

Surah 2. Al-Baqara

Asad: But whenever he prevails, he goes about the earth spreading corruption and destroying [man's] tilth and progeny:¹⁸⁹ and God does not love corruption.

Malik: And when he leaves you, he directs his efforts towards causing mischief in the land, destroying crops and cattle. Allah, Whom he makes his witness, does not like mischief.

Mustafa Khattab:

And when they leave ?you?,¹ they strive throughout the land to spread mischief in it and destroy crops and cattle. Allah does not like mischief.

Pickthall: And when he turneth away (from thee) his effort in the land is to make mischief therein and to destroy the crops and the cattle; and Allah loveth not mischief.

Yusuf Ali: When he turns his back his aim everywhere is to spread mischief through the earth and destroy crops and cattle. But Allah loveth not mischief.

Transliteration: Waitha tawalla saAAa fee alardi liyufsida feeha wayuhlika alhartha waalInnasla waAllahu la yuhibbu alfasada

Author Comments

189 - Lit., "he hastens about the earth (or "strives on earth") to spread corruption therein and to destroy tilth and progeny". Most of the commentators see in this sentence an indication of a conscious intent on the part of the person thus described; but it is also possible that the particle li in li-yufsida (generally taken to mean "in order that he might spread corruption") plays in this context the role of what the grammarians call a lam al-'aqibah, "the [letter] lam used to denote a consequence" - i.e., regardless of the existence or non-existence of a conscious intent. (By rendering the sentence the way I do it, both possibilities are left open.) As regards the expression harth (rendered by me as "tilth"), its primary significance is "gain" or "acquisition" through labour; and thus it often signifies "worldly goods" (see Lane II, 542), and especially the crops obtained by tilling land, as well as the tilled land itself. If harth is understood in this context as "tilth", it would apply, metaphorically, to human endeavours in general, and to social endeavours in particular. However, some commentators - basing their opinion on the Qur'anic sentence, "your wives are your tilth" (2:223)- maintain that harth stands here for "wives" (cf. Razi, and the philologist Al-Azhari, as quoted in Manar II, 248): in which case the "destruction of tilth and progeny" would be synonymous with an upsetting of family life and, consequently, of the entire social fabric. According to either of these two interpretations, the passage has the following meaning: As soon as the mental attitude described above is generally accepted and made the basis of social behaviour, it unavoidably results in widespread moral decay and, consequently, social disintegration.

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Another possible translation: "And when they assume authority, they strive ..."

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