

Al-Maidah

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Introduction

This is the last of the first group of *Madinan* surahs which started from surah *Al-Baqarah*. Some Scholars believe that it was revealed in 6 A.H, while others identify it as one of the last surahs to be revealed, as it is reported by Al-Hakim that Jubayr bin Nufayr said: *"I performed Hajj once and visited Aishah (RA) and she said to me, "O Jubayr! Do you read Al-Maidah" I answered "Yes." She said: "It was the last surah to be revealed. Therefore, whatever permissible matters you find in it, then consider them permissible. And whatever impermissible matters you find in it, then consider them impermissible."*¹ Like surah *An-Nisa*, surah *Al-Maidah* also carries instructions for the consolidation of an Islamic Community and secondary injunctions mostly related to dealings and contracts. The Muslims have been directed to fulfill their obligations that Allah (SWT) has ordained for them and they have been admonished over and over again to be just and not to follow the wrong behavior of their predecessors i.e. the People of the Book. They are further enjoined to remain steadfast to the Covenant that they had made with Allah (SWT) and be obedient to Him. The *People of the Book* have also been admonished to give up their evil behavior and accept the guidance and the truth revealed to Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

(1) *"O you who believe! Fulfill and be true to your obligations."* The Arabic word 'Aqd' literally means tying together. Here all types of covenants, agreements, promises and treaties are meant whether between man and Allah (SWT) or His prophets, or between human beings. Thus Allah (SWT) commands His servants to fulfill all their covenants and treaties, made with Him i.e. refrain from what He has prohibited and take what He has permitted, with His Prophets i.e. to have faith in them and follow them, and those made with their fellow beings, i.e. contracts which bind two persons, two groups or parties. *"Lawful to you (for food) are all the quadruped cattle except that which will be announced to you"* These are the first instructions given concerning the lawful and unlawful food. All four-legged animals like camels, cows and sheep are made lawful by Allah (SWT) except for those prohibited in the *Qur'an* and the *Ahadith* of the Prophet (SAW). Thus believers must eat from the animals that

Allah (SWT) has made lawful for them to eat. Similarly, they should abstain from eating those animals which He has declared unlawful. This is because Allah (SWT) knows what is better for His creatures and what can cause them harm, as He is the one who has created them all and makes what is good and pure lawful for them and only forbids unclean and impure animals that may be harmful for them. *“But hunting is unlawful when you wear Ihram for pilgrimage.”* i.e. even those animals which are lawful to eat in normal circumstances become unlawful to hunt in the state of Ihram. *“Verily, Allah (SWT) commands that which He wills.”* i.e. from His infinite knowledge, He knows what is better for His creatures, so it is better for them to obey Him in all that He has commanded and refrain from what He has prohibited.

(2) *“O you who believe! Violate not the sanctity of the rites of Allah (SWT), nor of the Sacred Month.”* *Sha’air* or symbols of Allah (SWT) refers to signs or marks by which something is known to belong to some particular person or a group of persons, like *Safa* and *Marwa* and the station of Abraham (AS), which have been described as the signs of Allah (SWT) in surah *Al-Baqarah*. Thus respect or honor towards anything which stimulates the remembrance of Allah (SWT) is a symbol or a sign. In this *ayah* the symbols of Allah (SWT) refer to the rituals of *Hajj* (pilgrimage). Further Allah (SWT) commands the believers not to violate the sanctity of the Sacred month (*Dhul-Hijjah*) by refraining from what He has prohibited in them e.g. killing and fighting. *“Nor of the animals brought for sacrifice, nor the garlanded animals, etc.”* Allah (SWT) commands the Muslims not to prevent others from bringing their animals to the Sacred House for sacrifice, with garlands in their necks to mark them out as sacred. *“Nor the people coming to the Sacred House, seeking the bounty and good pleasure of their Lord.”* i.e. do not prevent the pilgrims from entering the Sacred House of Allah (SWT), nor stop those who are heading towards the Sacred House to seek the grace and good pleasure of their Lord. *“But when you finish the Ihram, you may hunt”* Permission is being given for hunting once a pilgrim comes out of the state of Ihram. *“And let not the hatred of some people, who (once) hindered you from the Sacred Mosque, lead you to transgression.”* The *Quraysh* prevented the Muslims from reaching the Sacred House for pilgrimage at the event of *Hudaybiyah*. Thus the Muslims returned to *Madinah* with increase in their

anger and enmity towards the *Quraysh*. But now when Allah (SWT) has given the Muslims power over the *Quraysh*, He commands them not to take revenge for what happened in the past and that their hatred for them should not make them transgress Allah's limits and thus turn them away from justice. *"Help one another in righteousness and piety; but do not help one another in sin and transgression."* This is the spirit of justice and righteousness i.e. helping one another in piety and virtue but not assisting each other in sin and transgression. *"And fear Allah (SWT). Verily, Allah (SWT) is Severe in punishment."* Although He is the Most-Gracious and the Most-Merciful, He is also severe in punishment for those who transgress His limits. Have fear of Allah, for He is stern in retribution.

(3) *"Forbidden to you are: the dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and the meat of that which has been invoked the name of other than Allah (SWT), and that which has been killed by strangling, or by a violent blow, or by a headlong fall, or by the goring of horns, and that which has been (partly) eaten by a wild animal unless you are able to slaughter it"* In this *ayah* Allah (SWT) commands His servants to refrain from eating those animals that are made unlawful herein. The first is a dead animal who die before they are slaughtered but dead animals of the sea are excluded from the ruling as we have already explained in *ayah* 173 of *Al-Baqarah*. Second is the blood and the flesh of swine whether it is slaughtered or not. Third are those offerings that are sacrificed in the name of other than Allah (SWT) or they have been slaughtered for idols etc. Other animals that have been made unlawful to eat are those who have been strangled to death or died with a violent blow or have fallen from a high place and died. Another in the category of animals made unlawful is the gored and those which have been killed by wild beasts, unless one finds it alive and slaughters it before it dies. *"And that which is sacrificed on stone altars."* The altar refers to slabs of rocks placed around the *Ka'bah*, which the people of ignorance took as objects of worship. They named them after their *gods* and they would bring animals near the altars and sacrifice them dedicated to these gods. But Allah (SWT) declared such practices as a type of *Shirk* and forbade the believers from it. *"(Forbidden) also is the decision by raffling of arrows."* The Arabs during the time of ignorance used to draw arrows for making a decision or for the distribution of the meat amongst themselves. But Allah (SWT) forbade such practice for

the believers. *"All these are sinful acts."* This refers to all the prohibitions mentioned in this *ayah*. *"This day, those who disbelieved have given up all hope of your religion, so fear them not, but fear Me."* After the conquest of *Makkah* and almost all of the Arabia, Islamic law prevailed all over the Peninsula. Thereupon, because of the increase in strength and success of the Muslims, the disbelievers had lost all hope in eliminating Islam or its followers. Thus Allah (SWT) commands the Muslims not to fear them, but instead should fear Allah (SWT) alone i.e. follow His commandments. *"This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My Favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion."* This *ayah* was revealed on the day of *Arafat* of the Last *Hajj* of the Holy Prophet (SAW), in the tenth year of *Hijrah*. On that great day the divine blessing and true faith which was to be bequeathed to all human beings in this world, beginning from Prophet Adam (AS) had reached its perfection with the Final Messenger, Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Thus, there is now no need of a new religion or any other Prophet to be sent after Prophet Muhammad (SAW). *"But as for him who is forced by severe hunger, with no inclination to sin, then surely, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."* According to this *ayah*, it is permissible for a person to take any of the things prohibited by Allah (SWT) in cases of extreme necessity, provided that he only consumes that much amount which is necessary for his survival, and he himself is not inclined to eat what is prohibited. If such is the case then surely Allah (SWT) will forgive him. Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.

(4) *"They ask you what is lawful for them. Say: "All good and pure things are lawful for you. And those beasts and birds of prey which you have trained as hounds, training and teaching them (to catch) in the manner as directed to you by Allah (SWT); so eat of what they catch for you, but pronounce the Name of Allah (SWT) over it"* Some of the Companions of the Holy Prophet (SAW) asked him questions regarding lawful food and the permissibility of training beasts like dogs for hunting purposes. This *ayah* gives an answer to that question. Allah (SWT) clarifies that all pure things that have been mentioned herein are lawful for the Muslims to eat. Secondly, Allah (SWT) gives permission to train one's beasts like dogs or falcons to hunt an animal for them, if the following conditions are met. First is that the beasts should be trained according to the manner

directed by Allah (SWT) i.e. it should be trained in such a manner that when it catches the prey for you, it brings it back to you and does not start eating it. The second condition is that when you release the dog or the falcon after the game, mention the name of Allah (SWT) over it. If these conditions are met then it becomes lawful to eat and there is no need to slaughter the animal caught. *"And fear Allah (SWT). Verily, Allah (SWT) is Swift in reckoning."* i.e. be mindful of your duty to Allah (SWT) and take whatever He has made permissible for you, but refrain from what He has prohibited. Surely, He is swift in taking account of your deeds.

(5) *"Made lawful to you this day are all good and pure things."* i.e. all kinds of lawful foods Allah (SWT) has made permissible to eat e.g. meat of slaughtered eatable animals, milk products, fats, vegetables and fruits, etc. *"And the food of the people of the Book is lawful to you and yours is lawful to them."* The meat slaughtered by the *Jews* and the *Christians* has been made lawful for the Muslims, provided that it is of an animal that Allah (SWT) had made lawful. Similarly the meat slaughtered by the Muslims can also be presented to the People of the Book. *"(Lawful to you in marriage) are chaste women from the believers and chaste women from those who were given the Book before your time, when you have given their dowry, desiring chastity neither committing fornication, nor taking them as mistresses."* Allah (SWT) has made it lawful for the Muslims to marry chaste women amongst the believers as well as amongst the People of the Book, provided that they pay their dowry and live in honour with them i.e. their intention is not to commit fornication or keep them as secret concubines. *"And whosoever rejects faith, then fruitless is his work, and in the Hereafter he will be among the losers."* i.e. whoever disbelieves in the Oneness of Allah (SWT) and in all the other articles of Faith, then all of their deeds will be in vain and in the Hereafter he will be amongst the losers.

(6) *"O you who believe! When you intend to offer the prayer, wash your faces and your hands (forearms) up to the elbows, rub your heads, and (wash) your feet up to ankles."* In this *ayah* Allah (SWT) commands the believers to perform ablution before they pray. Before the start of ablution it is prescribed to make an intention and say *Bismillah* (In the name of Allah (SWT)). Then one should start his ablution

by washing his hands and his face. Then he should wash his forearms up to his elbows. Then he should take some water in his palm and rub his head. In the end he should wash his feet up to his ankles. *"If you are in a state of impurity, purify yourself."* This *ayah* commands the Muslims to take a bath and cleanse themselves when in a state of conjugal impurity. *"But if you are ill or on a journey or any of you comes from answering the call of nature, or you have been in contact with women and you find no water, then take clean earth and rub therewith your faces and hands."* This *ayah* has already been commented upon in *ayah* 43 of surah *An-Nisa*. *"Allah (SWT) does not want to place you in difficulty, but He wants to purify you, and to complete His Favor on you that you may be thankful."* Allah (SWT) does not burden any human being with more than he can bear. Thus He makes things easier for His servants, purifies them and bestows His blessings on them, so that they may show gratefulness.

(7) *"And remember Allah's favor upon you and His Covenant with which He bound you when you said: 'We hear and we obey.'"* This *ayah* reminds the Muslims of the blessings of Allah (SWT) and the covenant which He took from them to obey His commandments and follow His Messenger, when they said *"we hear and we obey."* *"And fear Allah (SWT). Verily, Allah (SWT) knows the secrets of your hearts."* i.e. be mindful of Allah (SWT) Who knows those who fulfill their covenants and those who turn away. Have fear of Allah (SWT). He knows of those (thoughts) in your hearts.

(8) *"O you who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah (SWT) and be just witnesses and let not the enmity and hatred of others make you avoid justice."* Allah (SWT) commands the Muslims to maintain justice and forbids them not to let enmity and hatred of others incite them to do injustice. Rather they are commanded to fight against injustice and tyranny and bear witness for Allah (SWT) i.e. say the truth whenever a testimony is needed. *"Be just: that is nearer to piety, and fear Allah (SWT). Verily, Allah (SWT) is Well-Acquainted with what you do."* Again Allah (SWT) states that piety and righteousness is much better than abandoning justice. And fear Him alone, as He is well aware of all your actions.

(9) *“Allah (SWT) has promised those who believe and do deeds of righteousness, that for them there is forgiveness and a great reward.”* Those who believed in Allah (SWT) and His Messengers and did righteous deeds, will have their sins forgiven and will be admitted into Paradise.

(10) *“They who disbelieve and deny our ayat are those who will be the dwellers of the Hellfire.”* On the other hand, those who disbelieved in Allah (SWT) and His revelations will be thrown into the Hellfire.

(11) *“O you who believe! Remember the favor of Allah (SWT) unto you when some people desired to stretch out their hands against you, but (Allah (SWT)) withheld their hands from you.”* After the battle of the trench the enemies of Islam stretched their hands again and again against Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and his followers, especially at the time of treaty of *Hudaybiyah*. But Allah (SWT) bestowed His favor upon the Muslims and His Messenger (SAW) and restrained their hands from them and made the disbelievers powerless. *“So fear Allah (SWT). And in Allah (SWT) let believers put their trust.”* Allah (SWT) commands the believers to fear Him alone and put their whole trust in Him. For if they do so, then Allah (SWT) will surely help them and protect them against the disbelievers.

(12) *“Indeed Allah (SWT) took the covenant from the Children of Israel, and We appointed twelve leaders among them.”* This refers to the covenant that Allah (SWT) took from the *Children of Israel* that they will follow Allah’s revelations and will obey Him and all His Messengers. For this purpose Allah (SWT) appointed twelve leaders amongst them, one from each tribe who took this pledge. Similarly, the number of leaders appointed by the Prophet (SAW) was also twelve, when he took pledge from the *Ansar* in *Madinah*, with three people from the tribe of *Aws* and nine from the tribe of *Khazraj*. *“And Allah (SWT) said: “I am with you if you establish regular prayers and give the obligatory charity and believe in My Messengers; honor and assist them, and lend to Allah (SWT) a good loan. Verily, I will remit your sins and admit you to Gardens under which rivers flow (in Paradise).”*” After the covenant, Allah (SWT) assured them His support and help if they establish regular prayers, pay their regular obligatory charity and not only believe in His Messengers, but also support them in establishing Allah’s *Deen*, and spend

generously in its cause. Whoever does this then Allah (SWT) will forgive his sins and admit him in Paradise. *"But if any of you after this, disbelieved, he has indeed gone astray from the Straight Path."* On the contrary, those who break their covenant have surely strayed from the right path.

(13) *"So because of the breach of their covenant, We cursed them, and made their hearts grow hard. They change the words from their (right) places and have abandoned a good part of the Message that was sent to them."* Allah (SWT) says that He cursed the Children of Israel and made their hearts so that they do not heed any advice. This was a punishment because they distorted His revelations and neglected much of what they were enjoined. *"And you will not cease to discover deceit in them, except a few of them. But forgive them, and overlook."* i.e. they always try to deceive the Muslims and make plots against them, but Allah (SWT) encourages His believers to forgive them and overlook their misdeeds. *"Verily, Allah loves good-doers"*. Allah (SWT) loves those who do good.

(14) *"And from those who call themselves Christians, We took their covenant, but they have abandoned a good part of the Message that was sent to them. So We planted amongst them enmity and hatred till the Day of Resurrection, and Allah will inform them of what they used to do."* This refers to the covenant that Allah (SWT) made with the disciples of Jesus (AS) that whenever He sends His Last Prophet (SAW), they would follow him and support him. But they also broke the covenant and neglected much of what they were enjoined, discarding Allah's Book and disobeying His Prophet (SAW). This is why as a punishment Allah (SWT) stirred among them enmity and hatred for each other, which will last till the *Day of Judgment* when Allah will declare to them all that they have done.

(15) *"O people of the Book! Now Our Messenger (SAW) has come to you revealing to you much of that which you used to hide from the Book and passing over much."* The Jews and the Christians used to conceal and distort the true teachings of the Books given to their Prophets. Then Allah (SWT) sent His Last Messenger (SAW) explaining to them the true teachings that they used to hide and guiding them to the truth. *"Indeed, there has come to you from Allah (SWT) a light and a plain*

Book." Here the light refers to Prophet Muhammad (SAW) i.e. the light of guidance, and the Book refers to this *Qur'an*.

(16) *"Wherewith Allah (SWT) guides all those who seek His Good Pleasure to ways of peace, and He brings them out of darkness by His Will unto light and guides them to a Straight Way."* i.e. with this light and Book, Allah (SWT) guides those who seek His pleasure to the ways of peace. And He brings them out of the darkness of disbelief and evil into the light of truth. As mentioned earlier in ayah 257 of surah *Al-Baqarah*, the light is always mentioned in a singular form while the darkness in the plural, because disbelief comes in different shades of evil and sin while there is only one truth.

(17) *"Surely, in disbelief are they who say that Allah (SWT) is the Messiah, son of Mary (AS). Say: "Who then has the least power against Allah (SWT), if He were to destroy the Messiah, son of Mary (AS), his mother, and all those who are on the earth?" And to Allah (SWT) belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them. He creates what He wills. And Allah (SWT) is Able to do all things."* Although all the Prophets of Allah (SWT) have a very high status and are the most honored, yet they are but men and creations of Allah (SWT). Christians claim that Jesus (AS) is God incarnate, but Allah (SWT) refutes them in this *ayah* and reminds them of His Sovereignty and that He is the Creator of everything, even Jesus (AS) and all other creatures. And He is able to do whatever He Wills. Thus, if He were to destroy Jesus (AS), or His mother or anyone else, then there is no one who can stop Him or prevent Him from doing that. He creates what He wills and has power over all things.

(18) *"And the Jews and the Christians say: "We are the children of Allah (SWT) and His loved ones." Say: "Why then does He punish you for your sins?"*" The *Jews* and the *Christians* thought of themselves as the chosen ones and they say they are the children of Allah (SWT). But Allah (SWT) commands His Prophet (SAW) to ask them that if you really are true in your claims that you are His loved ones then why does He punish you and make you suffer for your crimes. *"Nay, you are but human beings, of those He has created, He forgives whom He wills and He punishes whom He wills."* i.e. you are no different than the rest of His creations,

thus your being *Jews* or *Christians* does not make you immune from His punishment; rather He punishes whom He Wills and He forgives whom He wills. *“And to Allah (SWT) belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, and to Him is the return (of all).”* i.e. everything is under His Supreme control and power and everything is eventually going to return to him. He has control over the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them. And all shall return to Him.

Foot Notes

[1] Al-Hakim 2 : 311, who said, "It is Sahih according to the criteria of the two Shaikhs (Bukhari and Muslim) and they did not record it."