

grieve for these wrongdoing folk." (Verse 26) As they approached the holy land which God had promised them; He abandoned them to their aimless wandering. He forbade them the land He had assigned to them. The weightier view suggests that the land was forbidden to that particular generation of them, until a new generation came of age, aware of the lessons and strengthened by their upbringing in the desert. The first generation had long been used to subjugation and tyranny in Egypt. As such, it could not shoulder the tough responsibility. Tyranny and humiliation corrupt the nature of individuals as well as communities.

The *sūrah* stops at this point in their history to allow believers to reflect on the lessons learned. The Muslims also learned this tough lesson God relates to them. When they came face to face with difficulty and they were few in number confronting a mightier force of unbelievers in Badr, they said to their Prophet, Muḥammad (peace be upon him): "We will not say to you, Messenger of God, what the Israelites said to their Prophet, 'Go forth, then, you and your Lord, and fight, both of you. We shall stay here.' But we will say to you: Go forth, then, you and your Lord, and fight; we will fight alongside you."

We see how the Qur'ānic method produces results in educating the Muslim community through relating stories from past generations of believers. We can also see what purpose is served by relating the history of the Children of Israel.

The First Murder

Relate to them in all truth the story of the two sons of Adam: how each offered a sacrifice, and it was accepted from one of them while it was not accepted from the other. [The latter] said: "I will surely kill you." [The other] replied: "God accepts only from those who are God-fearing. (27)

﴿وَأْتَلُ عَلَيْهِمْ نَبَأَ ابْنَيْ آدَمَ بِالْحَقِّ إِذْ قَرَّبَا قُرْبَانًا فَتُقْبِلَ مِنْ أَحَدِهِمَا وَلَمْ يُنْقَبَلْ مِنَ الْآخَرِ قَالَ لَأَقْتُلَنَّكَ قَالَ إِنَّمَا يَتَقَبَّلُ اللَّهُ مِنَ الْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٢٧﴾﴾

Even if you lay your hand on me to kill me, I shall not lay my hand on you to kill you; for I fear God, the Lord of all the worlds. (28)

﴿لَئِن بَسَطتَ إِلَيَّ يَدَكَ لِتَقْتُلَنِي مَا أَنَا بِبَاسِطِ يَدِي إِلَيْكَ لِأَقْتُلَنَّكَ إِنِّي أَخَافُ اللَّهَ رَبَّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٢٨﴾﴾

I would rather you should add your sin against me to your other sins, and thus you will be destined for the Fire; since that is the just retribution of wrongdoers." (29)

﴿إِنِّي أُرِيدُ أَنْ تَبُوَأَ بِإِثْمِي وَإِثْمِكَ فَتَكُونَ مِنَ أَصْحَابِ النَّارِ وَذَلِكَ جَزَاءُ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾﴾

His evil soul drove him to kill his brother; and he murdered him, and thus he became one of the lost. (30)

﴿فَطَوَّعَتْ لَهُ نَفْسُهُ قَتْلَ أَخِيهِ فَقَتَلَهُ فَأَصْبَحَ مِنَ الخَاسِرِينَ ﴿٣٠﴾﴾

God then sent forth a raven which scratched the earth, to show him how he might conceal the nakedness of his brother's body. He cried out: "Woe to me! Am I then too weak to do what this raven has done, and to conceal the nakedness of my brother's body?" He was then overwhelmed by remorse. (31)

Because of this did We ordain to the Children of Israel that if anyone slays a human being, for anything other than in punishment of murder or for spreading corruption on earth, it shall be as though he had slain all mankind; and that if anyone saves a human life, it shall be as though he had saved all mankind. Our messengers brought them clear evidence of the truth, but despite all this, many of them continue to commit all manner of excesses on earth. (32)

It is but a just punishment of those who make war on God and His Messenger, and endeavour to spread corruption on earth, that they should be put to death, or be crucified, or have their hands and feet cut off on alternate sides or that they should be banished from the land. Such is their disgrace in this world, and more grievous suffering awaits them in the life to come; (33)

فَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ غُرَابًا يَبْحَثُ فِي الْأَرْضِ
لِيُرِيَهُ، كَيْفَ يُؤَارِي سَوْءَةَ أَخِيهِ
قَالَ يَوْمَئِذٍ لَقَدْ عَجِزْتُ أَنْ أَكُونَ مِثْلَ
هَذَا الْغُرَابِ فَأُؤَارِي سَوْءَةَ أَخِي
فَأَصْبَحَ مِنَ النَّادِمِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

مِنْ أَجْلِ ذَلِكَ كَتَبْنَا عَلَى بَنِي
إِسْرَائِيلَ أَنَّهُ مَنْ قَتَلَ نَفْسًا
بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ أَوْ فَسَادٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ
فَكَأَنَّمَا قَتَلَ النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا
وَمَنْ أَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا أَحْيَا
النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَلَقَدْ جَاءَتْهُمْ
رُسُلُنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ ثُمَّ إِنَّ كَثِيرًا
مِّنْهُمْ بَعَدَ ذَلِكَ فِي الْأَرْضِ
لَمُسْرِفُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

إِنَّمَا جَزَاءُ الَّذِينَ يُحَارِبُونَ اللَّهَ
وَرَسُولَهُ وَيَسْعَوْنَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَسَادًا
أَنْ يُقْتَلُوا أَوْ يُصَلَّبُوا أَوْ تُقَطَّعَ
أَيْدِيهِمْ وَأَرْجُلُهُمْ مِنْ خِلْفٍ
أَوْ يُنْفَوْا مِنَ الْأَرْضِ ذَلِكَ
لَهُمْ خِزْيٌ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَلَهُمْ فِي
الْآخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٣٣﴾

Except those who repent before you overpower them. For you must know that God is Much-Forgiving, Merciful. (34)

Believers, fear God and seek the means to come closer to Him, and strive hard in His cause, so that you may be successful. (35)

If those who disbelieve had all that is on earth and as much besides to offer as ransom from the suffering of the Day of Resurrection, it would not be accepted from them. Theirs shall be a painful suffering. (36)

They will wish to come out of the Fire, but they shall not come out of it. Theirs shall be a long-lasting suffering. (37)

As for the man or the woman who is guilty of stealing, cut off their hands in requital for what they have wrought, as an exemplary punishment ordained by God. God is Almighty, Wise. (38)

But whoever repents after having thus done wrong, and makes amends, shall have his repentance accepted by God. God is Much-Forgiving, Merciful. (39)

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ تَابُوا مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ
تَقْدِرُوا عَلَيْهِمْ فَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ
عَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٣٤﴾

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ
وَابْتَغُوا إِلَيْهِ الْوَسِيلَةَ وَجَاهِدُوا
فِي سَبِيلِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوْ أَنَّ لَهُمْ مَا
فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا وَمِثْلَهُ مَعَهُ
لَيَفْتَدُوا بِهٖ مِنْ عَذَابِ يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ
مَا نَقِلَ مِنْهُمُ وَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٣٦﴾

يُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يُخْرَجُوا مِنَ النَّارِ وَمَا هُمْ
بِخَارِجِينَ مِنْهَا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ
مُّقِيمٌ ﴿٣٧﴾

وَالسَّارِقُ وَالسَّارِقَةُ فَاقْطَعُوا
أَيْدِيَهُمَا جِزَاءً بِمَا كَسَبَا نَكَالًا مِنَ
اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٣٨﴾

فَمَنْ تَابَ مِنْ بَعْدِ ظُلْمِهِ وَأَصْلَحَ
فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يَتُوبُ عَلَيْهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ
عَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٣٩﴾

Do you not know that to God belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth? He punishes whom He wills and forgives whom He wills. God has power over all things. (40)

أَلَمْ تَعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَوَاتِ
وَالسَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ يُعَذِّبُ مَنْ
يَشَاءُ وَيَغْفِرُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ
شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٤٠﴾

Overview

This passage begins to outline some fundamental legislation concerning human life. Some of these are concerned with life protection in a Muslim community that applies Divine law. Others relate to the protection of the system against any rebellion that may seek to undermine the authority administering Divine law in such a society. All in all, these measures aim to provide proper protection for the Muslim community, as well as wealth and private property in a social set-up based on Divine guidance and ruled by Divine law.

The legislation covering these important aspects of social life take up this whole passage, after an introduction relating the story of Adam's two sons. This story exposes the nature of crime and its motives, and reveals its ugly face, showing the need to stand up to crime and to stamp it out of the life of Islamic society altogether. It stresses the need to punish the criminal and to counter the motives for crime.

The story appears to be firmly welded to the rulings and legislation that are subsequently detailed in this *sūrah*. A reflective reader is bound to feel that the story is given at the right place to fulfil an important function, and present a profound argument that penetrates the reader's consciousness. It thus puts hearts and minds in the right frame to receive the severe penalties Islam legislates for crimes committed against human life, public order, and personal property. These must be put into effect in an Islamic society which implements Divine law.

Islamic society runs all its life affairs, relations and commitments on the basis of the Divine constitution, implementing God's law. Thus, it guarantees for every individual, and for the community as a whole, all elements of justice, stability, reassurance and needful provisions. It protects both the individual and the community against all factors of provocation, oppression, injustice and poverty. Hence, in such a just, balanced society that guarantees mutual solidarity aggression against

personal life, public order, or individual property becomes a horrid crime, without any "extenuating" circumstances. When all factors encouraging a law-abiding life have been provided and motives for crime removed from the life of both individual and society, then a stringent attitude to crime and criminals is totally justified. Nevertheless, Islam ensures for the criminal all that guarantees proper investigation, interrogation and fair judgement, explaining any doubt in his favour, and opening the door to repentance which pardons some crimes in this life and ensures forgiveness of all crimes in the life to come.

We see examples of all this in the present passage and the legislation it puts in place. But before we start our discussion of such legislation we need to say a brief, general word about the environment and social set-up in which such legislation is implemented and the conditions that give its provisions the necessary force.

The legal provisions included in this passage, whether relating to aggression against life, public order or private property have the same status as the rest of Islamic law, prescribing mandatory or discretionary punishments. They are all applicable in Islamic society, in the "land of Islam". In order to understand this, we need to remember that, from the Islamic point of view, the whole world is divided into two parts. The first is the land of Islam, or the land of peace. This includes any area where Islamic law is implemented, whether its population are all Muslims, or they include non-Muslims living under Islamic rule, or they are all non-Muslims but living under an Islamic government implementing Islamic law.¹ It also includes any area which has been occupied by non-Muslims, but its local population, who may all be Muslims or having non-Muslims among them, are able to implement Islamic law in their own life and judge their disputes accordingly. The main criterion in considering an area as a "land of Islam" is whether Islamic law is implemented in it or not.

The second is 'hostile land' which includes any area where Islamic legal provisions and Islamic law in general are not implemented, regardless of what population it may have. Thus, even if its population, or the majority of them describe themselves as Muslims, or followers of other Divine religions, or non-believers, any area that does not

1. A non-Muslim is not bound by the entirety of Islamic law. Rather, a non-Muslim is

implement Islamic law is considered a hostile land to Muslims, both individuals and community.²

Islamic society is that which is established in the land of Islam, as defined above. It is such a society which implements Islamic law that deserves to have the full protection of life, property and public order. In such a society it is only appropriate that the punishments outlined by Islamic law should be inflicted on those whose actions threaten its peace and security. It is a noble, free and just society, which ensures work and sufficient provisions for everyone whether they are able or unable to work. It is a society where motives for goodness are plenty and those encouraging evil are few. It is only right that such a society should impose on every one of its subjects the duty of protecting this splendid state of affairs, respecting other people's rights to live in peace and security. It is natural that it should preserve the security of the "land of Islam" in which everyone lives peacefully, with all his rights and privileges guaranteed. Whoever violates the law of such a peaceful society is an evil aggressor who deserves severe punishment, allowing him, however, all the guarantees that ensure fair trial and which interpret doubt in his favour.

The people of a hostile land, as defined above, have no right to enjoy the guarantees provided by Islamic legal provisions and the deterrent they represent. This is because such a land neither implements nor recognises Islamic law. To Muslims who live in the land of Islam, such land is not a land of peace unless it enters into suitable treaties and agreements with the land of Islam. Moreover, Islamic law provides the same guarantees and rights to hostile individuals who come from hostile lands when they enter the land of Islam under a pledge of safety. This applies for the duration of that pledge, and within the area ruled by a Muslim ruler, implementing Islamic law.

Having made this explanation, we may now discuss this passage in detail.

A Murder is Committed

Relate to them in all truth the story of the two sons of Adam: how each offered a sacrifice, and it was accepted from one of them while

2. This definition, made by scholars and not used in the Qur'ān or *ḥadīth*, was introduced at a time when the overwhelming majority of Muslims lived under the Islamic state. It has recently been called into question by a number of scholars – Translator's note

it was not accepted from the other. [The latter] said: "I will surely kill you." [The other] replied: "God accepts only from those who are God-fearing. (Verse 27) Even if you lay your hand on me to kill me, I shall not lay my hand on you to kill you; for I fear God, the Lord of all the worlds. (Verse 28)

I would rather you should add your sin against me to your other sins, and thus you will be destined for the Fire; since that is the just retribution of wrongdoers." (Verse 29) His evil soul drove him to kill his brother; and he murdered him, and thus he became one of the lost. (Verse 30)

God then sent forth a raven which scratched the earth, to show him how he might conceal the nakedness of his brother's body. He cried out: "Woe to me! Am I then too weak to do what this raven has done, and to conceal the nakedness of my brother's body?" He was then overwhelmed by remorse. (Verse 31)

This story gives us a clear example of the nature of evil and totally unjustified aggression. It also gives us an example showing the nature of goodness and a peaceful attitude towards everyone. The two examples are set in clear contrast. The result is a sordid crime, which makes us feel the need for a legal code to impose just retribution and to stop aggressors even before they commit their crimes. If they, nevertheless, do commit crimes, they are certain to receive a punishment commensurate to their crimes. The legal code will thus be able to protect those who are good and ensure their right to live. It is indeed such people that should feel secure and safe under the protection of the law that deters crime and administers justice.

The Qur'ān does not specify the time or place of the story it relates. Nor does it mention the names of its main characters. Although reports mention the names of Cain and Abel as the two sons involved in the story, and although these reports mention some details about the conflict between them over two of their sisters, we prefer to confine our comments to the story as it is related in the Qur'ān, without adding any details. All reports mentioning details have an element of doubt, in the sense that they are given by people who follow earlier religions. The story is mentioned in the Old Testament with details of names, place and time, as given in these reports. The single *ḥadīth* which refers to the story and has

been verified as authentic does not give any details. It is a *ḥadīth* in which 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd quotes the Prophet as saying: "For every soul that is killed unjustly, a share of responsibility is borne by the first son of Adam, who was the first to commit murder." All that we can say about this story is that it took place during humanity's childhood stage. It was the first cold-blooded murder. The perpetrator did not know that dead people should be buried.

Leaving the story in the general terms in which it is given in the Qur'ān ensures that the purpose of relating it is fulfilled and its lessons are understood. Providing more details does not add anything to these basic purposes. Hence, our preference to discuss it as it is given.

Relate to them in all truth the story of the two sons of Adam: how each offered a sacrifice, and it was accepted from one of them while it was not accepted from the other. [The latter] said: "I will surely kill you." [The other] replied: "God accepts only from those who are God-fearing." (Verse 27)

Having related to his followers an account of certain events in the history of the Children of Israel with their Prophet, Moses, the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) is told by God to relate the story of two people representing two types of human being. The account should be given in all honesty, because it tells of the truth deeply entrenched in human nature. It also emphasises the need for a deterrent legal code to ensure justice.

Adam's two sons were in a situation that gives no rise to any thought of aggression in a good person's mind. The situation is one of obedience to God and offering a sacrifice to draw closer to God: "*How each offered a sacrifice and it was accepted from one of them while it was not accepted from the other.*" (Verse 27) We note that the passive mode is used here to indicate that the acceptance or rejection of the offered sacrifice is done by a higher power in a metaphysical way. This mode of expression suggests to us two points: the first is that we should not try to determine how exactly the offering was accepted. We need not discuss reports mentioned in books of commentary on the Qur'ān because these reports are most probably derived from Old Testament fables

The second point suggests that the one whose offering was accepted had not committed any crime that might cause anyone else to be angry with him to any extent, let alone that that person should plot a murder. He had no say in the acceptance of this offering. The nature of the One who accepted the offering was beyond the perception of either of the two brothers. Hence, thoughts of anger or murder should have been far removed from the minds of both brothers. They were in a situation that is close to worship, since it involves offering a sacrifice for God's sake.

"[The latter] said: 'I will surely kill you.'" (Verse 27) This is a statement of confirmed intention which is met by our disapproval because it is totally unjustified. Indeed, it could only be the result of blind envy which is alien to a good heart. Thus, from the very first moment, we take an attitude of total disapproval of aggression. The *sūrah*, however, greatly enhances the ghastliness of this act of aggression by showing the peaceful, good-natured attitude of the other brother: "*[The other] replied: 'God accepts only from those who are God-fearing.'*" (Verse 27)

This is a simple statement which puts matters in their proper perspective. It indicates that the person saying this is a believer who understands the reason for the acceptance of sacrifices offered to God. Also implied in this statement is a gentle advice to the aggressor to fear God, because this is the way through which he could gain acceptance. It is all done very gently so that his brother might remain responsive and unirritated. Adopting a completely peaceful attitude, the good believer of the two brothers tries further to pacify his brother and quieten him: "*Even if you lay your hand on me to kill me, I shall not lay my hand on you to kill you; for I fear God, the Lord of all the worlds.*" (Verse 28)

What we have here is a case of a peaceful man making clear that his attitude is based on fearing God and implementing His commandments. This attitude fills us with enthusiastic support for the victim of aggression, as we admire his calmness, reassurance and the fact that he fears God alone. His gentle words should have been sufficient to quench his brother's rage and reduce his anger. A good response would have been sufficient to re-establish the feelings of brotherhood and the reassurance of faith. To achieve this desirable result, however, the good-natured brother adds a word of warning: "*I would rather you should add your sin against me to your other sins and*

thus you will be destined for the Fire; since that is the just retribution of wrongdoers." (Verse 29)

We may paraphrase this statement by the God-fearing brother as follows: If you were to stretch your hand to me to kill me, it is not in my nature to do the same thing to you. The thought of murder does not occur to me in the first place, not because I cannot do it, but because I fear God, the Lord of all creation. I will leave you to bear the sin of murdering me so as to add it to your other sins which have caused your offering not to be accepted by God. Thus, you end up with a double burden of sin and a double punishment. This is a just reward for a heinous crime.

He, thus, depicted to his brother how loathsome to him was the very thought of committing murder. He did so in the hope that he would help his erring brother to resist all evil thoughts towards him, especially when he, himself, was of a peaceful disposition. He explained to him that the sinful burden of a murder was too heavy and that he would do well to avoid it in order not to end up with a double punishment. The only way to rid himself of it was through fearing God. In his persuasion, he went as far as any man could go. But the example of an evil man cannot be properly depicted until we know what sort of response he made to such persuasion: *"His evil soul drove him to kill his brother; and he murdered him, and thus he became one of the lost."* (Verse 30)

A Lesson Provided by a Raven

After all this admonition and persuasion, in a perfectly peaceful and gentle approach, the evil soul prevailed and the crime was committed. His evil soul was able to override every hindrance and made him less resistant to the thought of killing. Thus, he killed his own brother, only to be doomed: *"Thus he became one of the lost."* (Verse 30) He lost all as he brought himself into ruin, and lost his brother who should have been his friend and support. He also lost his world, since a murderer can never be happy in life. Most certainly, he lost his future life as he added his new sin to his earlier ones.

The ghastliness of his crime was made to appear to him in its most physical shape. The dead corpse of his brother started to rot and its nakedness became intolerable. Murderer as he was, he was soon made to realise his powerlessness, as he did not know how to conceal the

nakedness of his brother's corpse. He was weaker than a raven among birds: *"God then sent forth a raven which scratched the earth, to show him how he might conceal the nakedness of his brother's body. He cried out: 'Woe to me! Am I then too weak to do what this raven has done, and to conceal the nakedness of my brother's body?' He was then overwhelmed by remorse."* (Verse 31)

Some reports suggest that there were two ravens and one of them killed the other. Other reports suggest that the raven found a dead raven or brought the dead one with him and started to scratch the earth and buried the dead one. The murderer expressed his feelings in the way reported in the Qur'an and liked what he saw the raven do. It is clear that the murderer had never seen a dead man being buried. Otherwise, he would automatically have buried his brother. This may have been because the murdered brother was the first of Adam's children to die on earth, or maybe because the killer was still young and had never seen a burial before. Either case is probable. It also appears that his remorse was not one of repentance: otherwise, God would have accepted it from him. It was the sort of remorse which comes with the realisation that one's action is futile and leads to nothing but trouble.

It may be that the burial of the dead raven is something that ravens do, as some people suggest. It may also be a supernatural action God wanted to show to the killer at that particular time. To us, both cases are the same. The Creator who gives every species of His creation its nature and habits can accomplish whatever He wills through anyone of His creatures. His power is similarly indicated by either course.

The Killing of All Humanity

The *sūrah* then makes use of the profundity of relating this story by enhancing a positive response to the legislation enacted to deal with such a crime. The legislation achieves the dual purpose of weakening the motive to commit a murder and establishing the just punishment for such a crime whenever it takes place: *"Because of this did We ordain to the Children of Israel that if anyone slays a human being, for anything other than in punishment of murder or for spreading corruption on earth, it shall be as though he had slain all mankind; and that if anyone saves a human life, it shall be as though he had saved all mankind. Our messengers brought them clear evidence of the*

truth, but despite all this, many of them continue to commit all manner of excesses on earth." (Verse 32)

This type of person exists and aggression is committed against peaceful and good-natured people who harbour neither grudges nor ill-feelings towards others. A reminder and a warning may achieve nothing with those who have an evil nature. Adopting a peaceful attitude may not be sufficient to prevent aggression. For all this, the ghastly crime of killing one person is considered so grave and so sordid that it is equated with the crime of killing all mankind. On the other hand, efforts to prevent killing and to spare the life of one person are considered a great action, equal to saving all mankind. The law given to the Children of Israel included this principle which equates the life of any human being with every life. The right to live is applicable to all. Hence, killing one person is an aggression against the right to live in which all people stand equal. Similarly, preventing murder and sparing the life of one person, either through defending the would-be victim or inflicting the death penalty on the killer in order to prevent the murder of another, is to save the basic right of life applicable to all.

It should be clarified here that this rule applies to people in the land of Islam, whether Muslim or not, as long as they are living under the rule and protection of the Islamic authority. As for those who are in a land hostile to Islam, neither their lives nor their properties are protected unless they have concluded a peace treaty with the land of Islam. This legislative rule should be well remembered. We should also remember that the land of Islam is that in which the rule of Islam prevails and Islamic law is implemented. The hostile land is that which does not implement Islamic law.

God has decreed this principle for the Children of Israel, because at that time, they were the recipients of Divine revelation and, as such, they represented the land of Islam as long as they implemented the law of the Torah in its fullness, without any distortion. But the Children of Israel exceeded their limits after God's messengers came to them with clear proof of the truth. Ever since the time of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) many of them continue to commit excesses of all sorts. The Qur'ān records against them these excesses as well as the fact that they have no argument to justify their errors: "*Our [i.e. God's] messengers brought them clear evidence of the truth, but despite all this, many of them continue to*

commit all manner of excesses on earth." (Verse 32) What excess is greater than distorting or ignoring God's law?

This explained, we need to point out that God has made the perpetration of corruption on earth similar to murder: the perpetrator is put to death because he has forfeited his right to live. The security of the Muslim community in the land of Islam and maintaining law and order within the system which gives the Muslim community the sense of peace and security are essential in the same way as the safety of individuals, if not more. Indeed, the safety of individuals cannot be guaranteed unless the security of the community is achieved. There is also the added reason of protecting this distinguished type of community and providing for it all guarantees of stability and continuity so that its people may carry on with their promotion of a better standard of human life. It is perhaps appropriate to mention here that this community provides to all mankind the guarantees necessary for the promotion of life, helps everything good to flourish and repels all evil. Its prime purpose is prevention, but it also administers the proper remedy for what could not be prevented. It removes every cause tempting human beings to lean towards evil and aggression. When it has done all this, anyone who threatens the security of this community is an evil element and should be removed unless he returns to his senses.

The Just Punishment for Rebellion

The *sūrah* lays down the punishment for the crime that such wicked elements commit. This is known in the Islamic legal code as the punishment for waging war against Islam: "*It is but a just punishment of those who make war on God and His Messenger, and endeavour to spread corruption on earth, that they should be put to death, or be crucified, or have their hands and feet cut off on alternate sides or that they should be banished from the land. Such is their disgrace in this world, and more grievous suffering awaits them in the life to come;* (Verse 33), *except those who repent before you overpower them. For you must know that God is Much-Forgiving, Merciful.*" (Verse 34)

The crime to which this legislative statement refers involves rebellion against a Muslim ruler who implements the laws of Islam. The rebels gather in a group renouncing the ruler's authority. They cause fear among the Muslim community living in the Muslim land and they