is a complete way of life. Those who believe in God's message should actively support this way of life.

The verse also describes a type of spending in the way of God that goes beyond the prescribed Alms. This extra spending is considered by God as a loan given to Him by His servants even though the wealth came originally from God. These were the terms of the covenant. Once the terms are fulfilled, then the reward will be given. First, all sins will be wiped out. Wiping out all

sins is a great reward because humankind sins often. Wiping the sins is a great blessing and mercy from God. When all sins are wiped out, admission to gardens under which rivers flow follows. This is another blessing from God. But those who do not fulfill their commitment according to the covenant will go astray.

However, the Children of Israel reneged on their covenant, and they distorted the Scripture given to them and forgot the law. So, they were no longer capable of availing themselves of God's guidance and their hearts became hard. The Jews of Medina refused to accept the Prophet's (PBUH) guidance, they reneged on the treaty that they had with him, and they continued to break their agreements with him. However, the verse commanded the Prophet (PBUH) to pardon them and to deal with them in the best way possible.

Those who said they were Christians, but only paid lip service to the true meaning of the word, forgot the covenant they had with God. This is the covenant which proclaimed the Oneness of God. So, they became divided and enmity and hatred were stirred among them.

*"People of the Scripture, Our Messenger has come to reveal to you much of what you concealed of the Scripture, and to pardon much (of what you have done). A light has now come to you from God, and a Book making things clear. With which God guides to the ways of peace those who follow what pleases Him, bringing them from darkness out into light, by His will, and guiding them to a straight path."* These verses addressed the people of the Scripture, stating that God has sent Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as a messenger to them. His role was to explain and clarify parts of the message that was revealed before but were ignored or have been forgotten; he was instructed to pardon these transgressions. The Prophet (PBUH) came to re-establish God's original message and declare it a universal message to all people in every place and at all times. This Prophet (PBUH) and the Book he brought are a light to guide all people to the straight path. Those who receive this guidance are led to the way of peace. Islam fills life with peace, a comprehensive peace. It is a peace for the individual, peace for the family, peace for the community, peace for the nation, peace for the world, peace for the human race, and peace for the whole universe.

This Book will bring people out of darkness into light. There are different types of darkness: darkness generated by superstition; darkness generated by old myth and legends; darkness generated by bad traditions; darkness generated by whims and desires of humankind; darkness generated by missing guidance and going astray; and darkness generated by adopting wrong values and principles. The Book will guide people to the straight path. This is a path aligned with the initial natural human disposition; it is aligned with the laws that govern the universe; and it guides straight to God. God who created humankind and the universe gave humankind a way to guidance through the straight path.

*"Indeed, they have disbelieved who say, 'God is the Messiah, the son of Mary'". Say, 'If it had been God's will, could anyone have prevented Him from destroying the Messiah, the son of Mary, together with his mother and everyone else on earth?' To God belongs the dominion of the heavens and earth and all that is in between; He creates whatever He wills. God has power over everything."*

*“Say, ‘If it had been God’s will, could anyone have prevented Him from destroying the Messiah, the son of Mary, together with his mother and everyone else on earth?’ The dominion of the heavens and earth and all that is between them belongs to God; He creates whatever He wills. God has power over everything. The Jews and the Christians say, ‘We are the children of God and His beloved ones.’ Say, ‘Then why does He punish you for your sins? You are merely human beings, part of His creation. He forgives whoever He pleases and punishes whoever He pleases. Control of the heavens and earth and all that is between them belongs to Him: to Him is the final destination.’”* Jesus (PBUH) came with the same message which was brought by all other messengers. This message commands the worship of One Unique God. However, Christianity, as we know it today, distorted the original message and adopted the concept of trinity instead. The Quran came to re-establish the original message: worshipping the One and only God. The verse argued with those who say that Jesus is God, and posed the question: who can save Jesus, his mother, and indeed the whole human race if God wanted to destroy them? It stated the difference between the power of the Creator and the power of the created. There is no limit to what the Creator can do, while the created has limited power.

The Quran challenged the claim made by the Jews and Christians who said that they are the children of God which implies that God can be used as a father figure, spiritual if not physical. This claim casts doubts on the concept of the Oneness of God and distorts the relationship between the human being and God. Human beings are servants of God. The Oneness of the Creator means that all rules and laws that organize life on earth emanate from God who decrees the laws and the rules that are compatible and suitable for humankind, thus, bringing security and order to human life.

The verse addressed the claim that God promised not to punish the Jews and the Christians. Discrimination in treating human beings is against divine justice. Nobody should be given the right to break God’s law without suffering His punishment. All human beings are equal in front of God. He is capable of punishing whomsoever He wishes and forgiving whomsoever He wishes. To Him belongs the dominion of heavens and earth.

*“People of the Scripture, Our Messenger has now come to you, after an interval of cessation of the messengers, to make things clear for you in case you should say, ‘No one has come to give us good news or to warn us.’ So someone has come to you, to give you good news and warn you; God has the power to do all things.”* The verse made a clear statement to the people of the Scripture that a messenger has been sent to them, so they had no excuse. The verse challenged them to claim that they had not received a message to straighten out their distorted beliefs. They were also reminded that God has the power to send whosoever He wills as a messenger.

*“And when Moses said to his people, ‘My people, remember God’s blessings on you, how He raised prophets among you, made you kings, and gave you what He had not given any other people. My people, enter the holy land which God assigned for you, and do not turn your back for then you will be losers.’ They said, ‘Moses, in this land are a people of exceeding strength; never shall we enter it until they leave it; when they leave, then shall we enter.’”* One senses the trepidation that Moses (PBUH) felt when he was faced with the hesitant attitude of his people. The memory of his experience during the long journey from Egypt was still vivid in his mind. He tried to rally them around the cause that they came to achieve: to enter the Holy Land. He

reminded them of the blessings of God and God's promise to appoint from among them prophets and kings. This was a promise that was not given any other nation in the world. God promised them the Holy Land and God always fulfills His promise. Thus, turning back on their heels at this point would be a total loss. However, they forgot God's promise in face of the danger they sensed. They did not want to fight for the Holy Land even though they knew that God's promise will be fulfilled.

*"Two men whom God has blessed among those who were afraid (to disobey) said, 'Enter upon them through the gate, for when you have entered you shall surely be victorious, and put your trust in God if you are true believers.'"* The verse gave a true depiction of the qualities of people having genuine faith. The fear of God filled the hearts of these two men. This fear gave them the strength and the courage to face the giants controlling the Holy Land. The fear of God and the fear of fellow human beings do not coexist in the heart of a believer. They told their people: enter the gate, for when you have entered you shall surely be victorious. This is the rule: advance and conquer and put your trust in God. Only believers put their trust in God. But their response was, *"Moses, we shall never enter it so long as they are in it; go therefore you and your Lord, and fight, we will stay here."* This was a cowardly and rude response. Cowardice and rudeness usually go hand in hand. The response implied rejecting God as their Lord since believing in Him would force them to fight. Moses (PBUH) felt the pain of helplessness. He called upon his Lord, *"My Lord, I have no authority (upon any) but my own self and my brother; therefore, judge between us and the transgressors."*

God responded favorably to His Messenger's request and they were punished justly, *"God said, 'Therefore will the land be forbidden to them for forty years (during which) they will wander the earth aimlessly. Do not grieve over the transgressors.'"* The Promised Land was declared forbidden to them, and they had to wander in the Diaspora for forty years. Most probably, this was a ruling that applied only to that generation in the hope that a new generation will arise to fulfill the terms of the covenant. A new generation raised in the desert will be free from the heritage of slavery and humiliation which the previous generation was subjected to in Egypt. A new generation will be better prepared to carry its responsibility courageously.

### **Verses: 27 to 40**

27. *(Prophet), tell them the truth about the story of the two sons of Adam: each of them offered a sacrifice (to God). It was accepted from one, but not from the other. The latter said, "I will, certainly slay you." The former said, "God accepts only the sacrifice of those who are conscious of Him."*
28. *If you raise your hand to slay me, I will not raise my hand against you to slay you; for I do fear God, the Lord of the worlds.*
29. *And I would rather you were burdened with my sins as well as yours and became an inhabitant of the fire, that is the recompense of the wrongdoers."*
30. *But his soul prompted him to murder his brother; he murdered him, and became one of the losers.*
31. *Then God sent a raven, who scratched the ground, to show him how to hide his brother's corpse. He said, "Woe unto me, was I not even able to be as this raven, and cover my brother's body?" then he became remorseful.*

32. *On account of (this deed), We ordained for the Children of Israel that if anyone kills a person - unless it be for murder or for spreading corruption in the land - it would be as if he killed all humankind; and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all humankind. Our messengers came to them with clear signs, but many of them continued to commit excesses in the land.*
33. *The recompense for those who wage war against God and His Messenger, and strive hard to spread corruption in the land is: execution, or crucifixion, or the cutting off of hands and feet from opposite sides, or exile from the land. That is their disgrace in this world, and a great torment is theirs in the Hereafter;*
34. *Unless they repent before you overpower them; in that case, know that God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
35. *You who believe, be conscious of God, seek the means to come closer to Him, and strive with might in his cause; so that you may succeed.*
36. *Certainly, those who disbelieved, even if they had what is in the earth, all of it, and the like of it with it, that they might ransom themselves with it from the torment of the Day of Resurrection, it shall not be accepted from them, and they shall have a painful torment.*
37. *They will wish to get out of the Fire, but they will never get out therefrom; their torment will be one that endures.*
38. *Cut off the hands of thieves, whether they are male or female as a recompense for what they have done, a deterrent from God, God is Eminent, Wise.*
39. *But whoso repents after his wrongdoing and amends, God will certainly, relent toward him, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
40. *Do you not know that the dominion of the heavens and the earth belongs to God; He torments whom He pleases; and forgives whom He pleases and God has power over everything. (5:27-40)*

*“(Prophet), tell them the truth about the story of the two sons of Adam: each of them offered a sacrifice (to God). It was accepted from one, but not from the other. The latter said, ‘I will, certainly slay you.’ The former said, ‘God accepts only the sacrifice of those who are conscious of Him.’”* Tell them about these two models of humankind, and you are only telling them the truth. It is a true story that reveals certain dimensions of human nature. These two sons of Adam (PBUH) were trying to seek the pleasure of God by making offerings to Him. A person seeking the pleasure of God would not contemplate assaulting an innocent person. Committing such a crime defeats the purpose of making the offering. They made their offerings. The offering of one was accepted but the offering of the other was not. The verse is written in the passive voice which indicates that decisions whether to accept the offering or not and how it would be accepted were made by an unseen power. Two points need to be emphasized here. One, we should not dwell on the reasons behind the decision that one offering was accepted and the other was not. The second is the culpability of the person whose offering was accepted regarding the decision to reject the offering of his brother. The decision to reject the offering was made by an unseen power and no human deserves to be punished for it. However, the one whose offering was not accepted blamed the other for the rejection of his offering, he said, *“I will, certainly slay you.”* This statement indicates a premeditated intention to harm an innocent person. Such a horrible act could not be justified. It was incited by blind jealousy that filled the heart of the man whose offering was not accepted. The response of his brother only magnifies the gravity of the crime. In spite of the threat of impending harm, the brother simply responded by saying, *“God accepts*

*only the sacrifice of those who are conscious of Him.”* In this brief statement, he tried to clarify the situation. He showed his brother the need to accept God’s decision, and directed his brother gently to the way that leads to God’s acceptance. The brother who is faithful, righteous, and peaceful, continued to explain to his vengeful brother, *“If you raise your hand to slay me, I will not raise my hand against you to slay you; for I do fear God, the Lord of the worlds; and I would rather you were burdened with my sins as well as yours and became an inhabitant of the Fire, that is the recompense of the wrongdoers.”* In spite of the eminent danger, the response of the innocent brother portrayed a soul which reveled in peace and security. He would not raise a hand against his aggressive brother, even if the other tried to kill him. His restraint came from his consciousness of his Lord, not from any inability to retaliate. He would rather have his brother be burdened with the sins of both of them. The culprit’s sins were the reason that his offering was not accepted in the first place. This was also an attempt to swerve his brother away from his bad intention by expressing how much he abhorred harming his brother. He also pointed out to him that the way to get his sins forgiven is to be conscious of God.

*“But his soul prompted him to murder his brother; he murdered him and became one of the losers.”* In spite of all the pleading by the peaceful brother, evil prevailed and the soul of the wicked brother made it easy for him to commit the crime. He killed his brother and he became a loser. He lost his soul and got himself in trouble. He lost his brother who was his friend and companion. He lost comfort in this life and he lost the reward in the Hereafter. He realized the gravity of his crime when he saw the body of his brother lying on the ground and he did not know what to do with it. God in His wisdom wanted him to realize how helpless he was.

*“Then God sent a raven, who scratched the ground, to show him how to hide his brother’s corpse. He said, ‘Woe unto me, was I not even able to be as this raven, and cover my brother’s body?’ Then he became remorseful.”* It is obvious that this was the first time for the killer to see a dead body being buried. It may be the case that this was the first time one of Adam’s (PBUH) offspring had died or that the killer may have been too young to have seen a dead person being buried before. It is also obvious that his regret was for the realization that killing his brother did not solve his problem but added to it, rather than for the bad deed itself, since regret over the deed alone would have earned him God’s forgiveness. The story emphasized the gravity of the crime and provided a foundation for the legislation dealing with the crime of murder, a legislation which should be a deterrent before the crime is committed and a tool for retribution after the crime has been committed.

*“On account of (this deed), We ordained for the Children of Israel that if anyone kills a person - unless it be for murder or for spreading corruption in the land - it would be as if he killed all humankind; and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all humankind. Our messengers came to them with clear signs, but many of them continued to commit excesses in the land.”* On account of this incident, knowing that such aggressive human model exists and that such model may not heed advice or admonition, and for the protection of peaceful and righteous people who do not assault or commit evil against any one; God ordained for the children of Israel that killing one soul is equivalent to killing the whole human race and saving a single soul is equivalent to saving the whole human race.

*“The recompense for those who wage war against God and His Messenger, and strive hard to spread corruption in the land is: execution, or crucifixion, or the cutting off of hands and feet from opposite sides, or exile from the land. That is their disgrace in this world, and a great torment is theirs in the Hereafter; unless they repent before you overpower them; in that case, know that God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* The verse described the punishment for crimes that may be committed by gangs of outlaws against citizens of a Muslim state, a state governed by a Muslim ruler who governs according to God’s law. These gangs terrorize and assault people; and steal their money. These gangs are not only fighting the government or the citizens of the state but they are also fighting God and His Messenger because they are fighting God’s law. They are spreading corruption and terrorism in the land. This is a horrendous crime. People who are proven guilty of committing such crime will be punished in this life as well as in the Hereafter. However, if they abandoned violence and repented before they were seized, then they should be granted amnesty. The rationale behind granting them amnesty, if they repent while they are still free and able to commit more atrocities, has two components. First, abandoning their wicked ways while they are still in a position of power and are able to inflict more harm on the society is an expression of remorse and their serious intention to go back to the right way. Second, amnesty provides an incentive for such gangs to seek forgiveness and saves the society the burden of fighting them.

*“You who believe, be conscious of God, seek the means to come closer to Him, and strive with might in his cause; so that you may succeed.”* The divine project takes into account human nature. It recognizes its weaknesses and its strengths. It aims at promoting goodness in the human soul and encouraging people to follow the law. This cannot be achieved by punishment alone. Fear of the worldly consequences of breaking the law is not sufficient to create a healthy society. Punishment may deter people from committing crimes, however it does not change the criminal mindset. Quran encourages people to seek the pleasure of God by adopting means to bring them nearer to God. This is the honourable way for human beings to follow. So, be conscious of your Lord and seek the means to come near to Him. Seeking help from God empowers them and puts them on the road to success.

*“Certainly, those who disbelieved, even if they had what is in the earth, all of it, and the like of it with it, that they might ransom themselves with it from the torment of the Day of Resurrection, it shall not be accepted from them, and they shall have a painful torment. They will wish to get out of the Fire, but they will never get out therefrom; their torment will be one that endures.”* The verse paints an image for the disbelievers on the Day of Judgment. One can imagine that they have all what is on the earth and the like of it, trying to ransom themselves from the punishment by giving away that wealth and yet they are incapable of ransoming themselves.

*“Cut off the hands of thieves, whether they are male or female as a recompense for what they have done, a deterrent from God, God is Eminent, Wise. But whoso repents after his wrongdoing and amends, God will certainly, relent toward him, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. Do you not know that the dominion of the heavens and the earth belongs to God; He torments whom He pleases; and forgives whom He pleases and God has power over everything.”* The government in an Islamic society should guarantee a decent living, appropriate education, and social justice for all its citizens; Muslims and non-Muslims alike. No citizen should be faced with the temptation to steal to support him/herself. Islam requires a decent life for all citizens. It

ensures that each citizen has an ample access to education and health services. It decrees social justice for all. The right to have personal property gained through legal means is sacred. Personal property is a way to enrich the society and to benefit its citizens. It should be protected. It is then logical to specify a severe punishment for the crime of theft. However, for the punishment to be enacted, the alleged perpetrator has to be proven guilty without a shadow of a doubt.

Islam provides an integrated system which organizes the life of people in a Muslim state. For the Islamic system to be successful, it has to be applied in its entirety. Partial application of the system is counterproductive. The rationale behind enacting a law to address a specific crime may not be clear unless we examine the system as a whole. Let us examine the laws regarding the punishment for the crime of theft. All citizens of a Muslim state have the right to live a decent life. They have the right to have all their basic needs satisfied. These needs include food, clothing, and a comfortable home. The state has to provide education and appropriate work opportunities for its citizens so that they become gainfully employed and are able to afford a decent life. The state has to provide the necessary support for those who are unable to work, those whose income is not sufficient, and those who lost their jobs either temporarily or permanently. Islam prescribes three different measures that can be used to address the needs of the poor or needy. First, affluent family members are obligated to support their kin who are needy. If the family members are all poor, then the responsibility falls on the rich people of the town or the village. If this kind of help is not available, then Zakat money is used to address the need. An Islamic government should provide a reasonably decent life for its citizens.

Islam is very particular about the ways which are used to acquire wealth. All properties should be acquired through legal means. Since, wealth can only be acquired through hard work and legal means, then there is no reason for anyone to begrudge the wealthy. Islam trains its adherents to adopt highly ethical values and to behave accordingly. It motivates them to work hard and seek legal means for earning their living. If for some reason they are unable to work or it so happened that their income is not sufficient to ensure a decent life, then the government is obligated to cover that shortage.

In such a society stealing can only be motivated by greed and the desire for easy and quick gain. This is not acceptable in an Islamic setting. Such acts terrorize the society, threaten people's security, and infringe the right for legal ownership that people deserve. It is the right of all members of the society, who work hard and earn their living through legal means and pay their dues, to ensure that their property is protected. This system ensures that the basic needs for people are satisfied. Therefore, there is no excuse for those who choose to steal other people's property. This is a punishable crime.

However, punishments can only be executed if the crime has been proven without a shadow of a doubt. Any doubt renders the punishment inapplicable. 'Umar (RA) did not apply the punishment for theft during the year of draught (when there was a famine). Another example which illustrates this point is the story of the two servants of Ibn Hateb ibn abi Balta'h (RA) who stole a she camel from a man from a tribe called Mazeenah. Originally, 'Umar (RA) decided to punish the servants when they were proven guilty. However, when 'Umar (RA) came to know that the servants were often left without food and that their master did not satisfy their basic

needs, ‘Umar (RA) decided to pardon the servants. He punished their master by commanding him to repay the owner of the she camel twice its price.

Now, let us discuss the punishment for the crime of theft. A crime of theft is defined as stealing money or property that has a monetary value of more than about one dollar. The money or the property must be locked up in a secure place which is not accessible to people. Exceptions are made in certain situations. Examples of these are a person stealing money that was left with him/her as a trust, a servant stealing items that left unlocked in the house, a person refusing to repay his/her debt, or a person stealing fruits from a tree in an open field. The punishment for theft is not applicable in these situations. However, in such situations, the judge can impose different punishments depending on the gravity of the crime.

The punishment for the crime of theft is the cutting of the right hand to the wrist. A second offense is punished by cutting the left foot to the ankle. The scholars differed as to the punishments for repeating offenders who commit the crime of theft for more than two times. This punishment may seem to be a harsh and inhumane, but it is meant to be a deterrent. It also meant to send a message that the tool which is used to make illegal gains can be easily lost. This deterrent worked well, one can cite very few cases during the early years of Islam when it was necessary to enact the punishment.

In any case, the door for repentance is always open for those who seek it. Wrongdoing has grave consequences. Thus, for repentance to be accepted the wrongdoing has to be redressed. It is not only sufficient for a Muslim to abstain from committing injustice but it is also important that we make positive contribution to the society. Urging people to make positive contributions provides them with incentive to abstain from committing injustices.

The topics mentioned in these verses flow nicely from Islam’s strategy to train people to practice an Islamic way of life. First, the crime is outlined followed by citing the punishment, then comes the way out and finally a reminder of the power of God. God created humankind and He knows what is good and what is bad for people. God has the ultimate authority over everything.

## **Verses: 41 to 50**

- 41. Messenger, do not be grieved by those who race each other into disbelief: (whether it be) among those who say “We believe” with their lips but whose hearts have no faith; or it be among the Jews, who will listen eagerly to lies, and to those who have not even met you. They distort the meaning of the revealed words. They say (to each other), “If you are given this ruling, accept it, but if you are not, then beware.” If God intends to put any one to trial you will be powerless against God on their behalf, for those are the ones whose hearts God does not want to purify. For them there is disgrace in this world, and in the Hereafter a grievous torment.*
- 42. They are fond of listening to falsehood, and they devour what is unlawful. If they do come to you for judgment, either judge between them, or decline. If you decline, they cannot*

- hurt you in the least. If you judge between them, judge justly. God loves those who judge justly.*
- 43. But why do they come to you for judgment, when they have the Torah with God's judgment and even then, they still turn away. They are not really believers.*
  - 44. We revealed the Torah, wherein there are guidance and light. By which the prophets who submitted to God, judged the Jews; so did the rabbis and the scholars, for to them was entrusted the protection of God's book, and they were witnesses thereto. Therefore, fear not people, but fear Me, and sell not my verses for a small price. Whosoever fails to judge by what God has revealed, such are the disbelievers.*
  - 45. We prescribed for them in the Torah: a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and a wound for an equal wound. But whoso forgoes the just retribution by way of charity, it will be an act of atonement for himself. And whosoever fails to judge according to what God has revealed, such are the wrongdoers.*
  - 46. And We sent Jesus the son of Mary in their footsteps, confirming the Torah that had come before him. We gave him the Gospel; therein was guidance, light, and confirmation of the Torah that had come before him: a guidance and an exhortation to those who are God conscious.*
  - 47. So, let the people of the Gospel judge according to what God has revealed therein. Whosoever fails to judge according to what God has revealed, such are the transgressors.*
  - 48. To you (Muhammad), We sent the Book with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it, and guarding it in safety; so judge between them by what God has revealed; and follow not their vain desires which diverge from the truth that has come to you. To each among you We have prescribed a law and a path. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you in what He has given you; so vie one with another in doing good deeds. You will all return to God and He will make clear to you the matters which you differed about.*
  - 49. So (Prophet) judge between them according to what God has revealed, and follow not their whims, and beware of them lest they beguile you from any of what God has sent down to you. And if they turn away, be assured that God intends to punish them for some of the sins they have committed. And truly most people are transgressors.*
  - 50. Is it a judgment of the time of (idolatry) ignorance that they are seeking? Who is better than God as a judge for a people who have certitude? (5:41-50)*

*“Messenger, do not be grieved by those who race each other into disbelief: (whether it be) among those who say, ‘We believe’ with their lips but whose hearts have no faith; or it be among the Jews, who will listen eagerly to lies, and to those who have not even met you. They distort the meaning of the revealed words. They say (to each other), ‘If you are given this ruling, accept it, but if you are not, then beware.’ If God intends to put any one to trial, you will be powerless against God on their behalf. For those are the ones whose hearts God does not want to purify. For them there is disgrace in this world, and in the Hereafter a grievous torment. They are fond of listening to falsehood, and they devour what is unlawful. If they do come to you for judgment, either judge between them, or decline. If you decline, they cannot hurt you in the least. If you judge between them, judge justly. God loves those who judge justly. But why do they come to you for judgment, when they have the Torah with God's judgment and even then, they still turn away.*

*They are not really believers.*” It seems that these verses were revealed during the first years after the migration to Medina. During these years some of the Jewish tribes living in Medina were plotting against the Muslims. The hypocrites allied themselves with these tribes. This used to sadden the Prophet (PBUH). The verses came to offer support and consolation to the Prophet (PBUH). The verses also instructed the Prophet (PBUH) in ways to deal with those who plot against him and the believers. These verses describe a situation where members of a Jewish tribe committed certain offenses for which there were specific prescribed punishments in the Torah. The original prescribed punishments were harsh. However, gradually, the punishments were relaxed and were replaced with lighter punishments. They asked the Prophet (PBUH) what punishment he would suggest for these offenses. They had hoped that he would suggest the lighter punishments. However, they were determined to ignore the Prophet’s (PBUH) suggestion if they did not like it. This opportunistic approach reflects the insincerity of these people. God is telling His Messenger that this was a test for these people, a test that they failed. The Prophet (PBUH) is asked not to grieve over this. The hearts of these people were corrupt; and they were fond of listening to falsehood. They were no longer in pursuit of the truth. This is what happens to people who stray away from their Book. Their societies become decadent. These are people who have long lost the true meaning of their faith and they only follow the technicalities. They try to find a trick or a crooked decree to avoid what they consider difficult tasks. We can see this today among the Muslims who said, *“We believe with their lips but whose hearts have no faith.”* The verses came to console the Prophet (PBUH). These were people who were tried by God and because their corrupt hearts they failed the test. The Prophet (PBUH) could not save anyone from God’s trial.

They had no scruples about the sources of their wealth. They earned their living through illegal means. The Prophet (PBUH) was given the choice either to respond to their request or to abstain from suggesting any punishment. However, if the Prophet (PBUH) chose to judge among them, he should do that with absolute justice. God loves those who are just. The Muslim leader and the Muslim judge should seek the pleasure of God when they pass their judgments. They should know that it is God’s justice they apply not their own; this is the guarantee for establishing justice in an Islamic society.

The fact that the Prophet (PBUH) was given the choice to judge or not to judge implies that these verses must have been revealed in the early days of the life of Muslims in Medina. Once the Muslim state has been established, Islamic law has to be applied and it becomes incumbent on the ruler to rule according to Islamic law. Islamic law allows the people of the Scripture living in an Islamic society to follow their own law regarding the lawful and the forbidden. For example, Christians living in an Islamic state are allowed to eat pork and drink wine.

But why did they ask the prophet while they knew the punishment that Torah had prescribed? But they turned away from it. They were not true believers because believers obey God’s law. Believers uphold God’s law. Those who reject God’s law are no longer considered believers. This verse is similar to verse 65 Sura 4, *“But no, by your Lord, they will not truly believe until they make you (Muhammad) judge concerning that over which they dispute among themselves and then find within themselves no discomfort from what you have judged and submit willingly full submission.”* (4: 65) The two verses deal with those who are being judged, not with judges; and both verses emphasize that it is the essence of faith to accept God’s judgement.

The previous verses dealt with the people being judged and the following verses deal with the judges, *“We revealed the Torah, wherein there are guidance and light. By which the prophets who submitted to God, judged the Jews; so did the rabbis and the scholars, for to them was entrusted the protection of God’s book, and they were witnesses thereto. Therefore, fear not people, but fear Me, and sell not my verses for a small price. Whosoever fails to judge by what God has revealed, such are disbelievers. We prescribed for them in the Torah: a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and a wound for an equal wound. But whoso forgoes the just retribution by way of charity, it will be an act of atonement for himself. And whosoever fails to judge according to what God has revealed, such are the wrongdoers.”* This verse addressed the case of rulers who do not rule according to God’s law. Religion is not only a set of beliefs that are meant to settle in people’s hearts, nor a set of rituals to be practiced in a temple but religion is a way of life. It provides laws which organize life on earth. These laws have to be followed in our daily life. God is the only authority to issue such laws. He controls everything in this life and to Him we will be accountable in the Hereafter.

God revealed the Torah to guide the Children of Israel to the path of God. It has the light to guide them in their daily life. It brought them the doctrine of the Oneness of God as well as the law. The Prophets (PBUT) were commanded to rule according to the law and to keep their practices pure for the sake of God. This is the meaning of submission (Islam). The rabbis and scholars were asked to be witnesses for God by living according to God’s law. God knows that, in every place and at all times, there will be some who will resist the rule of God’s law. These are the people who will feel threaten because God’s law will outstrip them of the power which they use to rule people, guided only by their whims and desires. People who grow their wealth using shady financial practices will never accept the rule of God’s law. They know that the rule of God’s law will not permit them to continue their unfair practices. This group also includes those who are immersed into cheap material enjoyment and hedonistic practices. They know that these practices are unlawful under the rule of God’s law. Others who simply hate to see peace, tranquility and goodness spread all over the earth will also oppose the rule of God’s law. God knows this. This is why He commanded those entrusted with establishing the law to fear Him instead of fearing people. The establishment of God’s law should not be hindered by the fear that it will displease those who oppose God’s law. God is the only one who deserves to be feared.

God also knows that those who are entrusted with establishing the rule of God’s law may succumb to the temptation of the material pleasures of life. So, they are commanded not to sell God’s law for few pennies. They may be tempted by the corrupt to turn a blind eye, distort the law, or issue corrupt verdicts in return for cheap worldly pleasures. Any price they get for distorting the law is small no matter how big it was. No crime is more grievous for a man in a position of responsibility than betraying the trust. Finally, the verse ends with a strong statement: those who do not uphold the rule of God’s law are disbelievers. The rationale behind this statement is that those who do not uphold the rule of God’s law essentially refuse the right of God to rule. They thus reject one of the main attributes of God.

The verse gave an example of the laws revealed in the Torah, *“We prescribed for them in the Torah: a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and a wound for an equal wound.”* These laws were adopted into the Islamic law. This is the law

that should apply till the end of time. These laws apply only within the borders of a Muslim state because a Muslim state has no jurisdiction beyond its borders. This law was complemented in the Islamic law by the addition of a new article. This is the article that allows a person to forgo the retribution as an act of charity, *“But whoso forgoes the retaliation by way of charity, it will be an act of atonement for himself.”*

It may be appropriate to comment on the concept of retribution in Islam. Equality is a fundamental principle underlying the retribution laws. All people are equal irrespective of their ethnicity, social status, or rank. A life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and a wound for an equal wound. People are equal in front of God’s law. This fundamental principle which was proclaimed by God’s law is the true announcement of the new birth of the human race. All human beings are equal.

Retribution is intended to be a deterrent. When a person knows that he /she will suffer harm similar to that which they inflicted on others, criminals may think twice before inflicting harm on others. Imprisonment is not effective as a deterrent. However, Islam adds a new dimension: the dimension of forgiveness. God promised those who forgive the people who harmed them a great reward. The verse ends by a new attribute for those who do not uphold God’s law. They are wrongdoers. They are wrongdoers because they do not use God’s law to judge among people. Thus, they use the wrong law in their judgments.

*“And We sent Jesus the son of Mary in their footsteps, confirming the Torah that had come before him. We gave him the Gospel; therein was guidance, light, and confirmation of the Torah that had come before him: a guidance and an exhortation to those who are God conscious. So, let the people of the Gospel judge according to what God has revealed therein. Whosoever fails to judge according to what God has revealed, such are the transgressors.”* God revealed the Gospel to Prophet Jesus the son of Mary (PBUH). The Gospel came to establish a way of life. It came to confirm the law that was revealed in the Torah. The Gospel brought guidance, light, and admonition to those who are conscious of God. Those who are God conscious are the ones who seek guidance and their hearts are touched with the light of the Gospel. Those who are hard hearted do not benefit from this guidance, are unable to see the light, nor are they able to heed the admonition. The Gospel and the Torah came to guide specific communities. Each community is commanded to apply the laws that were revealed to them in their Scripture. These Scriptures were not meant to be the universal message to all people. A third attribute is then used to describe those who do not apply God’s law: they are transgressors. Three attributes describe those who do not uphold God’s law. They are disbelievers, wrongdoers, and transgressors.

*“To you (Muhammad), We sent the Book with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it, and guarding it in safety; so, judge between them by what God has revealed; and follow not their vain desires which diverge from the truth that has come to you. To each among you We have prescribed a law and a path. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you in what He has given you; so vie one with another in doing good deeds. You will all return to God and He will make clear to you the matters which you differed about. So (Prophet) judge between them according to what God has revealed, and follow not their whims, and beware of them lest they beguile you from any of what God has sent down to you. And if they turn away, be assured that God intends to punish them for some of the*

*sins they have committed. And truly most people are transgressors. Is it a judgment of the time of (idolatry) ignorance that they are seeking? Who is better than God as a judge for a people who have certitude?"* Finally, the last message is addressed. It is the message of Islam in its final form. It is the universal message which addresses all people. It confirms and supersedes all the forms that came before it. It establishes the way of life that God wants for His servants. It came to be applied as a way of life, not merely studied as an intellectual exercise. It addresses all the details of the daily lives of people. Reading this unequivocal command to apply God's law, one wonders, how can Muslims abandon the rule of God? The Book came with the truth. It is the truth because it is a revelation from God. God is the only authority to dictate the law and to formulate the rules. It is the truth because its contents embody the truth. This is the last Scripture to be revealed from God. It is the final reference which outlines the characteristics of the way of life that God has decreed. It embodies the final form of the message of submission (Islam.) Therefore, it is the standard that should be used to settle all arguments related to matters of faith and lives of the believers. The verse commands the Prophet (PBUH) to apply God's law. However, this specific command is generalized to include all Muslims. All Muslims should apply God's law in its entirety as long as they live.

This religion was revealed in its entirety, it is a blessing that God has bestowed on His servants, and it is a way of life that God wants His servants to adopt. No one has the authority to change its contents. Muslims cannot abandon its rules, nor replace them with manmade ones. God knows that the rules revealed in the Quran accommodate the needs of all people. These rules ensure goodness for those who follow them. These rules are adaptable to the changing needs of people with time until the Day of Judgment. This is a fact that each and every Muslim should know.

The verses carried a warning for the Prophet (PBUH) not to abandon God's law in favour of the whims of others. The warning was emphasized twice. God knew that there will be people who will make excuses to seek an exemption from following the command to apply God's rules. One excuse may be motivated by their desire to bring people of different faiths, different, political views, or different persuasions living in one country under a banner that they would all subscribe to. This may result in attempts to side step some rules which may not seem important in order to satisfy other groups. God's law should not be compromised in any way. God has decreed different rules for different people. Had God wanted all people to follow the same rule, He would have done that. It is therefore, critical not to compromise God's law in any way.

God consoled His Prophet (PBUH) by telling him not to be grieved by those who will turn away and refuse to apply God's law. The Prophet (PBUH) should persevere in applying God's law. He should not be tempted by the thought that he can pacify these people by side stepping God's law. They will be punished by God for turning away and no harm will befall the Prophet (PBUH) or the believers as a result of this. This closes all doors in the way of Satan who will always try to tempt people to abandon God's law. The warning is clear and the question is posed: do the believers want to follow God's law or do they want to follow the idolaters' law (law of ignorance)? There is no middle way, it is one or the other. This verse defines the meaning of the term "ignorance." The law of ignorance is the law that allows the rulers to judge people according to their whims and desires. It is a kind of slavery, because it places people under the mercy of their rulers. It denies God's right to be the only master and gives that privilege to a

mere mortal. Ignorance is a state of human existence, not confined to any historical period. This state can exist at any time and in any place. People who choose to follow God's law are the believers. Those who abandon God's law in favor of a manmade law are living in a state of ignorance. The verse concludes by stating the best choice a person firm in faith can make in choosing a judge: God is the best of the law makers. The best law maker is the Creator who created people and knows them best. He knows best what is good for them. He is the most Merciful to His people. He knows best what will happen in the future, and makes the law adaptable to the future needs of people. This is a central issue that needs to be understood by each and every Muslim. Applying God's law is what makes them Muslims. Abandoning God's law in favor of a manmade law places them in a state of ignorance.

## Verses: 51 to 66

51. *You who believe, do not take the Jews and the Christians as protecting guardians. They are protecting guardians only to each other. And he among you who takes them as protecting guardians becomes one of them. Verily God does not guide those who are wrongdoers.*
52. *But you will see those in whose hearts is a disease rushing to them for protection, saying, "We fear that a calamity should befall us;" but God may well bring about victory or a command from Himself, then they will regret the thoughts which they secretly harbored in their hearts.*
53. *And those who believe will say, "Are these the ones who swore their strongest oaths by God that they were with you?" All that they do will be in vain and they will become losers.*
54. *You who believe, if any of you turn back from his faith, soon will God replace you with people whom He loves and who love Him. They are people who are humble towards the believers, mighty against the disbelievers, fighting in the way of God, and never afraid of the reproach of anyone. That is the grace of God, which He will bestow on whom He pleases. And God is Vast, Omniscient.*
55. *Your true protecting guardians are God, His Messenger, and the believers- those who establish regular prayers and pay the prescribed alms, while bowing down humbly (in worship).*
56. *Those who turn to God, His Messenger, and the believers for protection (are God's party); God's party will certainly triumph.*
57. *You who believe, do not take as protecting guardians those who ridicule your religion and make fun of it, whether from among those who received the Scripture before you, or among the disbelievers; but be conscious of God if you are true believers.*
58. *When you make the call to prayer, they ridicule it and make a mockery out of it; that is because they are a people who do not understand.*
59. *Say, "People of the Scripture, do you resent us for any reason other than the fact that we believe in God, we believe in what was revealed to us, and that which was revealed before us, while most of you are transgressors.*
60. *Say, "Shall I tell you who deserves a worse punishment from God than (the punishment you wish upon) us: those whom God has cursed, those on whom God's wrath has fallen, those whom God condemned as apes and pigs, and those who worship idols. Such are in worse plight and further astray from the straight path."*

61. *When they come to you, they say, "We believe." But in fact they come with a disbelieving mindset, and they leave with the same, but God knows fully all that they hide.*
62. *And you see many of them vying one another into sin and transgression, and eating what is unlawfully acquired; how evil is that which they do?*
63. *Why do not their godly people and rabbis forbid them from uttering sinful words and eating forbidden things? How evil is that which they do?*
64. *And the Jews said, "God's hand is tied up." Their hands shall be shackled and they shall be cursed for what they say. Truly, God's hands are spread out, He expends as He pleases; and what has been revealed to you from your Lord will certainly make many of them more insolent and defiant; and We have placed enmity and hatred among them till the day of resurrection; whenever they kindle a fire for war God puts it out, and they strive to spread corruption in the land; and God does not love those who spread corruption.*
65. *If only the people of the Scripture had believed and been righteous, We would indeed have absolved them of their evil deeds and admitted them to gardens of bliss.*
66. *If they had observed the Torah and the Gospel and that which was revealed to them from their Lord, they would certainly have been given abundance from above them and from beneath their feet. Among them there are people who are moderate, but many of them are of evil conduct. (5:51-66)*

*"You who believe, do not take the Jews and the Christians as protecting guardians. They are protecting guardians only to each other. And he among you who takes them as protecting guardians becomes one of them. Verily God does not guide those who are wrongdoers. But you will see those in whose hearts is a disease rushing to them for protection, saying, 'We fear that a calamity should befall us;' but God may well bring about victory or a command from Himself, then they will regret the thoughts which they secretly harbored in their hearts. And those who believe will say, 'Are these the ones who swore their strongest oaths by God that they were with you?' All that they do will be in vain and they will become losers."* We need first to explain what is meant by the term "Protecting guardians" mentioned in the verse. The term "Protecting guardians" here refers to alliances between Muslims and Jews or Christians which involved pledges of protection and support. The verse is referring to a state of affair that was prevalent during the early days of Muslims in Medina. Some Muslims thought that such alliances are allowed. Muslims thought that it is possible to have such alliances especially since they had a great deal of business dealings with the Jews of Medina. The verse commanded the Muslims to abandon these alliances, since it became clear that such alliances are not plausible. Muslims are commanded to treat the Christians and the Jews kindly and fairly. Christians and Jews living in a Muslim state have all the rights and privileges that all citizens enjoy. However, the way the Christian and Jewish groups viewed Muslims and Islam at that time made all attempts to seek political alliances between the different groups unsuccessful.

The verse warned Muslims, who were still seeking to get protection for their interests from the Jews, that they were doing themselves, Islam, and the Muslims great injustice. God will deprive them His guidance and will make them outcasts because God does not guide those who commit wrongdoing. This was a very strong warning for Muslims in Medina. The warning reflects the gravity of the situation in Medina at that time. A person who is seeking to ally himself with the enemy of Islam and the Muslims betrays Islam, himself, and his fellow Muslims.

An example of the situations which explain the rationale behind these verses is narrated by Mohamed Ibn Ishaq. He said, *“I was told on the authority of Abi Ishaq ibn Yasar, that both Abd-Allah ibn Obai (RA) and Obada ibn Al-Samet (RA) were allies to the Jewish tribe of Banu Qinuqa’ when war erupted between them and the Muslims. Obada (RA) went to the prophet (PBUH) and denounced his alliance with Banu Qinuqa’ while Abd-Allah kept his alliance.”*

This story gives a glimpse of the conditions of the Muslim community in Medina at that time and how it was affected by the relationships that existed between the different tribes before Islam. Rules which organize the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims were not finalized yet. Although the interactions which prompted the revelation of this verse were mainly between Muslims and Jews, but the verse included the Christians as well. The verse established a principle regarding political alliances between Muslims and other non-Muslim groups. Muslims should only seek alliances with other Muslims. These alliances should only be in the sake of God, and for the benefit of the Muslim community. This does not violate the fundamental principle that Muslims must treat non-Muslims kindly. A Muslim is commanded to treat the people of the Scripture kindly (as long as they do not wage war against Muslims or persecute them). Muslims are allowed to marry Christian and Jewish women but that does not mean that Muslims are required to support Christianity or Judaism over Islam. Muslims are asked to call all non-Muslims to Islam but they cannot compel anyone to accept Islam. Faith is a matter of the heart and no one has control over people’s hearts. Compulsion in religion is not only forbidden in Islam but it is counterproductive.

When victory comes, those who have sickness in their hearts will regret their decision to hasten in supporting the Jews and Christians against the Muslims. Their hypocrisy will be revealed. The believers will recognize the hypocrites and they will look upon them with disdain.

*“You who believe, if any of you turn back from his faith, soon will God replace you with people whom He loves and who love Him. They are people who are humble towards the believers, mighty against the disbelievers, fighting in the way of God, and never afraid of the reproach of anyone. That is the grace of God, which He will bestow on whom He pleases. And God is Vast, Omniscient.”* Certainly, it is a great blessing to be chosen by God to fight in His sake, to bring the truth to people, and to establish God’s rule on earth. People are free to accept or reject this blessing. God will choose those who can carry out the mission. They will be blessed by the grace of God. This group will have specific characteristics. They love God and God loves them. Only those who are able to recognize their Lord can appreciate His love. They recognize God through the attributes which He described Himself with. They feel these attributes deep in their hearts and throughout their whole beings. Only those who are able to recognize the Giver are able to appreciate the gift.

It is even a greater blessing for the servant to be able to love His Lord. Only those who experienced that love are able to appreciate its sweetness. This is a unique feeling that no words can express. Rabi’ah El-‘Adawiyah tried to describe her love of God when she said, “I don’t mind how bitter life is, if I can experience the sweetness of Your nearness. I don’t mind how angry everyone is at me, if You are pleased with me. I don’t mind if everyone else abandoned

me, if I can still maintain my contact with You. I don't need anyone else, if I am able to experience Your love. Everything above the dust is dust."

Another attribute that this group has is treating the believers with humility. This is an attribute that emanates from their obedience to God. The believers listen to each other, they obey each other, and they love each other. The word humility here implies brotherhood and love, not subservience. On the other hand, they deal with the disbelievers with dignity. They know that they are on the right path and they are proud of their faith. They are sure that the truth will prevail. They fight in the sake of God fearing no blame from the others. This fight is not for personal, national, or ethnic gain. It is a fight in the sake of God, to establish the divine project and to support goodness over evil. They have no reason to fear people since they have the assurance of the love of the Lord of the people. This is a blessing from God. He bestows His blessings abundantly on whomsoever He chooses.

*"Your true protecting guardians are God, His Messenger, and the believers- those who establish regular prayers and pay the prescribed alms, while bowing down humbly (in worship)." The verse defined clearly the true protecting guardians of Muslims. It also reiterated the criteria which distinguish the believers. The believers are those who establish regular prayers and pay the prescribed poor dues. Establishing prayers implies more than just "performing" prayers. It means striving to perfection so that the expected fruits of the prayer are achieved as has been stated in the verse "Certainly, prayer forbids evil and sin." (29:45) So, those whose prayers do not forbid them to commit evil have not "established" prayers. They also pay the prescribed alms. The objective behind prescribing alms is more than providing financial help to the poor. Paying the prescribed alms is an act of obedience to God. Muslims should pay the alms willingly and with the sole purpose of pleasing God. The word Zakat in Arabic implies purification and growth. It is purification of the souls of those who pay it. Those who pay Zakat will not only be rewarded in the Hereafter, but will also experience growth in their wealth in this life. Paying Zakat enriches the economic system and strengthens the social fabric of the society. Poor people who receive Zakat know that they are only receiving what is their right, a right that has been given to them by God. They will not begrudge the rich for their wealth which they have accumulated legally. The rich know that they will be rewarded by God for fulfilling this obligation. They will only be grateful to God that they are able to fulfill their obligations and they will look for God's blessings. Thus, the Alms will help create an environment full of empathy, love and brotherhood.*

*"Those who turn to God, His Messenger, and the believers for protection (are God's party); God's party will certainly triumph."* This is God's promise to the believers; those who trust in God and seek His support alone will be granted victory against their enemy. The promise is given after the criterion for trusting in God has been explained. Allegiance and loyalty are pledged only to God, His Prophet and the believers. A warning against political alliances with the Jews and the Christians against Muslims has been delivered.

*"You who believe, do not take as protecting guardians those who ridicule your religion and make fun of it, whether from among those who received the Scripture before you, or among the disbelievers; but be conscious of God if you are true believers. When you make the call to prayer, they ridicule it and make a mockery out of it; that is because they are a people who do*

*not understand.*” This is a challenge for those who accept that their faith, their rituals, and their prayers be ridiculed. How can they pledge political allegiance to those who commit such acts against the believers? Those who ridicule the Muslims and their faith have no understanding. The disbelievers and the Jews used to ridicule the believers. There is no account that the Christians were guilty of such acts. However, the criterion which identifies those who are worthy of the allegiance of the believers has been formulated and will remain valid forever. There came times in history when Christians practiced the same behavior against Muslims. The Christian West sent crusaders, occupying armies, and missionaries to conquer Muslim lands and to convert Muslims to Christianity. Prohibiting political alliances with the Christians under this principle seems logical.

It must be emphasized that Islam commands Muslims to be tolerant and to treat the people of the Scripture, especially the Christians, kindly. However, political alliances and kind treatment are two different issues. Tolerance and kind treatment are matters of behaviour but a political alliance is a matter of faith and strategy. A political alliance requires those who subscribe to the alliance to support each other against a common enemy. Muslims should not be party to an alliance which targets other Muslims.

*“Say, ‘People of the Scripture, do you resent us for any reason other than the fact that we believe in God, we believe in what was revealed to us, and that which was revealed before us, while most of you are transgressors.’ Say, ‘Shall I tell you who deserves a worse punishment from God than (the punishment you wish upon) us: those whom God has cursed, those on whom God’s wrath has fallen, those whom God condemned as apes and pigs, and those who worship idols. Such are in worse plight and further astray from the straight path.”* The verse stated a rhetorical question that God instructed His Messenger to pose to the people of the Scripture. The objective was to underscore the actual behavior of the people of Scripture and to reveal the real motivation behind their animosity towards the Muslims. The question condemned the attitude of the people of the Scripture and alerted Muslims to the grave consequences that may occur as a result of the position which the people of the Scripture assumed.

The verse explains that the people of Scripture resented the fact that the Muslims were given a Book from God and that they follow that Book. The verse explains that those who harboured this resentment are transgressors. Transgressors do not tolerate seeing others following the straight path. If they admit that Muslims are on the straight path, then they are accepting the fact that they are following a crooked path. To avoid this self-incrimination, they convinced themselves that Muslims were wrong.

Idol worshippers are cursed. What is the meaning of idol worshipping that the verse alluded to? Idol worship mentioned here alludes to following any power that does not emanate from God, any rule that is not derived from God’s law, and any transgression from the truth. The people of the Scripture did not worship their scholars and priests but they followed their commands and abandoned God’s commands. They are then idolaters because they followed manmade laws instead of God’s law. Idolatry in this verse means putting manmade laws above God’s law.

*“When they come to you, they say, ‘We believe.’ But in fact they come with a disbelieving mindset, and they leave with the same but God knows fully all that they hide. And you see many of them vying one another into sin and transgression, and eating what is unlawfully acquired;*

*how evil is that which they do? Why do not their rabbis and scholars forbid them from uttering sinful words and eating forbidden things? How evil is that which they do? And the Jews said, 'God's hand is tied up.' Their hands shall be shackled and they shall be cursed for what they say. Truly, God's hands are spread out, He expends as He pleases; and what has been revealed to you from your Lord will certainly make many of them more insolent and defiant; and We have placed enmity and hatred among them till the day of resurrection; whenever they kindle a fire for war God puts it out, and they strive to spread corruption in the land; and God does not love those who spread corruption.*" The verses transform centuries old events into dynamic images and live scenes, following the unique Quranic style, to make the readers feel as if they were present when these events took place. The verses talk about those who used to approach Muslims pretending to be believers, while their hearts were full of disbelief. However, God knew what they concealed in their hearts. This statement was made to reassure the believers and to warn their enemy that they cannot hide anything from God. They hastened, as if they were in a race, to commit sins and to eat that which they gained unlawfully. The verse then alludes to one of the characteristics of corrupt societies. The fact that the scholars who derive and explain the laws of jurisprudence and matters of faith were silent in the face of the corruption they witness. The verse alerts those who are in authority in any community to their duty to command what is good and forbid what is evil. These duties cannot be fulfilled without authority.

Some Jews said that God's hand is tied up and in another verse of the Quran they said God is poor and we are rich, implying that God does not give people much. This is just an excuse to justify the fact that they do not want to spend in the sake of God. They deserve to be cursed for these evil words which they uttered against God. The verse addressed these evil claims by stating that God's hands are wide open. He spends as He wills. His bounty is limitless. His gifts that He bestows on His servants are abundant. God tells His messenger about what will befall these people. They will become more insolent and defiant because they refused the gift of true belief. God will allow enmity and hatred to burgeon between them; and their schemes against the Muslims will be in vain. However, God will quell the fire of war that they will kindle. God will send others to stop the corruption that the transgressors are spreading in the land, because God does not like corruption.

*"If only the people of the Scripture had believed and been righteous, We would indeed have absolved them of their evil deeds and admitted them to gardens of bliss. If they had observed the Torah and the Gospel and that which was revealed to them from their Lord, they would certainly have been given abundance from above them and from beneath their feet. Among them there are people who are moderate, but many of them are of evil conduct."* These two verses established a fundamental principle in Islam. It is very important to explain and emphasize this principle. God is telling the people of the Scripture that if they believe and remain conscious of God, He will expiate their sins and will admit them to gardens of bliss. This is their reward in the Hereafter. Furthermore, if they follow God's path, as explained in the Torah and the Gospel and what God had revealed to them without any deviation, they will have a better life on this earth and they will enjoy an abundance of provision. But many of them deviated and did not follow the path of God. The principle is clear: those who follow God's path and remain conscious of Him will not only get their reward in the Hereafter, but will also enjoy success in this life. There is a single route that leads to the success in both this life and the Hereafter. This route is guaranteed for those who believe and remain continuously conscious of God. Following God's path means leading a way of life that emanates from the divine project. This way of life is based on two pillars: true belief and

God consciousness. This path does not request humankind to sacrifice this life in favour of the Hereafter, nor to sacrifice the Hereafter for the sake of this life. According to the divine project, humankind is the vicegerent of God on earth with His permission and according to the constraints that He places on His servants. To fulfill the obligations of being a vicegerent of God on earth, human beings should work hard utilizing all the resources that were made available by God to develop a rich and prosperous life on earth. This task is an act of obedience to God. Humankind will be rewarded for it in the Hereafter, while reaping the benefit of the progress made in this life. Those who will not fulfill this obligation are considered sinners. Under this principle the duality of humankind's life is removed. There is no contradiction between working for this life and working for the Hereafter. It is one route that leads to success in both worlds.

## Verses: 67 to 81

67. *Messenger, proclaim the (message) which has been sent to you from your Lord. If you do not, then you will not have conveyed His message. And God will defend you from people, for God does not guide those who disbelieve.*
68. *Say, "People of the Scripture, you have no ground to stand upon unless you uphold the Torah, the Gospel, and all the revelation that has come to you from your Lord." What has been revealed to you (Muhammad) from your Lord will increase in most of them their obstinate rebellion and disbelief. But do not worry about those who do not believe.*
69. *Those who believe (in the Qur'an), those who follow the Jewish (Scripture), the Sabians, and the Christians - any who believe in God and the Last Day - and do righteous deeds, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.*
70. *We took the covenant of the children of Israel and sent them messengers. Whenever, a messenger brought them something that they do not like, they denied some, and some they slew.*
71. *They thought there would be no trial (or punishment); so they became blind and deaf; yet God (in mercy) turned to them; yet again many of them became blind and deaf. But God sees well all what they do.*
72. *They are verily disbelievers who say, "God is the Messiah, son of Mary." The Messiah (himself) said, "Children of Israel, worship God: my Lord and your Lord." Whosoever associates partners with God, God will then forbid him to enter paradise. Hell will be his refuge. No one will help such wrongdoers.*
73. *They are verily disbelievers who say, "God is the third of three," for there is no deity except One God. If they do not desist from what they say, verily a painful torment will befall the disbelievers among them.*
74. *Why do not they turn to God and seek His forgiveness? For God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
75. *The Messiah, son of Mary, was no other than a messenger; other messengers had passed away before him. And his mother was a saintly woman. And they both used to eat food (like other mortals). See how We make the revelations clear for them, and see how deluded they are.*
76. *Say, "How can you worship, besides God, something which has no power either to harm or benefit you?" But God alone is the All-Hearing, the Omniscient.*

77. Say, "People of the Scripture, do not exceed the limits of truth in your religion, nor follow the whims of people who went wrong before you - they misled many, and strayed (themselves) from the straight path.
78. Those of the Children of Israel who went astray were cursed by the tongue of David, and of Jesus, son of Mary. That was because they rebelled and used to transgress.
79. They did not forbid one another to commit iniquities; evil indeed were the deeds which they did.
80. You (Prophet) see many of them allying themselves with those who disbelieve. Evil indeed are (the deeds) which their souls have sent forward before them. God's wrath is on them, and in torment will they abide.
81. If only they had believed in God, in the Prophet, and in what was revealed to him, they would have never taken them as protecting guardians, but most of them are transgressors. (5:67 - 81)

"Messenger, proclaim the (message) which has been sent to you from your Lord. If you do not, then you will not have conveyed His message. And God will defend you from people, for God does not guide those who disbelieve. Say, 'People of the Scripture, you have no ground to stand upon unless you uphold the Torah, the Gospel, and all the revelation that has come to you from your Lord.' What has been revealed to you (Muhammad) from your Lord will increase in most of them their obstinate rebellion and disbelief. But do not worry about those who do not believe. Those who believe (in the Qur'an), those who follow the Jewish (Scripture), the Sabians, and the Christians - any who believe in God and the Last Day - and do righteous deeds, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve." This is a clear and strict command from God to his Messenger: convey the message in its entirety. The Message should not be compromised in any way or for any reason. God promised to protect him from any harm that he may be subjected to. A clear and unequivocal message reaches the hearts of people. The Messenger should not worry about those whose hearts are comfortable with compromises and hypocrisy. This does not mean that the Messenger should deliver the message in a harsh or a crude way. On the contrary, the Messenger was commanded to use a wise and decent approach in conveying the message to people. One has to differentiate between the content of the message and the way to deliver the message. While there should be no compromises regarding the content of the message, the message should be delivered in the most appropriate way.

It seems that the intent of the verse was to confront the people of the Scripture in Medina, who did not take their religion seriously and were only paying lip service to the injunctions of their books, while the reality of their practices contradicted what they were commanded to do. They only paid a lip service to the revelation that came to them. They did not uphold the injunctions of the Gospel or the Torah. Thus, they could not claim that they were really "People of the Scripture." One may argue that they have already received the Scripture and they were reciting it, but reciting the Scripture and abiding by its injunctions are two different things. The Messenger was told to confront them with this dichotomy. They could not be considered "People of the Scripture" unless they uphold the way of life that the Scripture instructed them to follow. Establishing the Torah and the Gospel meant also that they should believe in all messengers sent by God. Among these messengers is Muhammad (PBUH). The Messenger was commanded to confront them with this reality. God tells His Messenger that although this confrontation may cause them to become more obstinate, but it was necessary. The true message has to be

proclaimed and those who do not accept it should be prepared for the consequences of their rejection.

Those who believe (Muslims), the Jews, the Sabians [most probably this term refers to people who rejected polytheism before the advent of Muhammad (PBUH)], and the Christians are saved as long as they believe in God and the Day of Judgment and they do good deeds.

It is implied that this applies only to those who believed in the last messenger. This opinion is considered part of the essential knowledge that each Muslim should have. It is clear that Muhammad (PBUH) was the last messenger of God. God sent him to all people. Those who reject the messenger and his Message are not included among those *“on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.”*

*“We took the covenant of the children of Israel and sent them messengers. Whenever, a messenger brought them something that they do not like, they denied some, and some they slew. They thought there would be no trial (or punishment); so they became blind and deaf; yet God (in mercy) turned to them; yet again many of them became blind and deaf. But God sees well all what they do.”* The Children of Israel have a long history of arguing with their prophets and disobeying their commands. This may be the reason that the most often narrated stories in the Quran are about the Children of Israel. The Muslim nation is warned not to follow in their footsteps. When the Children of Israel disobeyed their prophets, they thought that they would not be punished by God and when they were forgiven by God, many of them went back and committed the same sin again. God is Totally-Aware of what they do.

*“They are verily disbelievers who say, ‘God is the Messiah, son of Mary.’ The Messiah (himself) said, ‘Children of Israel, worship God: my Lord and your Lord.’ Whosoever associates partners with God, God will then forbid him to enter paradise. Hell will be his refuge. No one will help such wrongdoers. They are verily disbelievers who say, ‘God is the third of three,’ for there is no deity except One God. If they do not desist from what they say, verily a painful torment will befall the disbelievers among them. Why do not they turn to God and seek His forgiveness? For God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. The Messiah, son of Mary, was no other than a messenger; other messengers had passed away before him. And his mother was a saintly woman. And they both used to eat food (like other mortals). See how We make the revelations clear for them, and see how deluded they are. Say, ‘How can you worship, besides God, something which has no power either to harm or benefit you?’ But God alone is the All-Hearing, the Omniscient. Say, ‘People of the Scripture, do not exceed the limits of truth in your religion, nor follow the whims of people who went wrong before you - they misled many, and strayed (themselves) from the straight path.’”* We have explained briefly before, how these corrupt claims crept into the Christian belief. Jesus (PBUH), as all other God’s messengers, was sent with a single message based on the pure concept of the Oneness of God. A message that is free from any traces of associating partners with God. These verses reiterate this concept and emphasize that claiming that Jesus (PBUH) is the son of God violates this principle. Jesus (PBUH) warned his followers not to associate partners with God but they forgot his command, *“Children of Israel, worship God: my Lord and your Lord.”* The command implied that he and they are servants of God. They worship one God. The Quran continues to emphasize the principle of the belief in the Oneness of God and warns against violating this principle, *“If they do not desist from what they say, verily a painful torment will befall the disbelievers among them.”* Those who do not desist

are truly disbelievers. The Quran leaves the door for repentance open by emphasizing that God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. The verses continue to present a rational argument about the nature of Jesus (PBUH). He and his mother used to eat food just like any other mortal. Eating food is a human trait: it satisfies a material need. God does not need food to survive. This should provide a proof for the human nature of Jesus (PBUH).

The verses continue this logical argument by posing a rhetorical question, *“Will you worship, besides God, that which has no power either to harm or benefit you?”* The choice of the word “which” instead of “who” is deliberate; because it includes all things that people associate with God. God hears and knows. He is the One who provides benefit and causes harm. He is the one who hears His servants when they call upon Him. He knows what is in their hearts. No one else is able to listen, know or respond to these calls. The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to warn the people of the Scripture not to exceed the limits of the truth by claiming that Jesus (PBUH) is divine, *“Say, ‘People of the Scripture, do not exceed the limits of truth in your religion, nor follow the whims of people who went wrong before you - they misled many, and strayed (themselves) from the straight path.’”* This was the last call for those who claimed the divinity of Jesus (PBUH) to abandon this false claim and to follow the straight path.

These verses point to three facts. The first fact is the great emphasis that Islam has placed on establishing the concept of the Oneness of God. The creed of Islam is rooted in the pure and absolute belief in the Oneness of God. The second fact is that the Quran clearly indicates that claiming the divinity of Jesus (PBUH) or believing in the trinity is equivalent to rejecting faith in God. The third fact is that it is impossible that a political allegiance can be established between Muslims who believe in the Oneness of God and people of the Scripture.

*“Those of the Children of Israel who went astray were cursed by the tongue of David, and of Jesus, son of Mary. That was because they rebelled and used to transgress. They did not forbid one another to commit iniquities; evil indeed were the deeds which they did. You (Prophet) see many of them allying themselves with those who disbelieve. Evil indeed are (the deeds) which their souls have sent forward before them. God's wrath is on them, and in torment will they abide. If only they had believed in God, in the Prophet, and in what was revealed to him, they would have never taken them as protecting guardians, but most of them are transgressors.”*

Those who disbelieved from among the Children of Israel were cursed by their prophets because they distorted the Scripture which was revealed to them, they did not uphold God's law that was given to them, and they infringed God's covenant. They disobeyed and transgressed. Each community has transgressors. But the rest of the community should be able to curb the infractions committed by the transgressors. When nobody raises a finger to stop those who transgress and commit indecent acts, God will punish the whole community. This is the basis of the concept of the collective duty of commanding what is good and forbidding what is evil. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, “Whoever sees a sinful act from among you, he should physically stop it. If he is unable to physically stop it, he should voice his objection to it, and if he is unable, then he should at least reject it in his heart.” In another tradition, the Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, “God will not punish a whole community on account of the transgression of a small minority, unless the community turns a blind eye to the infractions and no attempts were made to stop these infractions.” A third tradition quotes the Prophet (PBUH) to have said, “The best of Jihad is voicing the truth in the court of a tyrant ruler.” These

traditions and the above verses define the collective responsibility of the community to stop evil acts, which may be committed by a small minority, so that they would not become pervasive in the community. The Muslim community has a collective responsibility to protect itself from falling prey to cynicism. This requires a clear understanding of the meaning of the belief in God. To believe in God one must conduct a way of life that is shaped by God's law. All verses and traditions that addressed the concept of "commanding what is good and forbidding what is evil" addressed a Muslim community that recognized the dominion of God and used God's law to organize its life no matter how tyrant its ruler was. Those who disbelieved from among the Children of Israel allied themselves with the polytheists against the believers. They did not believe in the Prophet (PBUH) and the message that was revealed to him.

## Verses: 82 to 86

82. *You (Prophet) will find the most hostile to the believers are the Jews and the idolaters; and the most affectionate to the believers are those who say, "We are Christians"; because among these are priests and monks, and they are not arrogant.*
83. *And when they listen to the revelation received by the Messenger, you will see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognize the truth. They pray, "Our Lord, we believe; write us down among the witnesses.*
84. *And why should we not believe in God and the truth which has come to us, when we hope that our Lord includes us in the company of the righteous?"*
85. *God rewarded them for their saying - Gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein they will abide forever. That is the reward for the doers of good.*
86. *Those who disbelieve and deny Our revelations, they are inhabitants of Hell. (5:82-86)*

These verses describe how the Jews of Medina treated the Muslims. They state that the Jews were very hostile to the Muslims and that they aligned themselves with the polytheists in attacking the Muslims. But the situation was different for those who said, "*We are Christians.*" The verses describe these people as people who understood and followed true Christianity. Among them were scholars and priests who humbled themselves to God's truth. The verses describe their reaction when they heard the Quranic verses being recited. Their hearts became soft and tears welled up in their eyes. They said, "*Our Lord, we believe; write us down among the witnesses. Why should we not believe in God and the truth which has come to us when we hope that our Lord includes us in the company of the righteous?*" They proclaimed their belief in the truth and they asked God to include them in the company of the righteous. They were open to the truth, so they wondered why it should be a surprise that they would listen to the truth when it came to them. They recognized that the new faith is the truth and they were willing to sacrifice everything in order to be part of this new religion. So "*God rewarded them for their saying - Gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein they will abide forever. That is the reward for the doers of good.*" God knew that they recognized the truth and they were determined to follow it. As a result, they were rewarded and they were given the rank of "*the doers of good*" and this is the highest rank of the believers.

There are different narratives which identify the Christian group that these verses refer to. El-Qortby stated in his interpretation of the Quran, "These verses refer to the Negus (the king of Ethiopia) and his followers. According to Ibn Ishaq, Muslims migrated to Ethiopia fleeing the

persecution of the polytheist of Mecca. Some of them remained there until after the migration of the Prophet (PBUH) to Medina. After the battle of Badr, the idolaters of Mecca tried to repatriate the Muslims living in Ethiopia to kill them as an act of revenge for the idolaters killed at the hands of Muslims in the battle of Badr. The idolaters sent ‘Amr ibn El-‘Ass and ‘Abd-Allah ibn abi Rabie’a to make their case in the Negus’ court. The Prophet (PBUH) sent a letter with a messenger to the Negus, who called the Muslims living in Ethiopia to his court. The Negus requested Ja’far ibn abi Taleb (RA) to recite excerpts from the Quran. Ja’far recited Surat Mary (Mariam). The priests and the monks attending the court were moved and felt their eyes welling with tears. This was the group referred to by the verse, *“the most affectionate to the believers are those who say, ‘We are Christians.’”*

Al-Baihaqi narrated, on the authority of Ibn Ishaq, that the Prophet (PBUH) received a group of about twenty Christians who had business to conduct in Mecca. After they had attended to their business, the Prophet (PBUH) talked to them about Islam and recited verses from the Quran to them. When they listened to the Quran, their eyes welled up with tears and they accepted Islam.

## Verses: 87 to 108

87. *You who believe, do not make unlawful the good things which God has made lawful for you, and do not transgress, for God does not love those who transgress.*
88. *Eat of the things which God has provided for you, lawful and good; but be conscious of God, in Whom you believe.*
89. *God will not take you to task for that which is unintentional in your oaths, but He will take you to task for your deliberate oaths. The expiation for such oaths is to feed ten of the needy with food that you normally feed your own families, or to clothe them, or to free a slave, and for him who does not find the means, he should fast three days. This is the expiation of your oaths when you have sworn; and keep your oaths. Thus, God makes clear His revelations in order that you may be thankful.*
90. *You who believe, intoxicants and gambling, idolatrous practices, and divination by arrows, are an abomination - of Satan's handwork - eschew such (abomination), that you may succeed.*
91. *Satan seeks to incite among you, enmity and hatred with intoxicants and gambling, and to keep you from the remembrance of God and from prayer. Will you not then desist?*
92. *Obey God, and obey the Messenger, and be on your guard: if you do turn away, know you that the sole duty of Our Messenger is to proclaim (the message) in the clearest manner.*
93. *There is no blame on those who believe and do righteous deeds for what they ate (in the past), if they are conscious of God, believe, and do righteous deeds; then they are conscious of God and believe; then again, they are conscious of God and do good deeds; for God loves those who do good deeds.*
94. *You who believe, God will certainly try you in a little matter of game well within reach of your hands and your lances, that He may test who fears Him even though they do not see him: any who transgresses thereafter, will have a painful torment.*
95. *You who believe, do not kill game while you are dressed for Pilgrimage. If any of you does that intentionally- the recompense for that - a domestic animal the equivalent to that which he has killed, brought to the Ka'ba, as adjudged by two just men among you;*

- alternatively, he may atone by feeding the needy; or its equivalent in fast; that he may taste the penalty of his deed. God pardoned whatever happened in the past; but he who reoffends God will exact revenge on him. God is Eminent, Avenger of evil.*
96. *It is lawful to you to catch and eat seafood - for the benefit of yourselves and the travellers- but to hunt on land is forbidden you so long as you are dressed for Pilgrimage. Be conscious of God, to Whom you shall be gathered.*
97. *God made the Ka'ba, the Sacred House, a means of support for people, as also the Sacred Months, the animals for offerings, and the garlands that mark them; so that you know that God has knowledge of what is in the heavens and on earth and that God is well acquainted with all things.*
98. *Know too that God is severe in punishment and that God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
99. *The Messenger's duty is only to convey (the message). But God knows what you reveal and what you conceal.*
100. *Say, "The evil and the good are not equal even though the abundance of evil may attract you. So be conscious of God, O you who are possessors of intellect that you may succeed."*
101. *You who believe, ask not questions about things which, if made plain to you, may cause you trouble. But if you ask about them when the Qur'an is being revealed, they will be made plain to you (God has pardoned this). God is All-Forgiving, Forbearing.*
102. *Some people before you did ask such questions, and on that account lost their faith.*
103. *It was not God who instituted (superstitions like those of) a slit-ear she-camel, or a she-camel let loose for free pasture, or idol sacrifices for twin-births in animals, or stallion-camels freed from work. It is the disbelievers who fabricate a lie against God; but most of them do not use reason.*
104. *When it is said to them "Come to what God has revealed; and come to the Messenger." They say, "Enough for us are the ways we found our fathers following." What? Even though their fathers had no knowledge and no guidance?*
105. *You who believe, you have charge of your own souls; if you follow (right) guidance, no hurt can come to you from those who go astray. To God you shall return; and it is He who will inform you of all that you did.*
106. *You who believe, when death approaches any of you, let two just men from among you act as witnesses to the making of bequests, or two men from other people if you are journeying through the land and the chance of death befalls you. If you doubt (their truth), detain them both after prayer, and let them both swear by God saying, "We wish not in this for any worldly gain, even though the (beneficiary) be our near relation. We shall hide not the evidence before God. If we do, indeed we will be sinful."*
107. *But if it gets known that these two were guilty of the sin (of perjury), let two others stand forth in their places - nearest in kin from among those who claim a lawful right; and let them swear by God saying, "We affirm that our witness is truer than that of those two, and that we have not trespassed (beyond the truth), if we did, then indeed we are wrongdoers."*
108. *That is most suitable so that they may give the evidence in its true nature and shape, or else they would fear that other oaths would be taken after their oaths. But be conscious of God, and listen (to His counsel), for God does not guide transgressing*

people. (5: 87-108)

*“You who believe, do not make unlawful the good things which God has made lawful for you, and do not transgress, for God does not love those who transgress. Eat of the things which God has provided for you, lawful and good; but be conscious of God, in Whom you believe.”*

These two verses establish the right of God to decree laws which organize people's life on earth. God has created humankind, He is the One Who provides for them, thus, He alone has the right to dictate what is lawful and what is forbidden. This is a logical argument that people readily accept. The Owner of the dominion has the right to set the limits for what is permissible and what is not permissible. Anyone who does not accept this simple fact is a transgressor. Believers, by their nature, are not transgressors. Faith and transgression are mutually exclusive. These two verses and the subsequent verse were revealed to deal with attitudes adopted by some Muslims. However, although these verses were revealed to deal with a specific situation, the principle they establish is a general principle that should shape the attitudes of all Muslims, at all times.

It was narrated by Anas (RA) that three Muslim men came to the house of the Prophet (PBUH) to ask about his practice regarding the acts of worship. Some of the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) described his practice which seemed little in the eyes of these three men. They said, “We need to do more worship because we are not like the Prophet (PBUH), whose sins have been forgiven.” One said, “I spend the whole night in prayers;” the second said, “I fast every day;” and the third said, “I will remain celibate as long as I live.” The Prophet (PBUH) overheard them and came to talk to them. He said, “By God, I am more conscious of God than you, but I pray part of the night and I sleep the rest; I fast few days and I break my fast other days; and I did not vow celibacy. This is my practice. Whosoever does not follow my practice does not belong to me.”

*“God will not take you to task for that which is unintentional in your oaths, but He will take you to task for your deliberate oaths. The expiation for such oaths is to feed ten of the needy with food that you normally feed your own families, or to clothe them, or to free a slave, and for him who does not find the means, he should fast three days. This is the expiation of your oaths when you have sworn; and keep your oaths. Thus, God makes clear His revelations in order that you may be thankful”* It seems that this verse, which deals with taking oaths, was revealed to deal with situations when Muslims took oaths which prevented them from enjoying lawful things. This would be synonymous to taking the law in their hands and decreeing what is lawful and what is forbidden. The Quran told them that it is not their prerogative to make unlawful that which God has decreed lawful. The verse also deals with situations when a person takes an oath to commit a sin or to abstain from doing something good. If a person takes an oath then realizes that it is better to go back on his oath then, he can do this provided that he atones for breaking his oath using the prescribed expiation scheme mentioned in these verses.

Ibn ‘Abbas (RA) said that this verse was revealed to address the question posed by people who forbade themselves to enjoy good things which God deemed lawful. They took an oath not to avail themselves of these lawful things which included certain food or wedding women through legal marriage. When the verse saying, *“You who believe, do not make unlawful the good things which God has made lawful for you,”* was revealed, people who took such oaths asked how can they relieve themselves of the oaths they took. So, this verse came down to explain the difference between intentional and unintentional oaths. Unintentional oaths are forgiven but breaking an

intentional oath requires expiation. The verse also urged Muslims to watch out for taking oaths unnecessarily. Oaths are made to be respected. The verse explained how one can expiate for an intentional oath. The expiation consists of feeding ten needy people, clothing them, or freeing a slave. Those who do not have the means for any of these should fast for three days.

*“You who believe, intoxicants and gambling, idolatrous practices, and divination by arrows, are an abomination - of Satan's handwork - eschew such (abomination), that you may succeed. Satan seeks to incite among you, enmity and hatred with intoxicants and gambling, and to keep you from the remembrance of God and from prayer. Will you not then desist? Obey God, and obey the Messenger, and be on your guard: if you do turn away, know you that the sole duty of Our Messenger is to proclaim (the message) in the clearest manner. There is no blame on those who believe and do righteous deeds for what they ate (in the past), if they are conscious of God, believe, and do righteous deeds; then they are conscious of God and believe; then again, they are conscious of God and do good deeds; for God loves those who do good deeds.”* Drinking, gambling, idolatry practices and lottery (using arrows to determine winners in a competition) were practices ingrained in the pre-Islamic society. These practices were interwoven together in the fabric of the society. People used to drink excessively, boasting about their drinking habits and writing poetry to praise good wine. Drinking needed food, so they slaughtered animals for the idols and used their meat for their drinking parties. They devised a form of lottery; using arrows to determine how to distribute shares of meat among themselves. Islam recognized that these are only symptoms of the malaise. Islam chose to address the fundamental problem behind these corrupt practices. Islam recognized that the source of the problem lies in the concept of idol worship. Thus, the starting point was to guide people to the belief in the One True God. Islamic methodology focused on establishing the concept of “there is no deity but God” first. It recognized that once the belief in the One True God has been established, it would be easy to eradicate the pre-Islamic corrupt practices. The Prophet (PBUH) spent 13 years to establish the concept of “there is no deity but God.” During this period the main objective of the Prophet (PBUH) was to inculcate this concept in the hearts of the believers. Accepting and obeying the commands of God came naturally after the concept of “no deity but God” became ingrained in the psyche of the believers. In other words, obedience came after submission.

The process of prohibiting intoxicants in Islam did not occur overnight. The strategy to impose the prohibition used a gradual approach to allow the required drastic change in the social life to take place. The stage was set for the prohibition by verse 67 in Chapter 16, *“And from the fruit of the date-palm and the vine, you get out sweet drink and wholesome food: behold, in this also is a sign for those who are wise,”* which juxtaposed a sweet drink (wine) against wholesome food, implying that the two are not alike. The second stage started when verse 219 in Chapter 2 was revealed, *“They ask you concerning wine and gambling. Say, ‘In them is great sin, and some benefit, for people; but the sin is greater than the benefit.’ They ask you how much they are to spend; Say, ‘What is beyond your needs.’ Thus, does God make clear to you His Signs; in order that you may consider.”* (2:219) The verse suggested that although there are benefits that may accrue from wine, but the evil that will result outweighs the benefits that may accrue. Thus, it is better to abandon drinking. The third stage came with the revelation of verse 43 in Chapter 4, *“You who believe, do not approach prayer while you are intoxicated until you know what you are saying.”* (4:43) In the pre-Islamic society, people used to drink early in the morning, early afternoon, and after sunset. These new restrictions resulted in reducing the opportunity for

drinking at these times because these times overlapped with prayer times. Muslims have to pray five times a day and the times for prayers are usually closely spaced during the day which further diminishes the opportunity for drinking at other times. These stages paved the road for the final ruling which came to categorically prohibit drinking. These stages prepared the Muslims mentally and psychologically to accept the prohibition.

Before the prohibition was made, ‘Umar ibn El-Khatab (RA) used to pray, “Our Lord clarify for us the ruling regarding intoxicants.” Then the verse, “They ask you concerning wine and gambling...” was revealed. ‘Umar (RA) continued to pray for a clear position regarding intoxicants until the verse, “You who believe, do not approach prayer while you are intoxicated until you know what you are saying.” He continued to pray for a clear decision until the verse, “Satan seeks to incite among you, enmity and hatred with intoxicants and gambling, and to keep you from the remembrance of God and from prayer. Will you not then desist?” was revealed. ‘Umar (RA) said, “We desist, we desist.”

When the command to prohibit the use of intoxicants was finally revealed, three years after the battle of Uhud, all that was needed is for a person to go through the streets of Medina making the announcement. The response was instantaneous; people broke their glasses and spilled whatever intoxicants they had at the time. The verse which stated the prohibition, starts with the call to the believers, “*You who believe*,” to remind people that they are believers and that obedience goes hand in hand with this title. Then a clear statement was made regarding intoxicants, gambling, idolatry practices, and divination with the arrows. These are abomination and they are Satan’s handiwork. Satan is the eternal enemy of humankind, thus anything that is related to Satan is bad for the believer. The command to avoid such abomination came hand in hand with a promise of success for those who follow the command. The believer was reminded that Satan’s objective is to incite animosity among the believers through these sinful practices. Believers were asked to desist, their response was instantaneous, “We desist.” Believers should obey God, and should obey God’s Messenger. This is a fundamental rule in Islam, it is the essence of submission, and without which there would be no “submission.”

It may be a good idea to explain what is meant by “intoxicants” in these verses. Abu Daoud explained on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas (RA), “Everything that was left to ferment is an intoxicant and every intoxicant is forbidden.” ‘Umar (RA) stood on the podium of the Prophet (PBUH) and addressed the people; among the people were other companions of the Prophet (PBUH). He said, “Intoxicants have been prohibited. Intoxicants can be obtained from five sources: grapes, dates, honey, wheat, and barley. Intoxicants are any substance that fogs the mind.” This shows that the definition of intoxicants extends to cover any substance that affects the intellect of the human being. Islam requires Muslims to be alert at all times. This is not possible if the person is under the influence of an intoxicant that fogs the mind. Muslims should be alert so that they remain conscious of their Lord all the time. This will enable them to fulfill their duties to God, to themselves, to their families, and to their community.

The scholars are divided on the nature of intoxicants and whether they should be considered physically unclean. Most of the scholars opt for that opinion. Another group is of the opinion that it is only prohibited as a drink.

Some Muslims were concerned about the situation of their fellow Muslims who died before the prohibition command came down. That question was addressed by the revelation of, *“There is no blame on those who believe and do righteous deeds for what they ate (in the past), if they are conscious of God, believe, and do righteous deeds; then they are conscious of God and believe; then again, they are conscious of God and do good deeds; for God loves those who do good deeds.”* The verse established the rule that prohibitions can only be made on the basis of a decree and that they are not retroactive. Thus, those who used to drink and died before the prohibition came into effect are not going to be punished for drinking. I did not find in the literature on the interpretation of Quran a convincing argument about the repeated use of the sentence *“were conscious of God,”* in relation to believing, being righteous, and doing good deeds. The best I could come up with was given by the scholar Ibn Jareer Al-Tabari who said, *“The first mention of being conscious of God refers to the acceptance of God’s commands and working according to it; the second time it was mentioned, it refers to being steadfast in performing these commands; the third time it was mentioned it refers to improving the deeds by going beyond the obligatory tasks and performing voluntary tasks.”*

*“You who believe, God will certainly try you in a little matter of game well within reach of your hands and your lances, that He may test who fears Him even though they do not see him: any who transgresses thereafter, will have a painful torment.”* This was the test: an easy prey which was driven near them by God. It was within their reach and they could have easily struck it with their lances. The temptation was great, but they were on Pilgrimage. For them hunting was not allowed. This was to test the believers and to find out if they truly fear God even though He is unseen to them. Fear of God, even if God is unseen, is the solid foundation for the true belief. God knows who fears Him, but God does not punish people on the basis of His knowledge, God punishes people on the basis of their actual transgressions.

*“You who believe, do not kill game while you are dressed for Pilgrimage. If any of you does that intentionally- the recompense for that - a domestic animal the equivalent to that which he has killed, brought to the Ka’ba, as adjudged by two just men among you; alternatively, he may atone by feeding the needy; or its equivalent in fast; that he may taste the penalty of his deed. God pardoned whatever happened in the past; but he who reoffends God will exact revenge on him. God is Eminent, Avenger of evil.”*

Pre-meditated killing of animals by those who are performing the rituals of Pilgrimage is prohibited, but it is not sinful to kill an animal by mistake. The expiation for pre-meditated killing of animals is to offer for sacrifice a domestic animal equivalent to the animal that was killed. Two fair-minded judges should be chosen to decide the equivalency issue. When they have chosen an animal for sacrifice, the animal would be taken to the Ka’ba, sacrificed and used to feed poor people. If an animal is not available, the judges would determine the number of poor people to be fed by the culprit as expiation. The cost of this would be equal to the price of the killed animal (there is different opinions regarding this). Otherwise, the culprit has to fast a number of days. This way a person tastes the consequences of his deeds. Atonement for a sin is a kind of punishment. However, God pardoned those who transgressed before this command has been issued. A dire warning is issued to those who re-offend. They are reminded that if they breach the security that God awarded these animals in this secure place, God is Eminent and He can bring them to task. This is the verdict regarding hunting, but fishing is allowed whether a

person is in a state of Pilgrimage or not. The verse reiterated that prohibition of hunting after it allowed fishing. All scholars are agreed that hunting is prohibited while a person is in the state of Pilgrimage, but they differ about the animals that come under this ruling. They also differ regarding the permissibility of eating an animal that has been hunted by another person who is not on Pilgrimage. The verse ends by reminding the believers with the importance of being conscious of God.

*“God made the Ka’ba, the Sacred House, a means of support for people, as also the Sacred Months, the animals for offerings, and the garlands that mark them; so that you know that God has knowledge of what is in the heavens and on earth and that God is well acquainted with all things. Know too that God is severe in punishment and that God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. The Messenger’s duty is only to convey (the message). But God knows what you reveal and what you conceal.”* God has sanctified a place and a time for people so that they can find security and peace. The place is the Ka’ba and the time is the Sacred Months. During the Sacred Months people should stop fighting. They can take refuge in the Sacred Place at any time, to find security and peace. The guarantee of safety and security extends beyond people in the sanctified place to cover birds, animals, and other living things as well. Even before Islam, the Arabs observed the sanctity of the Sacred Months. During the four months of Zul Qi’da, Zul Hija, Rajab, and Muharram the Arabs abstained from fighting and revenge. It is being said that during these months, a person seeking to avenge the killing of his father would not harm those who were responsible even if he had the opportunity to do so. The security and safety were also extended to cover the animals which were destined to the Ka’ba for sacrifice. They were safe while on their way to the Ka’ba. Ka’ba had been sanctified since Prophets Abraham and Ishmael (PBUT) rebuilt it.

God has knowledge of all what is in the heavens and what is on earth. God decreed these laws to suit the nature and needs of the creation and to meet with their expectations and ambitions. When the hearts of the believers sense the mercy of God reflected on His laws, they will realize and appreciate God’s knowledge of His creation. At the end of the verses which explain the lawful and the prohibited, comes the warning and the hope that God is severe in punishment but He is also All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. Obedience is a personal responsibility. The Messenger’s duty is only to deliver the message and God knows what every person reveals and what he/she conceals. This verse points to the individual responsibility of people.

*“Say, ‘The evil and the good are not equal even though the abundance of evil may attract you. So be conscious of God, O you who are possessors of intellect that you may succeed.’”* This verse established a moral value. The abundance of evil does not make it good. This comes in the context of speaking of the lawful and forbidden. The lawful may be little but it is good. The lawful is good because it provides enjoyment without bad consequences. No pain, sickness, or sense of loss is left behind after consuming what is lawful. Lawful food provides joy in this life and in the Hereafter. God consciousness is the only guarantee for protection against temptation and for achieving success in this life and in the hereafter.

*“You who believe, ask not questions about things which, if made plain to you, may cause you trouble. But if you ask about them when the Qur’an is being revealed, they will be made plain to you (God has pardoned this). God is All-Forgiving, Forbearing. Some people before you did ask*

*such questions, and on that account lost their faith.*” These verses start a new theme, a theme of teaching Muslims the etiquette of asking questions and what questions are appropriate to ask God and His Messenger. Some Muslims used to ask repeatedly about things that have not been dealt with by the revelation. Some were anxious to know more details about certain issues which have been mentioned in the Quran without details. Reference to issues in general affords Muslims more flexibility in the interpretations. It has been narrated that when the verse prescribing Pilgrimage was revealed, someone asked the Prophet (PBUH) whether it is required to perform Pilgrimage every year. The Prophet (PBUH) was displeased by this question because the verse indicated that only those who can perform Pilgrimage should do it. Had it been mentioned that Pilgrimage should be performed every year, it would have been difficult to comply with the command.

Quran was not revealed to deal only with issues of faith and law, but also to provide a training program for the nation, to establish a society, and to prepare individuals having the right attitudes. These verses deal with the attitude towards seeking knowledge about details of the law that were not readily mentioned. God is the one who decrees the commands. He is the one who passes the law. It is appropriate to trust His wisdom about the level of details that He wants to reveal. God knows His creation. He knows their abilities, and their limitations. The law was revealed at the level of details that He deemed appropriate for them. There is no need to try to make things difficult for ourselves by trying to find out unnecessary details. The attitude of seeking more details would have been more dangerous at the time of the Prophet (PBUH). At that time the process of the revelation of the Quran had not been completed yet. Had the questions been answered and details were decreed, Muslims would have had to comply. That is why the verse commanded believers not to ask about things that may make life difficult for them. God will reveal details as He sees fit.

The verses gave the example of nations that received revealed Books before and had the same attitude. When they requested unnecessarily detailed instructions of what is permissible and what is not, it became very difficult for them to comply with the level of details that they received and consequently they lost their faith. An example of this is the story of the Cow which was mentioned in Surat Al-Baqarah (Chapter 2). The Children of Israel were asked to slaughter a cow. There were no conditions attached to the command. It would have been easier for them to comply with the command and slaughter any cow. But they kept asking about its details and how it looks like until it became extremely difficult to find a cow that fits all these details.

A saying of the Prophet (PBUH) that captures the essence of these verses has been narrated by Muslim. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, “God Almighty has decreed certain duties, perform them; He specified certain limits, do not exceed them; He prohibited certain things, do not violate them; and He did not mention certain things, not that He forgot these things but as a token of His mercy, so do not ask about them.”

*“It was not God who instituted (superstitions like those of) a slit-ear she-camel, or a she-camel let loose for free pasture, or idol sacrifices for twin-births in animals, or stallion-camels freed from work. It is the disbelievers who fabricate a lie against God; but most of them do not use reason.”*

This classification of cattle was invented by the Arabs before Islam. It was a heritage of the Pre-Islamic era. There are many definitions for these animals. We will mention some of them. Al-Zuhary narrated on the authority of Sa'eed Ibn Al-Mussaib (RA) that he said, "A slit-ear she camel (Bahira) is a camel whose milk is dedicated to the idols. The let loose camel (Sa'iba) was a camel that was let loose for the sake of the idols. The twin-birth camel (Wassila) is a camel that gives birth to two females one after the other. This she camel would be sacrificed for the idols. The stallion-camel (Ham) is a male camel that becomes protected against slaughtering after impregnating a certain number of she camels."

Linguistically, a Bahira is a she camel whose ears have been slit. The word "Bahira" is derived from "Bahr" which means sea. In the pre-Islamic tradition, a she camel, which gives birth five times ending with a male baby camel, would have its ears slit and it becomes dedicated to the idols. No one would ride it. It would be left to roam wherever it wishes. A person who needs the idols to help him achieve a wish promises to dedicate a she camel to the idols if his wish is fulfilled. This is called "Sa'iba." It becomes like a Bahira. The "Wassila" is an ewe that is born as a twin to a ram.

The idol worshippers among the Arabs in the pre-Islamic era used to practice these traditions. They also thought that they were the followers of Prophet Abraham (PBUH). They believed in God but they invented these rituals which were not decreed by God. This is a lie that they fabricated. So, they deserved to be labeled as disbelievers because they do not follow the law decreed by God.

*"When it is said to them, 'Come to what God has revealed; and come to the Messenger.' They say, 'Enough for us are the ways we found our fathers following.' What? Even though their fathers had no knowledge and no guidance?"* God's commands have been articulated in the Quran and the tradition of the Prophet (PBUH). The criterion of belief is to comply with these commands. Those who abandon God's commands in favor of the traditions that they inherited from their forefathers do not qualify to be believers. The irony is that their forefathers followed these traditions without knowledge and they were not guided.

*"You who believe, you have charge of your own souls; if you follow (right) guidance, no hurt can come to you from those who go astray. To God you shall return; and it is He who will inform you of all that you did."* The believers are but one nation. No harm shall befall them if others went astray as long as they remain on the straight path. This does not mean that the Muslim nation would abandon its duty in calling others to guidance. The duty of the Muslim nation is to establish an Islamic way of life according to the commands of God. It should become a beacon of justice for the rest of the world. This verse does not relieve the individuals and the nation from their duty in supporting truth and condemning evil.

*"You who believe, when death approaches any of you, let two just men from among you act as witnesses to the making of bequests, or two men from other people if you are journeying through the land and the chance of death befalls you. If you doubt (their truth), detain them both after prayer, and let them both swear by God saying, 'We wish not in this for any worldly gain, even though the (beneficiary) be our near relation. We shall hide not the evidence before God. If we do, indeed we will be sinful.' But if it gets known that these two were guilty of the sin (of*

*perjury), let two others stand forth in their places - nearest in kin from among those who claim a lawful right ; and let them swear by God saying, 'We affirm that our witness is truer than that of those two, and that we have not trespassed (beyond the truth), if we did, then indeed we are wrongdoers.' That is most suitable so that they may give the evidence in its true nature and shape, or else they would fear that other oaths would be taken after their oaths. But be conscious of God, and listen (to His counsel), for God does not guide transgressing people."* These verses explain the process of making wills. Two witnesses are needed to validate and execute a will. If the person is travelling and did not find two Muslims to testify, he can ask two non-Muslims to execute his will. If doubts arise as to the truthfulness of the witnesses, then an oath should be administered after performing their prayers. If, however, it was proven later that they perjured themselves, then two men from the deceased family should come forward and take an oath that they will be telling the truth. This would invalidate the original testimony. This procedure provides guarantees that the witnesses should tell the truth so that they would not be labeled as liars. But the ultimate incentive to tell the truth is the fear of displeasing God.

## **Verses: 109 to 120**

109. *On the day when God gathers the messengers together, and asks, "What was the response you received (from people to your teaching)?" They will say, "We have no knowledge. It is You Who know in full all that is hidden."*
110. *Then God will say, "Jesus, son of Mary, remember My blessing on you and on your mother. How I strengthened you with the Holy Spirit, so that you did speak to the people in childhood and in maturity. How I taught you the Scripture and the Wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel; and how, by My leave you fashioned the shape of a bird, breathed into it, and it became, by My leave, a bird; and how, by My leave, you healed the blind person, and the leper; and how, by My leave, you brought the dead back to life; how I did restrain the Children of Israel from (harming) you when you did show them the clear Signs, and the disbelievers among them said, 'This is nothing but evident magic.'*
111. *And how I inspired the disciples to believe in Me and My Messenger- they said, 'We believe, and we bear witness that we submit ourselves to God.'"*
112. *When the disciples, said, "Jesus son of Mary, can your Lord send down to us a table spread with food from heaven?" Said Jesus, "Be conscious of God, if you are true believers."*
113. *They said, "We only wish to eat from it and to reassure our hearts, and to know that you have indeed told us the truth; and that we ourselves become its witnesses."*
114. *Said Jesus the son of Mary, "God our Lord, send us a table spread with food from heaven, that it may be a feast for us - for the first and the last of us - and a sign from You; and provide for us, for You are the best of Providers."*
115. *God said, "I will send it down to you. But if any of you after that disbelieves, I will punish him with a torment such as I have not inflicted on any one among all the peoples."*
116. *And when God says, "Jesus the son of Mary, did you say to people, worship me and my mother as gods alongside God?" He will say, "Glory to You, never could I say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, You would indeed have known it. You know what is in my heart, but I know not what is in Yours. Indeed, You know in full all that is hidden."*

117. *I Never said to them except that which You commanded me to say, 'Worship God, my Lord and your Lord;' and I was a witness over them while I dwelt amongst them; when You did take me up You were the Watcher over them, and You are a Witness to all things.*
118. *If You do torment them, they are Your servants; and if You forgive them, You are the Eminent, Wise."*
119. *God will say, "This is a day when the truthful will profit from their truthfulness; theirs are gardens, with rivers flowing beneath, they will abide in it for ever; God is well pleased with them, and they with God. That is the great achievement."*
120. *To God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and all that is therein, and it is He Who has power over all things. (5:109-120)*

*"On the day when God gathers the messengers together, and asks, 'What was the response you received (from people to your teaching)?' They will say, 'We have no knowledge. It is You Who know in full all that is hidden.'"* God will gather all the messengers whom He sent to the people. He will ask them about the people's response to their call. The messengers were human beings. Each one of them was sent to guide his people to the truth. However, they had no true knowledge of who was a believer and who turned away. Only God can judge. He knows the unseen.

*"Then God will say, 'Jesus, son of Mary, remember My blessing on you and on your mother. How I strengthened you with the Holy Spirit, so that you did speak to the people in childhood and in maturity. How I taught you the Scripture and the Wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel; and how, by My leave you fashioned the shape of a bird, breathed into it, and it became, by My leave, a bird; and how, by My leave, you healed the blind person, and the leper; and how, by My leave, you brought the dead back to life; how I did restrain the Children of Israel from (harming) you when you did show them the clear Signs, and the disbelievers among them said, "This is nothing but evident magic." And how I inspired the disciples to believe in Me and My Messenger- they said, "We believe, and we bear witness that we submit ourselves to God."'"*

Then God will turn to Jesus. God will remind him with the blessings that He bestowed on him and on his mother. God supported him with the Holy Spirit and blessed him with the ability to talk when he was a baby in the cradle to clear his mother's name. God taught him the Torah and the Gospel. God blessed him with the ability to perform miracles no human could perform. He was able to breathe life into a piece of mud shaped in the form of a bird and it became a bird; he was able to heal the blind and the leper; and he was able to bring the dead back to life. All these miracles were blessings from the Creator Who is able to change the natural law, because He is the One Who created it. God will remind Jesus (PBUH) of His blessings when He protected him from the Children of Israel who belied him and accused him of sorcery. The Children of Israel were arrogant; they saw the miracles but instead of believing in Jesus (PBUH) they accused him of practicing sorcery. God saved him from crucifixion and raised him to heaven.

*"When the disciples, said, 'Jesus the son of Mary, can your Lord send down to us a table spread with food from heaven?' Said Jesus, 'Be conscious of God, if you are true believers.' They said, 'We only wish to eat from it and to reassure our hearts, and to know that you have indeed told us the truth; and that we ourselves become its witnesses.' Said Jesus the son of Mary, 'God our Lord, send us a table spread with food from heaven, that it may be a feast for us - for the first and the last of us - and a sign from You; and provide for us, for You are the best of Providers.'*

*God said, 'I will send it down to you. But if any of you after that disbelieves, I will punish him with a torment such as I have not inflicted on any one among all the peoples.'"* The story about the table mentioned here is different from the account given in the Bible of the meal which Jesus (PBUH) prepared for his disciples. The verse narrates the request that the disciples asked of Jesus (PBUH). They asked him if God can bring down a table spread with food from heaven. Jesus (PBUH) warned them to be conscious of their Lord. They said we would like to eat food from heaven to reassure our hearts and to witness the miracle. When they persisted, Jesus (PBUH) prayed his Lord to bring down a table spread with food from heaven so they can eat and celebrate. God responded positively to the prayer from Jesus (PBUH) so that there would be no excuse for anyone to disbelieve in the message that Jesus (PBUH) brought from God.

*"And when God says, 'Jesus the son of Mary, did you say to people, worship me and my mother as gods alongside God?' He will say, 'Glory to You, never could I say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, You would indeed have known it. You know what is in my heart, but I know not what is in Yours. Indeed, You know in full all that is hidden. I Never said to them except that which You commanded me to say, "Worship God, my Lord and your Lord"; and I was a witness over them while I dwelt amongst them; when You did take me up You were the Watcher over them, and You are a Witness to all things. If You do torment them, they are Your servants; and if You forgive them, You are the Eminent, the Wise.' God will say, 'This is a day when the truthful will profit from their truthfulness; theirs are gardens, with rivers flowing beneath, they will abide in it for ever; God is well pleased with them, and they with God. That is the great achievement.' To God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and all that is therein, and it is He Who has power over all things."* This is a rhetorical question because God knows what Jesus (PBUH) did say to people. However, it is reiterated so that the weight of the sin of associating partners with God is understood. Jesus' (PBUH) response started with glorifying his Lord and stating that God is High above all of this. Then, the statement of facts followed: God knows everything that Jesus (PBUH) would have said; God knows the unseen; and Jesus (PBUH) said only that which he was commanded to say. He did witness what they were doing when he was dwelling among them. When God raised him, he had no way of knowing what they did.

This Sura ends by the statement: to God belongs the dominion of heaven and earth, to remove any shadow of a doubt about the Oneness of God. He alone is the Lord and He alone is the God.