

Sūrah 65: at-Talāq

Period of Revelation

Abdullah bin Masud has pointed out, and the internal evidence of the “When you marry the believing...” subject matter of the Sūrah confirms the same, that it must have been sent down after those verses of Sūrah al-Baqarah in which commandments concerning divorce were given for the first time. Although it is difficult to determine precisely what is its exact date of revelation, yet the traditions in any case indicate that when the people started making errors in understanding the commandments of Sūrah Al-Baqarah, and practically also they began to commit mistakes, God sent down these instructions for their correction.

Theme and Subject Matter

In order to understand the commandments of this Sūrah, it would be useful to refresh one’s memory about the instructions which have been given in the Qur’ān concerning divorce and the waiting period (Iddat) above.

“Divorce is twice. Then [after that], either keep [her] in an acceptable manner or release [her] with good treatment.”

Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:229

“Divorced women remain in waiting [i.e., do not marry] for three periods, and it is not lawful for them to conceal what God has created in their wombs if they believe in God and the Last Day. And their husbands have more right to take them back in this [period] if they want reconciliation.”

Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:228

“And if he has divorced her [for the third time], then she is not lawful to him afterward until [after] she marries a husband...”

Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:230

“O You who have believed, when you marry believing women and then divorce them before you have touched them [i.e., consummated the marriage], then there is not for you any waiting period to count concerning them. So provide for them and give them a gracious release.”

Sūrah al-Ahzāb 33:49

“And those who are taken in death among you and leave wives behind - they, [the wives, shall] wait four months and ten [days].”

Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:234

The rules prescribed in these verses were as follows:

1. A man can pronounce at the most three divorces on his wife.
2. In case the husband has pronounced one or two divorces he is entitled to keep the woman back as his wife within the waiting period and if after the expiry of the waiting period the two desire to re-marry, they can re-marry; there is no condition of legalization (tahlil). But if the husband has pronounced three divorces, he forfeits his right to keep her as his wife within the waiting period, and they cannot re-marry unless the woman remarries another husband and he subsequently divorces her of his own free will.
3. The waiting period of the woman, who menstruates and marriage with whom has been consummated, is that she should pass three monthly courses. The waiting period in case of one or two divorces is that the woman is still the legal wife of the husband and he can keep her back as his wife

within the waiting period. But if the husband has pronounced three divorces, this waiting period cannot be taken advantage of for the purpose of reconciliation, but it is only meant to restrain the woman from re-marrying another person before it comes to an end.

4. There is no waiting period for the woman, marriage with whom has not been consummated, and who is divorced even before she is touched. She can re-marry, if she likes, immediately after the divorce.
5. The waiting period of the woman whose husband dies, is four months and ten days.

Here, one should understand well that Sūrah at-Talaq was not sent down to annul any of these rules or amend it, but it was sent down for two purposes: first, that the man who has been given the right to pronounce divorce should be taught such judicious methods of using this right as do not lead to separation, as far as possible however, if separation does take place, it should only be in case all possibilities of mutual reconciliation have been exhausted. For in the Divine Law provision for divorce has been made only as an unavoidable necessity; otherwise God does not approve that the marriage relationship that has been established between a man and a woman should ever break. The Prophet has said “*God has not made lawful anything more hateful in His sight than divorce.*” And: “*Of all the things permitted by the Law, the most hateful in the sight of God is the divorce.*” (Abu Dawud)

The second object was to complement this section of the family law of Islām by supplying answers to the questions that had remained after the revelation of the commandments in Sūrah al-Baqarah. So, answers have been supplied to the following questions: What would be the waiting period of the women, marriage with whom has been consummated and who no longer menstruate, or those who have not yet menstruated, in case they are divorced? What would be the waiting period of the woman, who is pregnant, or the woman whose husband dies, if she is divorced? And what arrangements would be made for the maintenance and lodging of the different categories of divorced women, and for the fosterage of the child whose parents have separated on account of a divorce?

Sūrah 65: at-Talāq¹⁵⁷⁰

In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate,
the Most Merciful

1. O Prophet, when you [Muslims] divorce women, divorce them for [the commencement of] their waiting period¹⁵⁷¹ and keep count of the waiting period, and fear God, your Lord. Do not turn them out of their [husbands'] houses, nor should they [themselves] leave [during that period] unless they are committing a clear immorality. And those are the limits [set by] God. And whoever transgresses the limits of God has certainly wronged himself. You know not; perhaps God will bring about after that a [different] matter.¹⁵⁷²
2. And when they have [nearly] fulfilled their term, either retain them according to acceptable terms or part with them according to acceptable terms. And bring to witness two just men from among you and establish the testimony for [the acceptance of] God. That is instructed to whoever should believe in God and the Last day. And whoever fears God - He will make for him a way out¹⁵⁷³
3. And will provide for him from where he does not expect. And whoever relies upon God - then He is sufficient for him. Indeed, God will accomplish His purpose. God has already set for everything a [decreed] extent.
4. And those who no longer expect menstruation among your women - if you doubt, then their period is three months, and [also for] those who have not menstruated. And for those who are pregnant, their term is until they give birth.¹⁵⁷⁴ And whoever fears God - He will make for him of his matter ease.
5. That is the command of God, which He has sent down to you; and whoever fears God - He will remove for him his misdeeds and make great for him his reward.
6. Lodge them¹⁵⁷⁵ [in a section] of where you dwell out of your means and do not harm them in order to oppress them.¹⁵⁷⁶ And if they should be pregnant, then spend on them until they give birth. And if they breastfeed for you, then give them their payment and confer among yourselves in the acceptable way; but if you are in discord, then there may breastfeed for him [i.e., the father] another woman.¹⁵⁷⁷
7. Let a man of wealth spend from his wealth, and he whose provision is restricted - let him spend from what God has given him. God does not charge a soul except [according to] what He has given it. God will bring about, after hardship, ease [i.e., relief].
8. And how many a city was insolent toward the command of its Lord and His messengers, so We took it to severe ac-

¹⁵⁷⁰ *At-Talāq*: Divorce.

¹⁵⁷¹ See rulings in 2:228-233. A wife should not be divorced except after the completion of her menstrual period but before sexual intercourse has occurred, or else during a confirmed pregnancy. The pronouncement of divorce begins her waiting period (*'iddah*).

¹⁵⁷² Such as regret or renewed desire for the wife.

¹⁵⁷³ i.e., relief from distress.

¹⁵⁷⁴ The ruling concerning pregnancy applies also in the case of the husband's death.

¹⁵⁷⁵ During their waiting period (referring to wives whose divorce has been pronounced).

¹⁵⁷⁶ So that they would be forced to leave or ransom themselves.

¹⁵⁷⁷ See 2:233.

count and punished it with a terrible punishment.

9. And it tasted the bad consequence of its affair [i.e., rebellion], and the outcome of its affair was loss.
10. God has prepared for them a severe punishment; so fear God, O you of understanding who have believed. God has sent down to you a message [i.e., the Qur'ān].¹⁵⁷⁸
11. [He sent] a Messenger [i.e., Muhammad] reciting to you the distinct verses of God that He may bring out those who believe and do righteous deeds from darkneses into the light. And whoever believes in God and does righteousness - He will admit him into gardens beneath which rivers flow to abide therein forever. God will have perfected for him a provision.
12. It is God who has created seven heavens and of the earth, the like of them.¹⁵⁷⁹ [His] command descends among them so you may know that God is over all things competent and that God has encompassed all things in knowledge.

¹⁵⁷⁸ Some scholars have interpreted “*dhikr*” here as “a reminder,” meaning the Messenger, since he is mentioned in the following verse.

¹⁵⁷⁹ i.e., a similar number: seven.