

Surah 5, Al-Ma'idah (The Table Spread) Medina 112

The Quran's Text & Yusuf Ali's Translation:

وَكَيْفَ يُحَكِّمُونَكَ وَعِنْدَهُمُ التَّوْرَةُ... ^{up}

5: 43. But why do they come to thee for decision, when they have (their own) laws before them?

... فِيهَا حُكْمُ اللَّهِ...

Therein is the (plain) command of God;

... ثُمَّ يَتَوَلَّوْنَ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ وَمَا أُولَئِكَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ (٤٣)

yet even after that, they would turn away.
For they are not (really) People of Faith.

Transliteration Wa kaifa yuhakkimu_naka wa'indahumut
taura_tu fiha_ hukmulla_hi summa yatawallauna mim ba'di
za_lik(a), wa ma_ ula_ika bil mu'minin(a).

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا التَّوْرَةَ فِيهَا هُدًى وَنُورٌ... ^{up}

5: 44. It was We who revealed the Law (to Moses); therein was guidance and light.

... يَحْكُمُ بِهَا النَّبِيُّونَ الَّذِينَ أَسْلَمُوا لِلَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالرَّبَّانِيُّونَ وَالْأَحْبَارُ...

By its standard have been judged the Jews,
by the Prophet who bowed (as in Islam) to
God's Will, by the Rabbis and the doctors of
Law:

... بِمَا اسْتُخْفِظُوا مِنْ كِتَابِ اللَّهِ وَكَانُوا عَلَيْهِ شُهَدَاءَ ...

for to them was entrusted the protection of
God's Book, and they were witnesses
thereto:

... فَلَا تَخْشَوْا النَّاسَ وَاخْشَوْنِي وَلَا تَشْتَرُوا بِآيَاتِي ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا ...

therefore fear not men, but fear Me, and sell
not My Signs for a miserable price.

... وَمَنْ لَمْ يَحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

If any do fail to judge by (the light of) what
God hath revealed, they are (no better than)
Unbelievers.

Transliteration *Inna_ anzalnat taura_ta fiha_ hudaw wa
nu_r(un), yahkumu bihan nabiyyunal lazina aslamu_ lillazina
ha_du_ war rabba_niyyu_na wal ahba_ru bimastuhfizu_ min
kita_billa_hi wa ka_nu_ 'alaihi syuhada_ '(a), fala_ takhsyaun
na_sa wakhsyauni wa la_ tasytaru_ bi a_ya_ti samanan
qalila_(n), wa mal lam yahkum bima_ anzalalla_hu fa ula_ 'ika
humul ka_firu_n(a).*

[Ali's comments: 749. This is a searching question as to the motive of the Jews in bringing their cases for decision to the Prophet. They came either;

- to ridicule whatever he said, or
- to deceive him as to facts and snatch a favourable decision which was against equity.

If their own Law did not suit their selfish interests, they sometimes twisted it. But Muhammad was always inflexible in his justice.

750 Guidance, with reference to conduct, light, with reference to insight into the higher realms of the faith. (5.44)

751. Rabbaniyyun may, I think, be rightly translated by the Jewish title of Rabbi for their learned men. Jewish learning is identified with Rabbinical literature. **Ahbar** is the plural of hibr or habr, by which we may understand Jewish Doctors of Law. Later the term was applied to those of other religions. Query: Is this word connected with the same root as "Hebrew", or "Eber" (Gen. 10:21), the ancestor of the Hebrew race? This seems negated by the fact that the Arabic root connected with the word "Hebrew" is 'Abar, not Habar. [5:44]

752 They were living witnesses to the truth of Scripture, and could testify that they had made it known to the people: Cf. ii. 143, and iv. 135. (5.44)

753 Two charges are made, against the Jews: (1) that even the books which they had, they twisted in meaning, to suit

their own purposes, because they feared men rather than God: (2) that what they had was but fragments of the original Law given to Moses, mixed up with a lot of semi-historical and legendary matter, and some fine poetry. The Taurat mentioned in the Qur-an is not the Old Testament as we have it: nor is it even the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament, containing the Law embedded in a great deal of semi-historical and legendary narrative). See Appendix 11, on the Taurat (printed at the end of this Sura). (5.44)

وَكَتَبْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ فِيهَا ... up

5: 45. We ordained therein for them:

... أَنَّ النَّفْسَ بِالنَّفْسِ وَالْعَيْنَ بِالْعَيْنِ ...

- "Life for life, - eye for eye,

... وَالْأَنْفَ بِالْأَنْفِ وَالْأُذُنَ بِالْأُذُنِ وَالسِّنَّ بِالسِّنِّ وَالْجُرُوحَ قِصَاصٌ ...

- nose for nose, - ear for ear, - tooth for tooth,

- and wounds equal for equal."

... فَمَنْ تَصَدَّقَ بِهِ فَهُوَ كَفَّارَةٌ لَّهُ ...

But if anyone remits the retaliation by way of charity, it is an act of atonement for himself.

... وَمَنْ لَّمْ يَحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

And if any fail to judge by (the light of) what God hath revealed, they are (no better than) wrongdoers.

Transliteration *Wa katabna_ 'alaihim fiha_ annan nafsa bin nafsi wal'aina bil 'aini wal anfa bil anfi wal uzuna bil uzuni was sinna bis sinn(i), wal juru_ha qisa_s(un), faman tasaddaqa bihi fa huwa kaffa_ratul lah(u_), wa mal lam yahkum bima_ anzalalla_hu fa ula_'ika humuz za_limu_n(a).*

[Ali's comments:

754 The retaliation is prescribed in three places in the Pentateuch, viz,. Exod. xxi, 23-25: Leviticus xxiv. 18-21, and Deut, xix. 21. The wording in the three quotations is different, but in none of them is found the additional rider for mercy, as here. Note that in Matt. v. 38. Jesus quotes the Old Law "eye for eye," etc., and modifies it in the direction of forgiveness, but the Quranic injunction is more practical. Even where the injured one forgives, the State or Ruler is competent to take such action as is necessary for the preservation of law and order in Society. For crime has a bearing that goes beyond the interests of the person injured: the Community is affected: see Q. v. 32. (5.45)

755 This is not part of the Mosaic Law, but the teaching of Jesus and of Muhammad. Notice how the teaching of Jesus is gradually introduced as leading up to the Qur-an. (5.45)

756. The seeming repetitions at the end of verses 44, 45 and 46 are not real repetitions. The significant words in the three cases are:

- Unbelievers, - wrong-doers, and - rebellious;

and each fits the context. - If the Jews tamper with their books they are Unbelievers;
- if they give false judgments, they are wrong-doers.
- If the Christians follow not their light, they are rebellious.
(5.45)]

Muhammad Asad's Translations:

5: 43 But how is it that they ask thee for judgment - seeing that they have the Torah, containing God's injunctions - and thereafter turn away [from thy judgment]? Such as these, then, are no [true] believers. 57

5:44 Verily, it is We who bestowed from on high the Torah, wherein there was guidance and light. On its strength did the prophets, who had surrendered themselves unto God, deliver judgment unto those who followed the Jewish faith; 58 and so did the [early] men of God and the rabbis, inasmuch as some of God's writ had been entrusted to their care; 5 ' and they [all] bore witness to its truth. Therefore, [O children of Israel,] hold not men in awe, but stand in awe of Me; and do not barter away My messages for a trifling gain: 60 for they who do not judge in

accordance with what God has bestowed from on high are, indeed, deniers of the truth!

5:45 And We ordained for them in that [Torah]: A life for a life, and an eye for an eye, and a nose for a nose, and an ear for an ear, and a tooth for a tooth, and a [similar] retribution for wounds;" but he who shall forgo it out of charity will atone thereby for some of his past sins. 62 And they who do not judge in accordance with what God has revealed - they, they are the evildoers!

[Asad's comments: 57 This verse illustrates the strange mentality of the Jews, who - despite the fact that they believe the Torah to contain all of the Divine Law - surreptitiously turn to a religious dispensation in which they do not believe in the hope that its verdict on certain ethical questions might confirm some of their own wishful beliefs which happen to run counter to the Torah. In other words, they are not really prepared to submit to the judgment of the Torah - although they assert their belief in it - nor the judgment of the Qur'an, which confirms some of the laws of the Torah and abrogates others: for, as soon as they come to realize that the Qur'an does not agree with their preconceived ideas, they turn away from it.

58 Implying that the Law of Moses (the Torah) was intended only for the children of Israel, and was never meant to have universal validity.

59 The expression "some of God's writ (kitab)" implies that the Torah did not exhaust the whole of God's revelation, and that more was yet to be revealed. For an explanation of the term rabbaniyun, see surah 3, note 62.

60 I.e., for the illusory feeling of superiority based on the spurious belief that the children of Israel are "God's chosen people" and, therefore, the sole recipients of God's grace and revelation. The "messages" referred to in this sentence relate to the Qur'an as well as to the Biblical prophecies concerning the advent of Muhammad.

61 See Exodus xxi, 23 ff., where details of the extremely harsh penalties provided under Mosaic Law are given.]

Muhammad Pickthall's Translation:

5:43 How come they unto thee for judgment when they have the Torah, wherein God hath delivered judgment (for them)? Yet even after that they turn away. Such (folk) are not believers.

5: 44 Lo! We did reveal the Torah, wherein is guidance and a light, by which the Prophets who surrendered (unto God) judged the Jews, and

the rabbis and the priests (judged) by such of God's Scripture as they were bidden to observe, and thereunto were they witnesses. So fear not mankind, but fear Me. And barter not My revelations for a little gain. Whoso judgeth not by that which God hath revealed: such are disbelievers.

5: 45 And We prescribed for them therein: The life for the life, and the eye for the eye, and the nose for the nose, and the ear for the ear, and the tooth for the tooth, and for wounds retaliation. But whoso forgoeth it (in the way of charity) it shall be expiation for him. Whoso judgeth not by that which God hath revealed: such are wrong-doers.