

12. Sûrahs 47 - 69



The Flood Gustave Doré

Sûrah Forty-seven (Medina)

Sûrah 47:2 *‘Those who believe and perform righteous deeds, and believe what has been sent down unto Muhammad – and it is the truth from their Lord – He has absolved them from their evil deeds and set their state aright’.*

Those who believe in God and in the revelation given them through Muhammad, and ‘perform righteous deeds’ have their sins forgiven.

We Christians have a similar belief. When a person genuinely converts to Christianity and is welcomed into the community in Baptism, all his or her previous sins are absolved. We are, in Paul’s words: ‘justified by faith’ (Romans 3:28), ‘justified by God’s grace as a gift’ (Romans 3:24). Faith is not something we do. It is something we receive. It is Jesus’ own faith in God that we receive as a gift, and it enables us to share in Jesus’ communion with God.

Sûrah 47:4 *‘When you meet those who disbelieve, strike at their necks; then, when you have overwhelmed them, tighten the bonds. Then free them graciously or hold them for ransom, till war lays down its burdens. Thus [shall it be]’.*

See Presentation 6 for an analysis of the Qur’an’s teaching on God’s authorisation of violence in defence of and propagation of Islam.

Sûrah 47:4-6 *‘As for those who are slain in the way of God, He will not make their deeds go astray. He will guide them and set their state aright, and cause them to enter the Garden, having made it known to them’.*

Tragically, it is verses such as these that are used to justify and encourage suicide bombers.

Sûrah 47:33-34 *'O you who believe! Obey God and obey the Messenger, and let not your deeds be in vain. Truly, those who disbelieve and turn from the way of God, then die when they are disbelievers, God will not forgive them'.*

Throughout the Qur'an, and essential to Islam, is the teaching that people cannot obey God unless they obey Muhammad.

Christians would use similar language in regard to Jesus, but the basis for the belief is different. In Islam it is through Muhammad that God reveals God's will, and it is expressed in the Qur'an. In Christianity, Jesus in his person is God's Self-revelation. To see Jesus is to see how God has chosen to reveal God's self in a human being. Our sacred literature, the New Testament, is an inspired response to Jesus. It is not itself God's revelation, and so can be, in fact must be, understood according to the rules of literary interpretation. The Scriptures were born in a particular culture and must be understood in their context.

Muslim Community



Qur'an

New Testament



Christian Community



Jesus

Sûrah Forty-eight (Medina)

The occasion for this sûrah was a truce that permitted the Muslims to enter Mecca and go to the Ka'bah. This enabled the pilgrims to mix with the people of Mecca and many joined the Muslims.

Sûrah 48:8-9 *'Truly, We have sent thee as a witness and a bearer of glad tidings and as a warner, that mankind may believe in God and His Messenger, and support Him and honour Him, and that you may glorify Him morning and evening'.*

Sûrah 48:28 *'He it is Who sent His Messenger with guidance and the Religion of Truth, to make it prevail over all religion'.*

See the commentary on Sûrah 9:33.

Sûrah Forty-nine (Medina)

This is concerned with showing respect to Muhammad, and how Muslims should treat each other as brothers.

Sûrah 49:7 *‘Know that the Messenger of God is among you. Were he to obey you in many matters, you would suffer. But God has caused you to love faith and has made it seem fair in your hearts, and He has caused you to despise disbelief, iniquity and disobedience. Such are they who have been rightly guided’.*

Sûrah 49:9 *‘If two parties among the believers fall to fighting, make peace between them. If one of them aggresses against the other, fight those who aggress until they return to God’s command. If they return, make peace between them with justice, and act equitably’.*

This is an enlightened policy for seventh century Arabia.

Sûrah 49:14 *‘The Bedouin say, “We believe.” Say, “You believe not”. Rather say, ‘We have submitted,’ for belief has not yet entered your hearts. Yet if you obey God and His Messenger, He will not diminish for you aught of your deeds. Truly God is Forgiving, Merciful.’*

The Study Quran states: ‘This verse indicates that belief is of a higher rank than submission, that faith has degrees, and that tribal affiliations are superseded by those of faith’ (page 1262 column 2).

Sûrah 49:15 *‘Only they are believers who believe in God and His Messenger, then do not doubt, and strive [jahada] with their wealth and their lives in the way of God. It is they who are the truthful’.*

See Presentation 6 where we examined the use of ‘jahada’ in the Qur’an. It speaks of striving to submit to God’s will, including God’s will that the Muslims use force to defend and propagate Islam.

Sûrah Fifty

(Mecca)

Sûrah 50:28 *‘Dispute not before Me, since I have already presented unto you the Threat’.*

The Study Quran states: “Some read threat here as a reference to the Quran, since to warn people of the impending punishment is considered a function of all revelation and is a central theme of the Quran’ (page 1269, column 1).

Sûrah 50:39-40 *‘Bear patiently what they say, and hymn the praise of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before the setting. And at night glorify Him, and after prostrations’.*

Ritual Prayer is one of the five pillars of Islam.

Sûrah Fifty-One (Mecca)

This tells the story of the heavenly guests who told Abraham that he would have a son (verses 24-31). It speaks also of the destruction of Sodom (verses 32-37), and of Pharaoh's army in the sea (verses 38-40), and Noah (verses 46-50).

These are among Muhammad's recurring stories that warn people of the punishment that awaits them if they do not believe and submit to God's will as revealed through Moses, through Jesus, and now, finally, through Muhammad, the '*seal of the prophets*' (see Sûrah 33:40).

Sûrah Fifty-two (Mecca)

Sûrah 52:7-8 *‘Truly, thy Lord’s Punishment shall come to pass. None can avert it’.*

Sûrah Fifty-three (Mecca)

Sûrah 53:1-18 speaks of Muhammad’s visions, including his Night Journey and Ascension.

Sûrah Fifty-four (Mecca)

Much of this sûrah focuses on divine warnings of punishment. ‘Warnings’ occurs 11 times.

Sûrah 54:17 *‘In truth, We have made the Quran easy to remember, so is there any who remembers?’.*

Sûrah Fifty-five (Mecca)

The Sûrah speaks of *'The Compassionate' (al-Raḥmân)*. It is a hymn of praise of the Creator, who transcends God's wonderful creation.

Among the pleasures in store for believers are *'maidens of modest gaze, whom neither man nor jinn has ever touched'* (verse 56), *'good and beautiful ones'* (verse 70), *'maidens secluded in pavilions'* (verse 72), *'untouched as yet by man or jinn'* (verse 74). *'They recline upon green cushions and beautiful wonders'* (verse 76).

We examined this and similar passages in Presentation 5 when we reflected on the Qur'an's teaching on the relations between men and women.



Let there be light Gustave Doré

Sûrah Fifty-six (Mecca)

This Sûrah is concerned with Judgment. It describes the condition of *'the Foremost'* in the Gardens of Delight on the Day of Judgment (verses 10-23).

Sûrah 56:17-22 lists among the joys of Paradise: *'Immortal youths wait upon them with goblets, ewers and a cup from a flowing spring ... with fruits as they choose and the meat of birds as they desire, and wide-eyed maidens, the likeness of concealed pearls'*.

On the right hand (verses 27-37) are *'virgins, amorous peers'* (verses 36-37). On the left hand (verses 41-43) *'scorching wind and boiling liquid, and the shadow of black smoke'* (verses 42-43).

Sûrah Fifty-seven (Medina)

Sûrah 57:16 'Has not the time come for those who believe for their hearts to be humbled to the remembrance of God and the truth that has come down, and to be not like those who were given the Book aforetime? But the span of time was too long for them, such that their hearts hardened and many of them are iniquitous'.

The Qur'an wants those who submit to God as Muslims to be more faithful than many Jews or Christians have been.

Sûrah 57:20 'In the Hereafter there shall be severe punishment, forgiveness from God and contentment, and the life of this world is naught but the enjoyment of delusion'.

The Study Quran quotes Ibn ‘Ajibah: “The world is something that appears beautiful on the outside, but that conceals what is ugly within it, like one who tricks people, and then cheats them. The world appears to those who pursue it as sweetness and infatuation, overtaking them little by little, until they become totally entangled in it and neglect all preparation for the Hereafter. Life passes from their hand in vanity, and the world continues to delude and betray them until it brings them bankrupt to the moment of their death’ (page 1337, col. 2).

‘The world’ can have negative connotations in the Christian Scriptures. Jesus says: ‘The world hates me because I testify against it that its works are evil’ (John 7:7). He is speaking of the world insofar as it is closed to God.

Fundamentally the Christian view of the world is positive: ‘God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him’ (John 3:16-17).

Sûrah 57:26-27 *‘We sent Noah and Abraham and established prophethood and the Book among their progeny. And among them is he who is rightly guided, yet many of them are iniquitous. Then We sent Our messengers to follow in their footsteps, and We sent Jesus, son of Mary, and We gave him the Gospel and placed kindness and mercy in the hearts of those who follow him. And monasticism they invented – We did not ordain it for them – only to seek God’s Contentment. Yet they did not observe it with proper observance. So We gave those of them who believed their reward, yet many of them are iniquitous’.*

There has been a shift since the judgment of Christians in Sûrah 5:82: *‘Thou wilt surely find the nearest in affection toward those who believe to be those who say, “We are Christians”. That is because among them are priests and monks, and because they are not arrogant’.*

Sûrah Fifty-eight (Medina)

This is a revelation in response to a woman who complained to Muhammad that her husband had sent her away for no good reason.

Sûrah Fifty-nine (Medina)

This surah refers to the Banu Nadir, a Jewish tribe of Medina, who were exiled for having broken their treaty, and had their property confiscated.

Sûrah 59:6 *'God grants His messengers authority over whomsoever He will, and God is Powerful over all things'.*

Muhammad asserts his divinely granted authority as God's final Messenger.

Sûrah Sixty (Medina)

Sûrah 60:1 *'O you who believe! Do not take Mine enemy and your enemy as friends' (awliya').*

Any religion that identifies its enemies as being God's enemies is on dangerous ground. In Presentation 5 we examined the various ways the Arabic awliya' is interpreted. This verse, and others like it, can be interpreted as requiring a Muslim not to accept a non-Muslim as governor, something that poses obvious problems for a non-Muslim democratic government.

Sûrah 60:7-9 *'It may be that God will forge affection between you and those of them with whom you are in enmity. God is Powerful and God is Forgiving, Merciful. God does not forbid you, with regard to those who did not fight you on account of religion and did not expel you from your homes, from treating them righteously and being just toward them. Truly God loves the just. God only forbids you with those who fought you on account of religion and expelled you from your homes, and supported your expulsion, from befriending them; whoever befriends them, they are the wrongdoers'.*

In seventh century Arabia this presents an enlightened view. It falls short of Jesus' teaching that we are to love our enemies because God loves them.

Sûrah Sixty-one (from ?)

Sûrah 61:6 *‘When Jesus, son of Mary, said: O Children of Israel! Truly I am the Messenger of God unto you, confirming that which came before me in the Torah, and bearing glad tidings of a Messenger to come after me, whose name is ‘Ahmad (‘more praiseworthy’).*

Interpreted as Jesus’ foretelling Muhammad

Sûrah 61:9 *‘God sent His Messenger with guidance and the Religion of Truth to make it prevail over all religion’.*

‘Religion of Truth’ is understood as the religion of Abraham, revealed to Moses, Jesus, and culminating in Muhammad.

Sûrah 61:14 *‘O you who believe! Be helpers of God, just as Jesus, son of Mary, said to the apostles, “Who are my helpers to God?” The apostles replied, “We are helpers to God”. Then a group from the Children of Israel believed, and a group disbelieved. So we strengthened those who believed against their enemies, and they came to prevail’.*

The Qur’an is referring to Jews who believed by becoming Muslims, and so prevailed.

Sûrah Sixty-two (probably Medina)

This surah has only eleven verses. Most of the following sûrahs are shorter. Consequently there is less to present and less to comment on.

Sûrah 62:9-10 *‘O you who believe! When you are called to the congregational prayer, hasten to the remembrance of God and leave off trade. That is better for you, if you but knew. And when prayer is completed, disperse throughout the land and seek the Bounty of God, and remember God much, that haply you may prosper’.*

Communal prayer is one of the five pillars of Islam.

Sûrah Sixty-three (Medina)

Sûrah 63:6 *‘It is the same for them whether thou askest forgiveness for them or thou askest forgiveness for them not; God will never forgive them. Truly God does not guide iniquitous people’.*

The image of God here is very different from that revealed by Jesus. See our commentary on Sûrah 3:84, Sûrah 9:80, and Sûrah 17:25.

Sûrah 63:9 *‘O you who believe! Let neither your property nor your children divert you from the remembrance of God’.*

Jesus taught us: *‘Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well’* (Matthew 6:33).

Sûrah Sixty-four (from ?)

Sûrah 64:10 *‘Those who disbelieve and deny Our signs, they are inhabitants of the Fire, abiding therein. What an evil journey’s end!’*

See Presentation 6 for a comparison of the Muslim and the Christian teaching on hell.

Sûrah Sixty-five (Medina)

Sûrah 65:1-2 'When you divorce your wives, divorce them for the waiting period [three months], and count well the waiting period, and reverence your Lord. Expel women not from their houses; nor shall they depart, unless they commit a flagrant indecency. These are the limits set by God ... When they have fulfilled their term, take them back in an honourable way or separate from them in an honourable way. And call two just persons among yourselves to witness and uphold the testimony for God'.

In the Arab culture, as in many cultures, only the male had the power to divorce. Jesus spoke out against this practice in Judaism of his day (see Mark 10:2-11). Paul deals with the issue of divorce in his First Letter to the Christian community in Corinth (7:10-16). He acknowledges that there is a place for divorce in certain circumstances. He stresses the importance of peace between husband and wife, and also the importance of being free to follow one's faith. His Letter needs careful reading.

Sûrah 65:7 *'God tasks no soul beyond that which He has given it. God will bring ease after hardship.'* (see also Sûrah 2:286).

Paul has a similar statement: 'God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it' (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Sûrah Sixty-six (Medina)

Sûrah 66:1-2 *‘O Prophet! Why dost thou forbid that which God has made lawful unto thee, seeking the good pleasure of your wives? And God is Forgiving, Merciful. God has already ordained for you the absolution of your oaths, and God is your Master. He is the Knower, the Wise’.*

In Presentation 5, when examining the position of women in the Qur’an, we commented on this passage, and on others like it.

Sûrah 66:12 presents Mary as an example to Muhammad’s wives: *‘Mary, the daughter of ‘Imrân, preserved her chastity [see Sûrah 21:91]. Then We breathed therein of Our Spirit, and she confirmed the Words of her Lord and His Books, and was among the devoutly obedient’.*

Sûrah Sixty-seven (Medina)

This section highlights one of Muhammad's central convictions. He is sent to warn people. If they do not heed the warning, hell awaits them.

Sûrah Sixty-eight (Medina)

Those who refuse belief consider Muhammad to be 'possessed' (verses 2 and 51), whereas he is *'naught else than a reminder for the worlds'* (verse 52).

Sûrah Sixty-nine (Medina)

This is yet another sûrah on the final judgment: *either 'enjoying a contented life, in a lofty Garden with low-hanging clusters'* (verses 21-23), or *'Hellfire'* (verse 31), for those who, among other things *'did not urge feeding the indigent'* (verse 34).



There is a yearning

