

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Surah An-Nisa

The Women · Madani · 176 ayat — reflections on surah
4 of the Qur'an

QURAN

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Surah An-Nisa

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النساء — An-Nisa, “The Women”. Surah 4 of 114, revealed in Madinah, 176 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/4/.

ONE

The surah in brief

Detailed guidance on justice within society, especially toward women, orphans, and the vulnerable, covering inheritance, marriage, and family, alongside warnings against hypocrisy and a call to uphold fairness for Allah's sake.

An-Nisa is the great Madani surah of social justice, opening by rooting all humanity in a single soul and commanding taqwa toward Allah and toward the ties of the womb. Much of it secures the vulnerable — orphans, women, and heirs — through detailed inheritance shares, marriage ethics, and the fair treatment of wives, framing family law as worship. It widens into public order: rendering trusts, obeying legitimate authority, uncompromising justice even against oneself or kin, and the handling of hypocrites and the fearful in times of conflict. Toward its end it corrects the People of the Book on Isa, denying his crucifixion-death and any claim of divinity, and reaffirming the unbroken chain of prophethood.

OCCASIONS OF REVELATION

Why it was revealed

These are the occasions (asbāb al-nuzūl) that the authentic collections narrate for verses of this surah. An occasion explains a verse; it does not limit its meaning.

Qur'an 4:3

A man had an orphan girl in his care who owned a date-palm garden, and he married her for the garden rather than out of love. The verse about fearing injustice to orphan girls came regarding his case.

"He married her just because of that and not because he loved her. So the Divine Verse came regarding his case"

'A'isha · Sahih al-Bukhari 4573

Qur'an 4:11

The Prophet and Abu Bakr visited Jabir while he was ill and unconscious; the Prophet sprinkled water from his ablution on him. Jabir asked what to do with his wealth, and the verse on children's inheritance was revealed.

"What do you order me to do as regards my wealth?" So there was revealed"

Jabir ibn 'Abdullah · Sahih al-Bukhari 4577

Qur'an 4:19

Before this verse, when a man died his relatives had the right to his widow: to marry her, marry her off, or keep her from marrying. The verse was revealed about this.

"if a man died, his relatives used to have the right to inherit his wife"

Ibn 'Abbas · Sahih al-Bukhari 4579

Qur'an 4:59

The verse "Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority" was revealed about 'Abdullah ibn Hudhafa, whom the Prophet appointed to command a detachment.

"was revealed in connection with `Abdullah bin Hudhafa bin Qais bin `Adi' when the Prophet (ﷺ) appointed him as the commander of a Sariyya"

Ibn 'Abbas · Sahih al-Bukhari 4584

Qur'an 4:65

Az-Zubair and a man of the Ansar disputed over a stream used to water their palms. The Ansari was angry at the Prophet's ruling, and the Prophet then gave Az-Zubair his full right. Az-Zubair said he thought the verse was revealed about this.

"Az-Zubair said, 'I don't think but the Verse was revealed in this connection'"

Az-Zubair ibn al-'Awwam (via 'Urwa) · Sahih al-Bukhari 4585

Qur'an 4:88

Some who set out with the Prophet for Uhud turned back, and the Muslims split into two parties over them. The verse "what is the matter with you that you are divided into two parties about the hypocrites?" was revealed.

"Some of the companions of the Prophet (ﷺ) returned from the battle of Uhud (i.e. refused to fight) whereupon the Muslims got divided into two parties"

Zaid ibn Thabit · Sahih al-Bukhari 4589

Qur'an 4:94

A man with his sheep greeted pursuing Muslims with "Peace be on you", but they killed him and took his sheep. Allah revealed the verse forbidding them to tell one who offers peace, "You are not a believer."

"But they killed him and took over his sheep. Thereupon Allah revealed in that concern, the above Verse"

Ibn 'Abbas · Sahih al-Bukhari 4591

Qur'an 4:95

While the Prophet dictated "Not equal are those of the believers who sit at home and those who strive", the blind Ibn Umm Maktum said he would fight if he were able. Allah revealed the exception "except those who are disabled".

"Then that state of the Prophet (ﷺ) passed and Allah revealed"

Zaid ibn Thabit · Sahih al-Bukhari 4592

Qur'an 4:97

Some Muslims stayed with the pagans and swelled their numbers against the Prophet, and some were killed by arrows or swords. Allah revealed the verse about those whom the angels take in death while wronging themselves.

"Ibn `Abbas informed me that some Muslim people were with the pagans, increasing the number of the pagans against Allah's Messenger (ﷺ)."

Ibn `Abbas (via `Ikrima) · Sahih al-Bukhari 4596

Qur'an 4:102

The allowance in the verse, "because of the inconvenience of rain or because you are ill", was revealed about `Abdur-Rahman ibn `Auf, who was wounded.

"(It was revealed in connection with) `Abdur-Rahman bin `Auf who was wounded"

Ibn `Abbas · Sahih al-Bukhari 4599

Qur'an 4:127

Guardians would marry orphan girls in their care for their wealth and beauty with less than the proper dower. After the earlier verse forbade this, people asked the Prophet for instructions, and Allah revealed "They ask your instruction regarding women."

"The people asked Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) his instructions after the revelation of this Divine Verse whereupon Allah revealed"

'A'isha (asked by `Urwa) · Sahih al-Bukhari 4574

TWO

Its themes

- Justice for the vulnerable
- Family law and inheritance
- Rights and trusts
- Obedience and legitimate authority
- Confronting hypocrisy
- Correcting beliefs about Isa

THREE

Key verses

O mankind! reverence your Guardian-Lord, who created you from a single person, created, of like nature, His mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women;- reverence Allah, through whom ye demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (That bore you): for Allah ever watches over you.

Qur'an 4:1

The surah of women's rights begins by reminding all people they descend from one soul, so kinship and shared humanity precede every ruling that follows. Reflect that upholding others' rights is inseparable from taqwa of the God who made you kin.

Allah doth command you to render back your Trusts to those to whom they are due; And when ye judge between man and man, that ye judge with justice: Verily how excellent is the teaching which He giveth you! For Allah is He Who heareth and seeth all things.

Qur'an 4:58

Allah commands rendering trusts to their owners and judging between people with justice — a verse said to have been revealed about handing back the key of the Ka'bah to its keeper. Treat every responsibility placed in your hands, public or private, as an amanah you will answer for.

O ye who believe! stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor: for Allah can best protect both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest ye swerve, and if ye distort (justice) or decline to do justice, verily Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do.

Qur'an 4:135

Stand firmly for justice as witnesses for Allah, even against yourselves, your parents, or your kin, and let neither wealth nor poverty sway you. Reflect on how the hardest justice to deliver is the one that costs you personally.

O ye who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you. If ye differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if ye do believe in Allah and the Last Day: That is best, and most suitable for final determination.

Qur'an 4:59

Obey Allah, the Messenger, and those in authority among you — then return disputes to Allah and His Messenger. The order is deliberate: obedience to authority is bounded by, and derived from, obedience to revelation.

Serve Allah, and join not any partners with Him; and do good- to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbours who are near, neighbours who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (ye meet), and what your right hands possess: For Allah loveth not the arrogant, the vainglorious;-

Qur'an 4:36

Worship Allah, associate nothing with Him, and then a widening circle of kindness — parents, kin, orphans, the needy, the near and far neighbor, the companion, the traveler, and those your right hands possess. Read it as a checklist for whom your ihsan has been neglecting.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Surah an-Nisa is a Madani surah of 176 verses, revealed in the years following the migration and, by the weight of internal evidence and reports in the tafsir tradition, largely in the aftermath of the Battle of Uhud (around 3–4 AH). Uhud left behind widows and orphans, families whose breadwinners had fallen, and property that now had to change hands. Much of the surah reads as the Qur'an rebuilding a wounded community from the household outward — securing the rights of exactly those people whom war and custom tend to trample: women, orphans, the poor, and the socially weak.

Its name, "The Women," comes from the sheer density of legislation concerning women — marriage, dower, inheritance, the treatment of wives, prohibited unions, and the protection of female orphans from being exploited by their guardians. But the name should not narrow our sense of its scope. This is one of the great legislative surahs of the Qur'an, and alongside family law it deals with the inner enemy of the hypocrites, the rules of fighting and of prayer in the state of fear, arbitration and obedience to authority, and a sustained address to the People of the Book that culminates in correcting their claims about Jesus.

The mood is unmistakable from the opening word: taqwa. The surah begins by commanding humanity to be conscious of "your Lord who created you from a single soul," and it returns to

that command again and again, as if every ruling about money, marriage, and inheritance is being placed under the eye of God. Ibn 'Ashur notes how the surah binds social justice to God-consciousness: rights are not merely legal claims to be haggled over but trusts (amanat) for which one answers to the One who created both parties from a single origin. The register is therefore both juristic and deeply moral — precise about shares and shares of blame, yet always lifting the gaze back to God and the Last Day.

How the surah unfolds

The surah opens by grounding all human relations in a single fact of creation: one soul, from which the mate was made, and from the pair countless men and women spread across the earth (4:1). From that shared origin it derives a shared duty — reverence toward God and toward the wombs (al-arham), the ties of kinship. This first verse is the seed of everything that follows: because we come from one source, the strong owe justice to the weak.

It moves immediately to orphans (4:2–10), commanding that their wealth be handed back untouched and never swallowed under the cover of guardianship, and warning that those who devour an orphan's property are swallowing fire. Out of this concern for orphaned girls flows the famous verse on marriage (4:3): if a guardian fears he cannot be just to female orphans in his care, let him marry from other women, up to four — but if he fears he cannot be just even then, only one. The passage is

explicitly framed by justice, not appetite. Dower is established as the woman's own right (4:4), and the property of the weak-minded is protected (4:5).

Then come the inheritance verses (4:11–12), among the most carefully structured legislation in the entire Qur'an — fixed shares for sons and daughters, parents, spouses, and siblings, hedged with the settlement of debts and bequests. These verses, Ibn Kathir observes, wrested inheritance away from pre-Islamic custom, which had often excluded women and children entirely and given everything to the fighting men. The passage closes with the "limits of God" and a stern warning: to keep these bounds is Paradise, to transgress them is Fire (4:13–14). Rights of inheritance are thus not mere estate law but a boundary of the sacred.

The surah then legislates a whole web of family matters — the earlier rulings on illicit conduct, the prohibition of inheriting women against their will and of oppressing them to reclaim the dower (4:19), the list of women forbidden in marriage (4:22–24), and the concession for those who cannot afford to marry free believing women. This body of law is repeatedly punctuated by the refrain that God wishes to lighten your burden, for "man was created weak" (4:28) — the law is demanding, but it is fitted to human frailty, not indifferent to it.

At 4:34–35 comes the passage on the ordering of the marital home and, crucially, the machinery for saving a marriage in crisis through two arbiters, one from each family. It is worth reading 4:34 in the light of 4:35 and 4:128: the Qur'an's concern throughout is reconciliation and the protection of the wife, not

the license of the husband. From the home the surah widens outward to a magnificent verse of universal ethics (4:36): worship God, associate nothing with Him, and then a cascade of kindness — to parents, kin, orphans, the needy, the near and far neighbor, the companion at your side, the traveler, and those your right hands possess. Social justice is presented as the outward face of tawhid.

The middle of the surah turns to the community's integrity and its enemies within and without. There is the command to render trusts and judge with justice (4:58), and then the pivotal verse on obedience: obey God, obey the Messenger, and those in authority among you, and refer disputes back to God and the Messenger (4:59). This is followed by a searching exposure of the hypocrites who claim to believe yet seek judgment from other than the Prophet, and the oath that they do not truly believe until they make him judge in all their disputes and submit fully (4:65). The surah presses on to the duty of struggle in God's cause on behalf of the oppressed — "the weak among men, women, and children" who cry out for a rescuer (4:75) — and legislates even the form of prayer under threat of attack, the salat al-khawf (4:101–103), showing that the link to God is not to be dropped even on the battlefield.

The final major movement addresses the People of the Book directly. It rebukes their factions, recounts the sins of some of the Children of Israel, and reaches the celebrated passage on Jesus (4:157–159): they did not kill him nor crucify him, but it was made to appear so to them; rather God raised him to Himself. The surah insists on the true, exalted station of the Messiah — a servant and messenger of God and a word He cast

to Mary — against both those who slandered him and those who deified him (4:171–172). It closes, fittingly for a surah so concerned with inheritance, by returning to the case of the *kalala*, one who dies leaving neither parent nor child (4:176), sealing the surah on the same note of protecting rights that it opened with.

The major themes, in depth

Justice to the vulnerable. This is the beating heart of an-Nisa. The surah repeatedly singles out the very people whom power tends to overlook — orphans whose wealth can be quietly consumed, women whose dower and inheritance can be denied, the oppressed who have no army of their own. The Qur'an does not merely recommend kindness to them; it turns their rights into fixed, enforceable law and then wraps that law in the fear of God and the fire of Hell. To eat an orphan's property is to swallow fire (4:10); to transgress the shares of inheritance is to cross the limits of God (4:14). Ibn 'Ashur reads the whole surah as the establishment of a just social order in which the measure of a community's faith is precisely how it treats those who cannot defend themselves.

Marriage and family as a sacred trust. The surah treats the family not as a private arrangement but as an institution answerable to God. Dower is the woman's inalienable property (4:4). Marriage is a "solemn covenant" — *mithaqan ghaliza* (4:21) — the same weighty word the Qur'an uses for God's covenant with the prophets. Wives are to be lived with in kindness, and even where a man dislikes his wife he is reminded that God may place much good in what he dislikes (4:19). When conflict

comes, the response is arbitration and reconciliation (4:35, 4:128), not abandonment. Even in the delicate arena of intimate authority in 4:34, the classical scholars — al-Qurtubi and al-Tabari among them — read the verse within its guard-rails of graduated, restrained, and ultimately reconciliation-seeking steps, condemning cruelty and framing the goal as the preservation of the marriage. Inheritance, likewise, is worship: to distribute an estate by God's shares is to keep His limits and enter His gardens (4:13).

The integrity of the believing community. Alongside family law runs a sustained concern with what holds the umma together and what corrodes it. The corrosion is hypocrisy — the nifaq of those who profess faith with the tongue while their hearts seek judgment elsewhere, who waver between the believers and the disbelievers "belonging neither to these nor to those" (4:143). Against this the surah sets a positive architecture of loyalty: trusts rendered to their owners, justice in judgment, and obedience to God, His Messenger, and legitimate authority, with all disputes ultimately referred back to revelation (4:58–59). The oath of 4:65 is decisive: true faith is not compatible with resisting the Prophet's judgment. Here the surah defines the community not by ethnicity or slogan but by wholehearted submission to God's guidance.

The truth about Jesus and the People of the Book. The surah's closing address corrects two opposite errors at once. Against those who denied and slandered the Messiah, it affirms his miraculous birth and his rescue by God from the cross (4:157–158). Against those who exalted him into a god, it insists he was "only a messenger of God, and His word which He cast to Mary,

and a spirit from Him" — and it commands, "do not say 'three'" (4:171). Ibn Kathir underlines the balance: the Qur'an gives Jesus the highest human honor while refusing every step toward deifying him. This is the doctrinal capstone of a surah that has spent 170 verses teaching a community to keep its bounds — and the greatest bound of all is the bound of tawhid.

Points of reflection

An-Nisa asks us to measure our religion not by our loudest acts of devotion but by how we treat the people God has placed within our reach — the orphan in our guardianship, the wife in our home, the heir waiting for a share, the neighbor at our side. The surah's genius is to fuse worship and justice so completely that they can no longer be separated: the same breath that forbids associating partners with God commands kindness to the servant and the traveler (4:36). A believer who is scrupulous in prayer yet cavalier with an orphan's inheritance has, by this surah's logic, misunderstood the whole point.

It also teaches that rights are trusts we will answer for. Money, marriage, guardianship, and authority are all amanat, and the recurring drumbeat of taqwa reminds us that no legal loophole hides us from the One who created both us and the person we might wrong. The surah calls the reader to become a person of scrupulous justice — one who stands firm for fairness "even against yourselves or your parents and kin" (4:135), and who returns every disputed matter to God and His Messenger rather than to ego or custom. Its final invitation is to live the whole of one's social life — inheritance and marriage, loyalty and

conflict, war and peace — inside the limits of God, trusting that those limits are mercy fitted to a creature He knows was created weak.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. See guarding the rights of orphans, women, and heirs as an act of taqwa, not mere legality.
2. Hold justice above loyalty to self, family, and tribe.
3. Handle every entrusted duty as an amanah with a reckoning attached.
4. Let tawhid overflow into concentric circles of kindness toward everyone around you.

Where this reading draws from. Ibn Kathir, al-Sa'di, al-Qurtubi, al-Tabari. A summary is not a tafsir: for the verse-by-verse treatment go to the works themselves, or to the close studies at deen2u.com/tadabbur/.