

## Surah al-Tālaq (65)

### 'Divorce'

## سورة الطلاق

The surah derives its name from the prominence within it of words denoting divorce (*tālaq*). Like the other Madinan surahs it contains matters pertaining to the Islamic order, as well as to matters of faith. While Surah al-Taghābun concluded with warnings about some women, this surah opens on some rules concerning them.

**By the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful**

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

**By the name of Allah, ...** We seek help by the name of the God that He be an aid to us in our important affairs; for He is the best from whom to seek help, as He has knowledge and power and wisdom.

**... the Compassionate, the Merciful.** He who bestows mercy even on those who are disobedient and negligent of His commands. For He bestows over and above what is deserving; and He assists even those who seek His assistance but do not deserve it.

**O thou the Prophet! When ye divorce the women, divorce them during their term and count the term; and be ye guardful of Allah, your Lord. And put them not from their houses, and nor should they leave, save that they bring a obvious indecency. And these are the boundaries of Allah; and whosoever infringes the boundaries of Allah, indeed he has wronged himself. One never knows, perhaps Allah will bring about thereafter a new matter.**  
(1)

يَتَأْتِيهَا النَّبِيُّ إِذَا طَلَّقْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَطَلِّقُوهُنَّ لِعَدَّتِهِنَّ  
وَأَحْصُوا الْعِدَّةَ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ رَبَّكُمْ لَا تُخْرِجُوهُنَّ مِنْ  
بُيُوتِهِنَّ وَلَا يَخْرُجْنَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَأْتِيَنَّ بِفَحِشَةٍ مُبَيِّنَةٍ وَتِلْكَ  
حُدُودُ اللَّهِ وَمَنْ يَتَعَدَّ حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَقَدْ ظَلَمَ نَفْسَهُ لَا  
تَدْرِي لَعَلَّ اللَّهَ يُخْدِثُ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ أَمْرًا ﴿١﴾

**O thou the Prophet, ...** The address is to the holy Prophet (*nabi*), but since it regards an important matter concerning him and those with him, the ayah takes up the plural, in His word:

**... when ye divorce the women, ...** That is: 'when ye have the intention of divorcing them', for both the present and the past tenses can have the sense of intending the action conveyed by the verb.

**... divorce them during their term ...** It means during the period of their cleanliness (from menses) while copulation has not taken place between man and woman during the period.

**... and count the term; ...** It means that the days of the woman's waiting-term (*'iddah*), after the conclusion of which she is no more the responsibility of her first husband and she may lawfully marry another man, are to be counted.

**... and be guardful of Allah, your Lord ...** And therefore do not break His law by divorcing women while they menstruate, or by failing to count their days, so that the divorced woman remains expecting the end of her term so as to set up a new home, without knowing that it is over.

**... And put them not from their houses, ...** It means that when a woman is divorced she should not be moved from her home until the waiting-term is concluded, for during that term her housing is a duty upon the husband.

**... and nor do they leave, ...** They are not to leave their homes during their waiting-terms; and if they leave without necessity, they have sinned.

**... save that they bring a clarifying indecency ...** It means open obscenity and transgression, like fornication (*zina*), as narrated from the Imam al-Shādiq, *peace be upon him*. So when she manifestly fornicates she is removed from her home to be punished. In other narrations the interpretation is that she annoys the other people of the house with her tongue, and so she is removed to another place due to her causing vexation.

... **And these are the boundaries of Allah; so whosoever violates the boundaries of Allah, indeed he has wronged himself** ... The rulings given concerning divorce are the divine boundaries, protecting the community of His believers. Whoever breaks His rules has wronged himself by preparing himself for punishment.

He, glory be to Him, then explains something of the wisdom of these rules, in His word:

... **One never knows...** It is given for *la-tadri*; literally: it (i.e. a soul) knows not.

... **perhaps Allah will bring about thereafter a new matter.** It means that after the intention to divorce or after the actual divorce itself, and before the divorced woman's term is concluded, Allah may bring about some change of heart. For in delaying the divorce until the woman is in her term of cleanliness, during which her husband has not had sexual intercourse with her, it may be that he will change his mind and not divorce her. Similarly, legislating the term of waiting, or *'iddah*, and her remaining in her home, may well soothe the anger that led to the divorce, so that they turn back to each other and away from the divorce.

**So when they reach their term, retain them in honour or part from them in honour; and have two holders of justice from ye witness. And establish the witnessing for Allah. This is that by which whosoever believes in Allah and the Last day is admonished. And whosoever is guardful of Allah – He will make for him a way out. (2)**

فَإِذَا بَلَغْنَ أَجَلَهُنَّ فَأَمْسِكُوهُنَّ بِمَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ فَارِقُوهُنَّ  
بِمَعْرُوفٍ وَأَشْهِدُوا ذَوَى عَدْلٍ مِّنكُمْ وَأَقِيمُوا الشَّهَادَةَ لِلَّهِ  
ذَٰلِكُمْ يُوعَظُ بِهِ مَن كَانَ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ  
وَمَن يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مَخْرَجًا ﴿٢﴾

**So when they reach their term, ...** That is: when the divorced women approach the end of their waiting-term, just before it is concluded, for it is then that the man must finally choose between returning to her, or leaving her so that the term is completed.

... **so retain them in honour** ... When the man decides to return, he is to treat his wife in the way Allah commands him, with fine kindness.

... **or part from them in honour; ...** It means leaving them to themselves so that their term is concluded, without annoying them, or taking any of their possessions, or disturbing them, as is the practice of the ignorant.

... **and have two holders of justice from ye witness** ... When a man wishes to divorce his wife he must have two or more just Muslims witness the recitation of the divorce formula. 'Justice', in this sense, is an inner quality that drives a person to fulfil the obligations (*wajiba*) and refrain from the prohibitions (*muharrama*) from fear of Allah, glory be to Him.

... **And establish the witnessing for Allah** ... It means that when one of the two parties is in need of witnesses, they should be witnesses for the sake of Allah, glory be to Him, and should not falsify or distort. For when a person does something for Allah, glory be to Him, he is more careful not to add or omit anything.

... **This** ... That the witnessing be for Allah, glory be to Him.

... **is that by which whosoever believes in Allah and the Last day is admonished** ... It is only such persons who fear Allah and will perform the witnessing for Allah; others will give it little importance. The indication is that a false testimony reveals the absence of commitment.

... **And whosoever is guardful of Allah – He will make for him a way out.** When a person fears Allah, glory be to Him, and therefore acts in accordance to His commands, Allah makes him a way out of his difficulties.

**And one should not imagine that his testifying in truth will cause him difficulties, due to the anger of whoever sought a false testimony from him. Nor should one suppose that his sustenance will be cut by anyone who seeks a false testimony from him, and who has a hand in his sustenance, like an employer, say, or a customer, or one who has influence with such a person:**

**And He provisions him from whence he reckons not; and whosoever relies upon Allah – He is enough for him. Indeed Allah shall attain His purpose. Allah has put for everything a measure. (3)**

وَيَرْزُقُهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَحْتَسِبُ وَمَنْ يَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ فَهُوَ حَسْبُهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بَلِغٌ أَمْرِهِ قَدْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدْرًا



**And He provisions him from whence he reckoned not; ...** Allah provisions him his livelihood from sources that he had not foreseen; and experience provides many examples of the truth of this. As an example, in my own time a man killed a whore for her money, then threw the body in the river. He then gave his companions money so that they would not testify against him before the judge, and threatened them against doing so. When the matter was discovered the judge took testimony upon the noble Qur'an; all of them gave false testimony save one. He refused to swear falsely on the Qur'an, and gave true testimony and then fled from the killer. Amazingly, the judge convicted the murderer on the basis of that single testimony, and punished them all, except for him who had already repented and had sworn to the truth. Today, he is still alive and all who know him praise him; whereas the others have all suffered imprisonment, fines and some have died in their youth.

**... and whosoever places his trust in Allah – He is enough for him ...** When a person entrusts his affairs to Allah, He is sufficient for him against every danger and difficulty, and He saves him from every disaster.

**... Indeed Allah shall attain His purpose ...** When Allah wants a thing to happen, it happens. Nothing He wants to happen will fail to happen. It should not be supposed by anyone that what He promises will not come about.

**... Allah has put for everything a measure ...** The processes of Allah proceed according to a determined measure and quantity; so when He determines sufficiency and fair provision for His guardful servant, there is no doubt but that it will be exactly as He wills.

He then explains, glory be to Him, the length of the term after which it is lawful for a divorced woman to take a new husband:

**And those of your women who are in despair of menstruation, if ye are in doubt, then their term is three months – also those who menstruate not. And those carrying a child, their term is until they lay down their child. And whosoever is guardful of Allah – He makes for him ease in his affair. (4)**

وَالَّتِي يَيْسَّرْنَ مِنَ الْمَحِيضِ مِنْ نِسَائِكُمْ إِنْ ارْتَبْتُمْ فَعِدَّتُهُنَّ ثَلَاثَةُ أَشْهُرٍ وَالَّتِي لَمْ تَحِيضَنَّ وَأُولَاتُ الْأَحْمَالِ أَجَلُهُنَّ أَنْ يَضَعْنَ حَمْلَهُنَّ وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ تَجْعَلْ لَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِ يُسْرًا ﴿٤﴾

**And those of your women who are in despair of menstruation, if ye are in doubt, ...** It means those divorced women who are not clearly over the age of menstruation – fifty in the case of most women, and sixty in the case of other women such as those descendants of the prophet, and the natives of Iraq known as the Nabat}, unless for an exception.

**... then their term is three months ...** When the three months are over their waiting-term is complete and they can remarry. However, those whose menopause has occurred and no longer menstruate have no waiting-term, for it is lawful for such a woman to remarry as soon as she is divorced.

**... also those who menstruate not ...** This refers to those who have not yet begun to menstruate due their youth, or do not menstruate due to illness and suchlike. Their waiting-term is also three months.

**... And those carrying a child, ...** It means women who are divorced while they are pregnant.

**... their term is till they lay down their child ...** The waiting-term of divorced women who are pregnant is until they give birth; so, when they have given birth to the baby they were carrying at

the time of the divorce, their waiting-term is over, whether the period between the divorce and the birth was lengthy or short.

... **And whosoever is guardful of Allah – He puts for him ease in his affair.** When a person is guardful of Allah and refrains from breaking His commands, He makes his affairs easy so that he doesn't fall into difficulties. And since these rules lead to the suppression of the passions on the part of the men who wish to marry the divorced women, and on the part of the divorced women themselves, the matter is wrapped in the wrappings of pious guardfulness, as a reminder and an admonition, so that neither of the two parties who desire marriage will slip into disobedience.

**That is the command of Allah, He sends it down to ye; and whosoever is guardful of Allah – He annuls his evils and magnifies for him a wage. (5)**

ذَٰلِكَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ أَنزَلَهُ إِلَيْنَا وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يَكْفِرْ عَنْهُ  
سَيِّئَاتِهِ وَيُعْظِمْ لَهُ أَجْرًا ﴿٥﴾

**That is the command of Allah, He sends it down to ye; ...** The rules of divorce as given constitute the command and order of Allah, sent down for our benefit.

... **and whosoever is guardful of Allah ...** It means he who fears Him and therefore obeys Him.

... **He annuls his evils ...** He forgives him his sins.

... **and magnifies for him a wage.** In the hereafter He gives him a magnificent wage and a grand reward.

Allah, glory be to Him, then explains the ruling for the divorced woman's livelihood and housing during her waiting-period, in His word:

**Settle them where ye have settled, according to your means; and do not harm them so as to straiten them. And if they are carrying a child, so dispense on them until they lay down their child. Then if they suckle for ye, so give them their wages, and agree between yourselves amicably. And if ye fall out, so another shall suckle him. (6)**

أَسْكِنُوهُنَّ مِنْ حَيْثُ سَكَنْتُمْ مِنْ وُجْدِكُمْ وَلَا تَضَارُوهُنَّ  
لِئَلَّضِيْقُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ وَإِنْ كُنَّ أَوْلَاتٍ حَمَلٍ فَأَنْفِقُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ حَتَّى  
يَضَعْنَ حَمْلَهُنَّ فَإِنْ أَرْضَعْنَ لَكُمْ فَآتُوهُنَّ أُجُورَهُنَّ  
وَأْتَمِرُوا بَيْنَكُمْ بِمَعْرُوفٍ وَإِنْ تَعَاَسَرْتُمْ فَسَرِّضُوا لَهُنَّ آخَرَىٰ

﴿٦﴾

**Settle them where ye have settled, according to your means; ...** The divorced woman is to be lodged by the husband in property he puts at her disposal, according to his means.

... **and do not harm them ...** It means they are not be lodged in a place that would cause them harm.

... **so as to straiten them ...** It means to put them in straitened circumstances, by insisting they stay in a place that would inconvenience them, with the aim of putting them in need of the husband.

... **And if they are carrying a child. ...** That is, if they are pregnant.

... **so dispense on them until they lay down their child ...** They are to be given their needs of clothing, food and drink and so forth, until they give birth to the babies they are carrying, at which time their waiting-period is over.

... **Then if they suckle for ye, ...** That is, if they suckle the husband's child after birth.

... **so give them their wages, ...** They are to be paid for suckling the child, for the costs of the child's sustenance is obligatory upon the father.

... **and agree between yourselves amicably ...** The parents and those connected to them are all to come to an agreement over the child's suckling, so that no harm be done to any of the three parties: the father, the mother and the child.

... **And if ye fall out, so another shall suckle him.** If those seeking to come to an agreement over the child's suckling should fail to agree about the mother's position and the rate of the payment she should receive and so forth, then the child is to be suckled by a woman other than the mother. It is likely that this indicates a gentle reproof to the mother that she should not be too difficult.

He then explains, that it is desirable for the father to give plentifully to the divorced woman when she suckles their child, assuming he has an abundance:

**The holder of plenty shall dispense from his plenty; and he whose provision is stinted for him should dispense from what Allah has given him. Allah charges no soul save what He has given it; Allah shall place ease after hardship.**

لِيُنْفِقَ ذُو سَعَةٍ مِّن سَعَتِهِ ۗ وَمَن قُدِرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقُهُ فَلْيُنْفِقْ  
مِمَّا آتَاهُ اللَّهُ لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا مَاءً آتَاهَا سَيِّجَعُلُ  
اللَّهُ بَعْدَ عُسْرٍ يُسْرًا ﴿٧﴾

(7)

**The holder of plenty shall dispense from his plenty; ...** He shall give a plentiful wage for suckling; was she not his wife? And is she not the mother of his child?

... **and he whose provision is stinted for him should dispense from what Allah has given him ...** When the father is in straitened circumstances, he is to give a wage for suckling his child to the extent of what Allah has bestowed on him, and he is not expected to give more than what a man in his circumstances can give.

... **Allah charges no soul save what He has given it; ...** Allah expects no more from anyone than what they can possibly give, in wealth, just as in other things like physical capabilities. Thus the impoverished should not become distressed at not being able to give much, though there are many poor fathers who are sorrowful at not being able to give grandly for the suckling of their children.

... **Allah shall place ease after hardship.** After poverty comes wealth, and after humiliation comes grandeur, and after being lowly comes a lofty station, and so on in all affairs.

Upon the clarification of these rules, the theme now turns to explain that those who disobey these and other such rules are on the path of the previous peoples, who were destroyed on account of their transgressions and disobedience:

**And how many a town has transgressed the command of its Lord and His Messengers; and so We reckoned it a severe reckoning, and We chastised it an atrocious chastisement.** (8)

وَكَايْنٍ مِّن قَرْيَةٍ عَتَتْ عَن أَمْرِ رَبِّهَا وَرُسُلِهِ ۗ فَحَاسَبْنَاهَا  
حِسَابًا شَدِيدًا وَعَدَدْنَاهَا عَذَابًا نُكْرًا ﴿٨﴾

**And how many a town has transgressed the command of its Lord and His Messengers; ...** 'How many' is given for *ka ayyin*, which conveys the meaning that such townships were many. 'Town' (*qaryah*) means the people of the town; an instance of the inhabitants of a place being termed as the place itself. The overall sense is that many townships failed to obey the commands of Allah, glory be to Him, and the directions of His Messengers.

... **and so We reckoned it a severe reckoning, ...** This is in contrast to a gentle, indulgent reckoning, as the believer who performs the virtuous deeds is pardoned his sins and is subject to an easy, indulgent reckoning in reward for his faith and his good deeds. But the transgressor faces the reckoning of each and every deed he has performed.

... **and We chastised it an atrocious chastisement.** An abominable and painful chastisement. Thus what is meant by their reckoning being strict was that they were subject to a reckoning as a group, not as individuals, for that reckoning is only after death, whereas here the theme implies that their reckoning was before their chastisement in the world.

**So it tasted the mischief of its affair; and the consequence of its affair was loss.** (9)

فَذَاقَتْ وَبَالَ أَمْرِهَا وَكَانَ عَنَقِبَةُ أَمْرِهَا خُسْرًا ﴿٩﴾

Each of those townships was subjected to the consequences of its evil behaviour, and those consequences were that its inhabitants lost their world and they lost their hereafter.

**Allah prepared for them a severe chastisement; so be guardful of Allah, O ye people of intellect who have believed. Allah surely has sent down to ye a reminder. (10)**

أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ عَذَابًا شَدِيدًا فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ يَا أُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ  
الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا قَدْ أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ إِلَيْكُمْ ذِكْرًا ﴿١٠﴾

**Allah prepared for them a severe chastisement;** ... After their chastisement in the world they still have to face the chastisement of the hereafter, which is a severe chastisement. Therefore, be warned, and

... **so be guardful of Allah,** ... Fear His punishments.

... **O ye owners of the mind...** Be guardful towards Him, O ye of understanding, so that there not come to ye that which came to the previous communities.

... **who have believed** ... This phrase serves as an adjective for 'ye endowed with minds', for it is those who believe who will benefit from the warning.

... **Allah has sent down to ye a reminder.** His reminder reminds us of the force of Allah and His chastisement; and deviation is worse after having been reminded.

He then defines the reminder that He has sent down, glory be to Him:

**A Messenger, reciting upon ye the signs of Allah, in clarification, so as to lead those who believe and do the virtuous deeds from the darknesses into the light. And whosoever believes in Allah and acts virtuously – He enters him into gardens, rivers flowing under them, eternal in them, forever. Indeed Allah has granted him excellent provision! (11)**

رَسُولًا يَتْلُوا عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ مُبَيِّنَاتٍ لِيُخْرِجَ الَّذِينَ  
ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ وَمَنْ  
يُؤْمِن بِاللَّهِ وَيَعْمَلْ صَالِحًا يُدْخِلْهُ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا  
الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا قَدْ أَحْسَنَ اللَّهُ لَهُ رِزْقًا ﴿١١﴾

**A Messenger,** ... It means Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family. He is 'sent down' in the sense that he was sent by Allah, glory be to Him; and so the term is an instance of something spiritual being likened to something physical.

... **reciting upon ye the signs of Allah,** ... The Messenger recited to humankind His proofs and existential evidences and arguments.

... **in clarification,** ... Those signs made the reality clear. *And the reason he recited those signs that make things clear was:*

... **so as to lead those who believe and do the virtuous deeds from the darknesses into the light** ... 'Believe' means belief in Allah and His Messenger and what he brought. The 'darknesses' are the darknesses of disbelief and disobedience. The light is the light of faith and doing the virtuous deeds. Faith is likened to light as it enables a person to perceive the truth and reality in faith and action; for whoever believes there is no God or that the God has partners is in darkness and oblivious to reality, like the darkness of night that keeps him from seeing what is directly in front of him. Such a person is like one who drinks alcohol: he imagines that he is not being harmed, but he is in the darkness about the truth and reality; and the same applies in all the other beliefs and actions.

As for His word, 'lead those who believe', it means the believers prior to their believing. The description is used to clarify who they are, not that they believed and worked the virtuous deeds and yet were still to be led from the darknesses into the light – as is obvious.

... **And whosoever believes in Allah and acts virtuously - He enters him into gardens under which rivers flow, eternal in them, forever** ... When a person believes in Allah with a real and correct faith, and performs the virtuous deeds, which includes refraining from the deeds of ugliness and corruption, then in the hereafter Allah will place him in the gardens of paradise under whose palaces and trees flow rivers of wine, honey, milk and sweet water. They will be eternal in them, and stay in them forever.

... **indeed Allah has granted him excellent provision!** The sustenance of the person who believes and who does the virtuous deeds will be the height of beauty and excellence. He shall be provided and sustained with the fruits and drinks and spouses of paradise, and all the other requisites of the exalted lifestyle.

He then clarifies His attributes, glory be to Him, so that the disobedient fear Him, and the believer find confidence in His promise:

**Allah is He who created seven skies, and of the earth the same as them, the command descending between them – for ye to know that Allah is over all things powerful, and that Allah has encompassed all things in knowledge.**  
(12)

اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ وَمِنَ الْأَرْضِ مِثْلَهُنَّ يَتَنَزَّلُ  
الْأَمْرُ بَيْنَهُنَّ لِتَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ  
أَحَاطَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا ﴿١٢﴾

**Allah is He who created seven skies, ...** the skies here may be in reference to the planetary orbits, or suchlike.

... **and of the earth the same as them, ...** Seven. Imam Ridā, peace be upon him, has said that ‘an earth is surrounded by its sky; then an earth is surrounded by its sky; then an earth ... and so on until he counted seven.’

... **the command descending between them ...** Allah’s command descends from each sky to its earth, until it reaches the final earth. And Allah created what He created – that of it perceived by man – in order:

... **for ye to know that Allah is over all things powerful, ...** Thus He is able to punish and reward, just as He is able to create the skies and the earths.

... **and that Allah has encompassed all things in knowledge.** The creation signifies His knowledge, and without knowledge there would be no creation, just as the process of creation, referred to in His word ‘*the command descending between them*’, indicates His knowledge, for such a procedure needs precise and detailed knowledge.