

09. Sûrahs 6 - 16



Sûrah Six

(from Mecca).

Much of this section focuses on the Oneness of God and on what will happen to those who believe and to those who disbelieve. It makes the claim that pagan Arabs, as well as Jewish and Christian Arabs, will find forgiveness from the Merciful God if they submit to God as revealed in the Qur'an. People who persist in rejecting God and God's revelation will suffer the consequences.

Sûrah 6:39 *‘Whomsoever God will, He leads astray, and whomsoever He will, He places him upon a straight path’.*

The Qur’an assumes that whatever happens is ultimately the work of God. See our earlier reflections. Thanks to Jesus Christians have learned that God loves all that God has made. He does not control creation, but respects the freedom given to the universe, and especially to us human beings. It is not God who *leads astray*. It is our own sinful refusal to welcome God’s love.

Sûrah 6:100-101 *'They make the jinn [spirits of an order lower than angels] partners unto God, though He created them, and falsely attribute sons and daughters to Him, without any knowledge. Glory be to Him! Exalted is He above that which they ascribe! The unique Originator of the heavens and the earth! How should He have a child when he has no consort'.*

The Quran is speaking primarily of the pagan polytheists, though Muhammad thought (wrongly) that Christians taught that God had a mother (Mary) and a child (Jesus). See reflections on Christian monotheism in Presentation 3.

Sûrah 6:101-102 *'He created all things, and He is Knower of all things? That is God, your Lord, there is no God but He, Creator of all things. So worship Him. And He is Guardian over all things'.*

We Christians share this belief with our Muslim brothers and sisters.

Sûrah Seven (from Mecca).

This section is largely an appeal to the pagans, especially it seems Muhammad's own tribe, the Quraysh of Mecca. Muhammad reminds them of ancient Arab messengers from God and their refusal to heed God's word.

The section draws heavily on the Jewish Scriptures: the story of the fall of Adam and Eve (verses 27-28); the story of Noah (verse 59); the destruction of Sodom (verses 80-84); Moses, the Pharaoh, and the plagues of Egypt (verses 103-137; the crossing of the Red Sea (verse 138); the giving of the Torah (verses 142-145); the worship of the golden calf (verses 148-154); the 70 men given the gift of prophesy (verse 155); Moses striking the rock (verse 160); the manna from heaven (verse 160).

Sûrah 7:42-43 *‘As for those who believe and perform righteous deeds – We task no one beyond their capacity – it is they who are the inhabitants of the Garden; they shall abide therein. And We will remove whatever rancour lies within their breasts. Rivers shall run below them. And they will say, “Praise be to God, Who guided us into this. We would not have been rightly guided, had not God guided us. The messengers of our Lord certainly brought the truth’.*

This is one among many texts where the Quran holds out the promise of Paradise to those *‘who believe and perform righteous deeds’.*

Sûrah 7:55 *'Call upon your Lord humbly and in secret'.*

Jesus' call is similar: 'Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you' (Matthew 6:5-6).

Sûrah Eight (from Medina).

This section deals, for the most part, with a revelation concerning the spoils of war, resulting from the victory of the Muslims at Badr against the army of the Quraysh from Mecca.

Commentators disagree as to who is being addressed in the following verse. If it is addressed to the Quraysh, the first sentence is ironical. They sought victory and it has come, but not to them. God has given victory – but to the *'believers'*, the Muslims.

Sûrah 8:19 'If you seek victory, then victory has come to you. If you desist it would be better for you. If you return We shall return, and your company will not avail you aught, even if they be many. Know that God is with the believers'.

Muhammad and his followers were doing what was customary among the Arabian tribes. They were attacking other tribes for booty and power. In this instance they were fighting for their life against the Quraysh of Mecca, Muhammad's own tribe. The fact that they were victorious was for them a sign that God was with them.

In Presentation 6 we examined the Qur'an's teaching about divine authorisation for the use of force to defend Islam and to propagate it. It is a key theme in this surah.

Sarah 8:12 *'I shall cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve. So strike above the neck, and strike their every fingertip'.*

Sûrah 8:39 *'Fight them until there is no strife, and religion is wholly for God'.*

Sûrah 8:41 *'Know that whatsoever you take as spoils, a fifth is for God and the Messenger, and for kinsfolk, orphans, the indigent, and the traveller' .*

Sûrah 8:45 *'O you who believe! When you meet a company in battle, be firm and remember God much, that haply you may prosper' .*

Sûrah 8:60 *'Prepare for them what you can of strength [of arms] and horses tethered [for battle]. Frightening thereby the enemy of God and your enemy, and others besides them whom you know not. God knows them. Whatsoever you spend in the way of God will be paid unto you in full. And you shall not be wronged' .*

Sûrah 8:65 *'O prophet! Rouse the believers to fight'.*

Sûrah 8:67 *'It is not for a prophet to take captives until he overwhelms his enemy in the land'.*

See Presentation 6 on the use of force to propagate Islam. There is nothing parallel in the Christian Scriptures. Christianity is a movement of people who are inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus. It is not, in itself, a political movement.

In 380AD Emperor Theodosius I made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. After that it was possible for a state made up of Christians to wage war, as Jews had done, and as Muslims were to do. When so-called Christian states did this, they were acting as states, not as Christians. It was Jesus' teaching that we should love our enemies because God loves them.

In the early centuries when Christianity suffered persecution, it grew, not by the power of the sword, but through the attraction of love and the meaning it offered people.

Sûrah Nine (from Medina).

Much of the section is addressed to those who failed to join Muhammad in his campaigns.

Sûrah 9:5 'When the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters wheresoever you find them, capture them, besiege them, and lie in wait for them in every place of ambush. But if they repent and perform the prayer and give the alms, then let them go their way. Truly, God is Forgiving, Merciful'.

See Presentation 6 on the use of force to propagate Islam.

Sûrah 9:30-31 *'The Jews say that Ezra is the son of God; and the Christians say that the Messiah is the son of God. Those are words from their mouths. They resemble those who disbelieved before. God curse them! How they are perverted! They have taken their rabbis and monks as lords apart from God, as well as the Messiah, son of Mary, though they were commanded to worship one God. There is no God but He! Glory be to Him above the partners they ascribe'.*

We do not know what Muhammad might have heard Jews saying, but, as far as the Jewish Scriptures are concerned, the Qur'an is wrong about Ezra. The Jewish Scriptures see him as God's faithful priest, not as the son of God. It also misunderstands the Christian teaching about Jesus. See our earlier treatment of this. Christians do not believe that Jesus is a second God. It is one thing to listen to these words coming from Muhammad. It is another to be asked to accept them as coming from God and expressing God's judgment of Jews and Christians!

To fulfil the mission given him by God, Muhammad relied on God's authorisation to spread belief by force of arms: *'to prevail over all religion'* (verse 33).

Sûrah 9:63 *'Do they not know that whosoever opposes God and His Messenger, surely for him will be the Fire of Hell, to abide therein?'*

In Presentation 5 we compared the Muslim and the Christian teaching on hell.

Sûrah 9:71 *'The believing men and believing women are friends of one another'.*

One of the reasons for Muhammad's success in achieving power was to replace the relationships that bound people to their family and tribe with the bond of being Muslim. For Christians, too, there is a strong bond among those who share faith in Jesus and in God as revealed by him.

Luke quotes a saying of Jesus that sounds shocking, if we fail to understand the Aramaic idiom he is using: **'Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple'** (Luke 14:26). When 'love' and 'hate' are contrasted in Aramaic they do not refer to feelings of antipathy or attraction. They speak of choice, of preference.

The decision to believe in Jesus as God's Self-revelation is a radical one. We must, as Jesus says elsewhere: 'Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well' (Matthew 6:33). We are to 'love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might' (Deuteronomy 6:5; repeated by Jesus in Matthew 22:37). We are to love 'father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and ourselves' in God. We are to love them with the sacred love that binds us to them in God.

Sûrah 9:73 *'O Prophet! Strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites and be harsh with them. Their refuge is Hell. What an evil journey's end!'*

See the earlier reflections in Presentation 5 on hell as in the New Testament and in the Qur'an.

Sûrah 9:80 *'If thou seekest forgiveness for them seventy times, God will not forgive them. That is because they disbelieve in God and His Messenger, and God guides not iniquitous people'.*

Jesus had a very different image of God! To be forgiven we must open our hearts to welcome God's offer of grace, but from God's side, God is love and is always ready to forgive. There are no limits to God's offer of forgiveness and guidance. God continues to love and guide 'iniquitous people'.

Jesus tells a story about a rich man who showed no care for a poor man lying at his gate (Luke 16:19-31). Both die. The poor man is in heaven. The rich man is in hell. It is too late for forgiveness, not because God has stopped loving, but because love does not force itself upon anyone, and the rich man has locked himself into a place where God's love cannot reach. It matters how we behave and it matters eternally. We are foolish to put off repentance.

Sûrah 9:84 *'Never pray over one of them (disbelievers) who dies, nor stand by his grave'.*

We are a long way from Jesus' command that we love our enemies (Matthew 5:44).

Sûrah 9:129 *'God suffices me. There is no God but He. In Him do I trust'.*

Christians would joyfully share this beautiful prayer of trust with our Muslim brothers and sisters. The expression *'In God let the believers trust'* is found throughout the Qur'an (see Sûrahs 3:122, 160; 5:11; 9:51; 12:67; 14:11-12; 39:38; 58:10; 64:13).

At the Last Supper, before his passion and death, Jesus pleaded with his disciples: 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me' (John 14:1).

Paul writes: 'I know the one in whom I have put my trust' (2 Timothy 1:12).

Peter writes: 'Through Christ you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God' (1 Peter 1:21).

Sûrah Ten (from Mecca)

.Sûrah 10:15 'When Our signs are recited unto them as clear proofs, those who anticipate not the meeting with Us say "Bring a Quran other than this, or alter it." Say, "It is not for me to alter it of my own accord. I follow only that which is revealed to me'.

In Presentation 4 we saw how the Quran explains the contradictory statements found in it. Put simply: God can do anything God chooses to do. God is not bound by human reason and logic. God is free to abrogate a revelation and replace it with another. God is free to do this, but, as this sûrah states, Muhammad is not. He can only say what has been revealed to him.

Sûrah 10:80-91 speaks of Moses, Aaron and the Pharaoh of Egypt.

It draws on the Jewish Scriptures for examples of God warning people to follow God's way. When we neglect to do so, there is punishment. Sometimes, as, for example, with Jonah (see verse 99), people heed the warning, repent, and are forgiven.

The Qur'an challenges the Jews to heed the warning God is giving them through Muhammad. If they listen and repent, God '*the Forgiving, the Merciful*' (verse 108) will bless them.

Sûrah Eleven (from Mecca).

Sûrah 11:2 *‘Worship none but God. Truly I am a warner for Him, and a bearer of glad tidings’.*

We reflected on Muhammad as a warner and bearer of glad tidings when we looked at the Qur’an’s teaching on hell (Presentation 5).

After speaking of reward and punishment, this section focuses on the story of Noah (verses 25-48), which tells of God’s punishment and God’s favour. It reminds the people that those who did not listen to the warning given by Noah were destroyed. It will be the same for those who reject the warning God is giving through Muhammad.

We hear too of three Arabian prophets who, like Noah, were saved by God from the catastrophe that fell on the people: Hûd (verses 50-60); Sâlih (verses 61-68); and Shu‘ayb (verses 84-88; identified by some with Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law).

Sûrah 11 speaks, too, of the story of Abraham and Lot (verses 70-83), and Isaac and Jacob (verse 71).

Sûrah 11:75 *‘Truly Abraham was clement, tender-hearted, penitent.’*

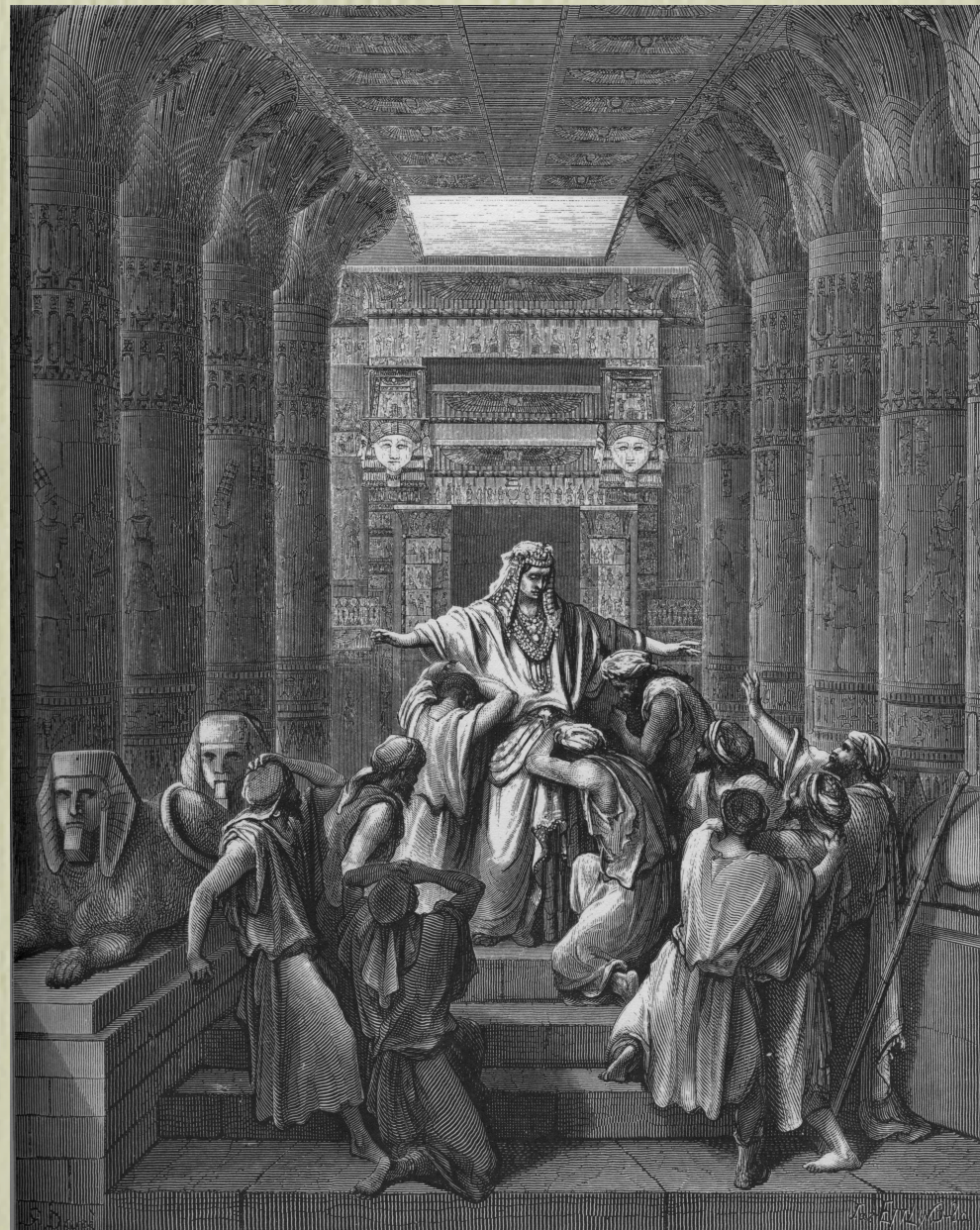
Muhammad saw himself as being called by God to draw Jews, Christians and the polytheistic tribes to follow faithfully the religion of Abraham.

Jesus challenged his contemporaries: ‘If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing what Abraham did’ (John 8:39).

Paul speaks of ‘those who share the faith of Abraham who is the father of all of us’ (Romans 4:16).

Sûrah Twelve (from Mecca).

This sûrah is a re-telling of the story of Joseph (see Genesis 37-50).



Sûrah Thirteen (from Mecca).

This section focuses on God as Creator, on God's revelation through Muhammad and on God's reward for the good and punishment of the evil.

Sûrah 13:30 'Thus have We sent thee unto a community, before whom other communities have passed away; that thou mayest recite to them what We have revealed to thee; yet they disbelieve in the Compassionate. Say, He is my Lord; there is no god but He. In Him do I trust and to Him I turn'.

Giving expression to Christian monotheism Paul writes: 'For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist' (1 Corinthians 8:6). 'There is one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all' (Ephesians 4:6).

That God is compassionate is at the heart of Jesus' revelation (see the commentary on Sûrah 1). On trust see the reflection on Sûrah 9:129.

Sûrah Fourteen

(from Mecca)

This section speaks of God's choice of Moses and Abraham and the importance of heeding what God revealed through them.

Sûrah 14:1 *'This is a Book that we have sent down unto thee, that thou mightest bring forth mankind out of darkness into light, by the leave of their Lord, to the path of the Mighty, the Praised'.*

We find this theme of darkness and light repeated often in the Christian Gospels. Jesus said to a leading Jew: **"This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God"** (John 3:19-21).

Sûrah 14:49-52 *‘On that Day thou wilt see the guilty bound together in fetters, their garments made of pitch, and the Fire covering their faces, that God may recompense every soul for that which it has earned; surely God is swift in reckoning. This is a proclamation unto mankind that they may be warned thereby, and that they may know that He is the One God, and that the possessors of intellect might be reminded’.*

In Presentation 5 we compared the Muslim and the Christian view on Hell. Jesus showed us that God is love, and nothing we can do will change that. Love cannot force itself upon another. We are free to accept or reject God’s love and our acceptance or rejection has consequences. These are not a reward or a punishment from a judge. It is we who choose heaven (communion with God) by welcoming God’s love, or hell (separation from God) by obstinate, persistent, refusal of love.

Sûrah Fifteen (from Mecca)

This section includes the story of the creation of man from clay and God's Spirit (verses 26-29).

The refusal of the idolaters of Mecca to acknowledge Muhammad as God's prophet is compared to the refusal of a leading angel to prostrate himself before man (verse 31). This angel (Iblis, Satan, the Devil) was cast out of paradise and tempts people to evil (verses 34-50).

Also in the sûrah is the story of the heavenly guests who told Abraham he would have a son, and of Lot's escape from the destruction of Sodom (verses 51-74). The sûrah presents this as a sign of how God treats unbelievers: those who do not accept the Qur'an as God's revelation or Muhammad as God's Messenger (verses 77-84).

Sûrah Sixteen

(from Mecca)

This is a treatise on Providence.

Sûrah 16:18 'Were you to count the blessings of God you could not number them'.

Paul writes: 'God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work' (2Corinthians 9:8).

Sûrah 16:93 'Had God willed, He would have made you one community. But He leads astray whomever He will and guides whomever He will'.

We Christians do not put limits on God's power, but, thanks to the revelation given us by Jesus, we see God as 'Love'. This means that true power is the power of love. It is God's Love that knows no limit.

God has given us freedom and does not control our use of freedom. If we choose a destructive path, it is not God who leads us astray.

Sûrah 16:101-102 *‘When we replace one sign with another – and God knows best that which He sends down – they say, “you are only a fabricator.” Nay but most of them do not know. Say, “the Holy Spirit has brought it down from thy Lord to make firm those who believe, and as guidance and glad tidings for those who submit’.*

This is yet another attempt to deal with the contradictions that occur in the Qur’an. See our reflections in Presentation 4. See also Sûrah 10:15. It acknowledges that God is free to ‘replace one sign with another’ and asserts that God is testing us to ‘submit’ to His revelation even when we cannot resolve the contradiction.

You Raise Me Up. Graham / Lovland

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