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Surah Al-Mumtahanah

She That Is To Be Examined · Madani · 13 ayat —
reflections on surah 60 of the Qur'an

QURAN

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المتحنة — Al-Mumtahanah, “She That Is To Be Examined”. Surah 60 of 114, revealed in Madinah, 13 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/60/.

ONE

The surah in brief

Loyalty belongs to Allah and His believers, not to enemies of the faith: the surah forbids allying with those who fight the religion while permitting kindness to peaceful non-Muslims, cites Ibrahim as a model of loyalty and disavowal, and sets terms for testing migrant women.

Revealed around the time of the conquest of Makkah, Al-Mumtahanah sets the terms of loyalty (wala') and disavowal (bara') for a community surrounded by hostile relatives. It opens by forbidding the believers from taking Allah's enemies as intimate allies, prompted by Hatib ibn Abi Balta'a secretly warning Quraysh, and holds up Ibrahim as the pattern: he disowned his people's idolatry while praying for them. Crucially, it clarifies that disavowal is aimed at hostility, not at kindness itself, so Allah does not forbid goodness and fairness toward those who never fought you over faith. It then legislates the testing of believing women who emigrated and records the pledge (bay'ah) the Prophet took from women.

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 60:1

Hatib ibn Abi Balta'a wrote secretly to the Makkan pagans about the Prophet's plans. 'Ali, az-Zubair and al-Miqdad intercepted the letter carried by a woman, and the Prophet forgave Hatib as one who fought at Badr. Allah revealed the surah forbidding believers to take His enemies as friends.

"Then Allah revealed the Sura"

'Ali ibn Abi Talib · Sahih al-Bukhari 4274

Qur'an 60:8

Asma's non-Muslim mother came to her hoping for kindness, and the Prophet told Asma' to treat her kindly. The verse permitting kindness to those who did not fight Muslims over religion is linked to this by the sub-narrator Ibn 'Uyaina, not by Asma'.

"Ibn 'Uyaina said, 'Then Allah revealed'"

Asma' bint Abi Bakr · Sahih al-Bukhari 5978

Qur'an 60:10

Under the Hudaibiya truce, those who came from Makkah were to be returned. Believing women emigrants came, among them the young Umm Kulthum bint 'Uqba, and when her family asked for her back the Prophet refused because Allah had revealed the verse about examining believing women and not returning them to the disbelievers.

"for Allah had revealed the following Verse regarding women"

Marwan and al-Miswar ibn Makhrama · Sahih al-Bukhari 2711

Qur'an 60:11

After Muslims were ordered to repay pagans what they had spent on wives who emigrated, the pagans refused to pay what Muslims had spent on their own wives. Allah revealed 60:11 so a Muslim whose wife had gone could be compensated.

"When the pagans refused to pay what the Muslims had spent on their wives, Allah revealed"

'Urwa (from 'A'isha) · Sahih al-Bukhari 2733

TWO

Its themes

- Loyalty and disavowal
- The example of Ibrahim
- Kindness to the non-hostile
- Testing the sincerity of faith
- The women's pledge

THREE

Key verses

O ye who believe! Take not my enemies and yours as friends (or protectors),- offering them (your) love, even though they have rejected the Truth that has come to you, and have (on the contrary) driven out the Prophet and yourselves (from your homes), (simply) because ye believe in Allah your Lord! If ye have come out to strive in My Way and to seek My Good Pleasure, (take them not as friends), holding secret converse of love (and friendship) with them: for I know full well all that ye conceal and all that ye reveal. And any of you that does this has strayed from the Straight Path.

Qur'an 60:1

Do not take My enemy and yours as allies, extending them affection. The occasion was a believer leaking intelligence out of family feeling; the verse redirects that affection to its rightful place.

There is for you an excellent example (to follow) in Abraham and those with him, when they said to their people: "We are clear of you and of whatever ye worship besides Allah: we have rejected you, and there has arisen, between us and you, enmity and hatred for ever, - unless ye believe in Allah and Him alone": But not when Abraham said to his father: "I will pray for forgiveness for thee, though I have no power (to get) aught on thy behalf from Allah." (They prayed): "Our Lord! in Thee do we trust, and to Thee do we turn in repentance: to Thee is (our) Final Goal.

Qur'an 60:4

There is an excellent pattern for you in Ibrahim and those with him, who told their people, 'We disown you and what you worship.' Al-Sa'di notes the model is firmness on principle without abandoning the prayer for guidance.

Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loveth those who are just.

Qur'an 60:8

Allah does not forbid kindness and justice toward those who did not fight you over religion nor expel you. Ibn Kathir uses this to show Islam's default toward peaceful non-Muslims is goodness and equity.

O Prophet! When believing women come to thee to take the oath of fealty to thee, that they will not associate in worship any other thing whatever with Allah, that they will not steal, that they will not commit adultery (or fornication), that they will not kill their children, that they will not utter slander, intentionally forging falsehood, and that they will not disobey thee in any just matter,- then do thou receive their fealty, and pray to Allah for the forgiveness (of their sins): for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

Qur'an 60:12

The pledge of the believing women, to not associate partners, steal, or commit indecency, maps a whole ethic of everyday integrity. The Prophet took it by word, not by touching their hands, as A'isha reports.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Al-Mumtahanah (She Who Is Examined) is a Madinan surah that legislates the practical shape of a believer's loyalties. Its opening was occasioned by the case of Hatib ibn Abi Balta'a, a sincere veteran of Badr who, on the eve of the Conquest of Makka, secretly sent word to the Quraysh — moved not by disbelief but by anxiety for his family there. The Prophet ﷺ intercepted the letter, and though Hatib was forgiven, the surah drew the enduring lesson: no ties of kin or interest justify confiding love to those at war with the faith.

The surah takes its name from a later verse (60:10) commanding that believing women who migrated be 'examined' (imtihan) as to their faith, under the terms that had followed the treaty of Hdaybiya. Around these two occasions the surah builds a balanced doctrine of loyalty and disavowal (wala' and bara').

Its character is at once firm and merciful. It draws a hard line against alliance with those who fight the believers over their religion, holds up Ibrahim as the pattern of principled separation, yet insists on justice and kindness toward peaceful others, and holds open the hope that God may yet turn enmity into affection.

How the surah unfolds

It opens by forbidding the believers to take God's enemies and their own as intimate allies, 'extending to them affection' while they have rejected the truth and driven out the Messenger and the believers for believing in God (60:1). If you have gone forth striving in My cause and seeking My pleasure, do not secretly befriend them; I know what you conceal and reveal (60:1). It reminds that if such people gained the upper hand they would be open enemies, stretching out hands and tongues in harm, wishing the believers would disbelieve (60:2); and that on the Day of Resurrection neither kin nor children — the very ties for which one might compromise — will avail (60:3).

The surah then sets Ibrahim before the believers as 'an excellent pattern' (uswa hasana): he and those with him told their people, 'we are free of you and of what you worship besides God; we reject you, and there has appeared between us enmity and hatred forever, until you believe in God alone' (60:4). Only Ibrahim's promise to seek forgiveness for his idolatrous father is excepted from imitation. Their prayer is quoted as the model attitude: 'Our Lord, upon You we rely, to You we turn, and to You is the destination; make us not a trial for the disbelievers, and forgive us' (60:4–5).

It then softens the doctrine with hope and with justice. Perhaps God will place affection between you and those you now hold as enemies, for God is powerful and forgiving (60:7). And the crucial distinction: 'God does not forbid you from being righteous and just toward those who did not fight you over

religion nor drove you from your homes — God loves the just' (60:8). What He forbids is only alliance with those who fought you for your faith, expelled you, or aided your expulsion (60:9).

The surah closes with two rulings and a pledge. Believing women who come as emigrants are to be examined; if found faithful, they are not to be returned to the disbelievers, for the two are no longer lawful to one another, and their disbelieving husbands are to be repaid the dowers they spent (60:10). And the Prophet ﷺ is instructed to accept the allegiance (bay'a) of believing women upon a clear moral code: that they associate nothing with God, nor steal, nor commit adultery, nor kill their children, nor bring forth slander they invent, nor disobey him in what is right (60:12). A final verse repeats the prohibition against allying with a people who have earned God's anger and who despair of the Hereafter (60:13).

The major themes, in depth

The first and governing theme is wala' and bara' rightly balanced. The surah forbids intimate, loving alliance with those actively waging war on the faith — and Hatib's case shows that even a sincere believer's family concerns cannot license it — yet it is emphatic that this is not a licence for hostility toward all non-Muslims. 'God does not forbid you from dealing kindly and justly with those who did not fight you over religion' (60:8). The line is drawn at hostility and aggression against the faith, not at mere difference of belief.

The second theme is Ibrahim as the pattern of principled disavowal. His stance — a clean break from idolatry coupled with reliance on God and a longing for his people's guidance —

models a separation that is doctrinal, not merely tribal, and that carries no cruelty. The Qur'an even flags the one element not to be copied (his prayer for a stubbornly idolatrous father), showing how carefully the pattern is to be followed.

The third theme is that faith, not lineage, now determines belonging. The examination of the migrant women, the severing of marriages across the line of belief, and the historic women's pledge of allegiance all enact a community reconstituted on faith. A believing woman is not to be handed back to disbelief, whatever her origin; her creed, not her tribe, defines where she belongs.

The fourth theme is the mercy that tempers the whole. 'Perhaps God will place affection between you and those you regard as enemies' (60:7) refuses to freeze enmity into a permanent condition. The doctrine of disavowal is held open to the possibility of reconciliation, for hearts are in God's hand.

Points of reflection

The surah asks the believer to examine where his loyalties truly lie, and to be honest — as Hatib's story warns — that fear for family or worldly interest can quietly bend one's allegiance. It teaches that on the Day when kin and children avail nothing, it is faithfulness to God that will matter.

Its command to justice and kindness toward peaceful others (60:8) is a lasting corrective against reading loyalty and disavowal as blanket hostility. The believer is to be a person of *birr* (goodness) and *qist* (fairness) toward all who do not war against his faith — for 'God loves the just.'

And the women's pledge (60:12) offers a timeless moral summary: to worship God alone, to keep hands and honor and speech clean, to protect one's children, and to obey in what is right. It is, in miniature, the ethical life the surah calls every believer to live under the banner of a loyalty ordered by faith.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Anchor your alliances in faith, not sentiment or kinship.
2. Model Ibrahim: firm against falsehood, still praying for people.
3. Disavowal targets hostility, not ordinary kindness and fairness.
4. Hold to the everyday integrity the women's pledge names.

Where this reading draws from. Ibn Kathir, al-Sa'di, al-Qurtubi. 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/.