

From the Madinan period, *Āl ‘Imrān*, or “The House of ‘Imrān,” refers to the family line, or “house,” of ‘Imrān mentioned in v. 33. Early in the *sūrah* there is a discussion of the interpretation of the Quran (v. 7), raising questions of its levels of meaning and the spiritual qualities necessary to understand the depths of the text. Among the events of sacred history described in this *sūrah* are the birth and early life of Mary, the mother of Jesus (vv. 35–43), the birth of Jesus (vv. 45–47), his miracles (v. 49), and his relationship with his apostles (vv. 52–57). Like *al-Baqarah*, this *sūrah* addresses the status of the People of the Book, both Jews and Christians, criticizing them strongly, but also distinguishing between the good and the bad among them and affirming their belief in God and the uprightness of some among them (vv. 61–115, 199). A considerable portion of this *sūrah* is devoted to the events of the Battle of Uḥud (3/625), the second major battle that followed the first battle, the Battle of Badr. In this second battle the community of believers fought the Makkans at the foot of Mt. Uḥud, outside Madinah. This part of the *sūrah* also deals, among other matters, with the moral issues of cowardice, hypocrisy, and worldly attachment and theological questions such as the state of souls once they leave this worldly existence (vv. 121–79). It is said that the first part of this chapter (between thirty to eighty verses according to various opinions) was revealed on the occasion of the visit to Madinah of a delegation of Christians from Najrān, one of whom was said to be honored by the Byzantines for his knowledge of religion (R). According to the traditional accounts, it was reported that in the course of the debate with the Prophet they said that Jesus was God, because he revived the dead, healed lepers, and spoke of unseen realities; that he was the son of God, because he had no human father; and that he was the third of three, because in scripture God says, “We did/made,” and so on, whereas if He were not three, He would have said, “I did/made.” The account also reports that the Prophet asked the following set of questions, which were followed by the Christians’ responses: “Do you not know that there is no child who does not resemble his father?” “Yes.” “Do you not know that our Lord is Living and does not die, and that Jesus is subject to passing away (ya’tī ‘alayhi’l-fanā’)?” “Yes.” “Do you not know that our Lord sustains all things, preserving them, guarding them, providing for them?” “Yes.” “Was Jesus able to do any of those things?” “No.” “Do you not know that nothing on earth or in heaven is hidden from God most high?” “Yes.” “Did Jesus know aught of it save what he was taught?” “No.” “Do you know not that God formed Jesus in the womb as He willed, and that our Lord does not eat food, nor consume drink, nor defecate?” “Yes.” “Do you not know that [in the case of] Jesus his mother bore him as women do, then gave birth to him as women do, then fed him as children are fed, after which he ate food, drank, and defecated?” “Yes.” “So how can it be as you allege?” According to the account, it was after this that the first part of the chapter was revealed (Al, Ṭ). *Āl ‘Imrān* follows *al-Baqarah*, and in some of the *aḥādīth* describing the various “virtues” of the Quran it is paired with *al-Baqarah* and the two are called the “radiant ones” (*al-zahrāwiyān*): “Recite the Quran, and it will intercede on the Day of Resurrection for those who are devoted to it. And recite the two radiant ones, *al-Baqarah* and *Āl ‘Imrān*, which will come on the Day of Resurrection as if they were two clouds, or like two rays of the sun, or like two flocks of birds that will argue on behalf of their devotees