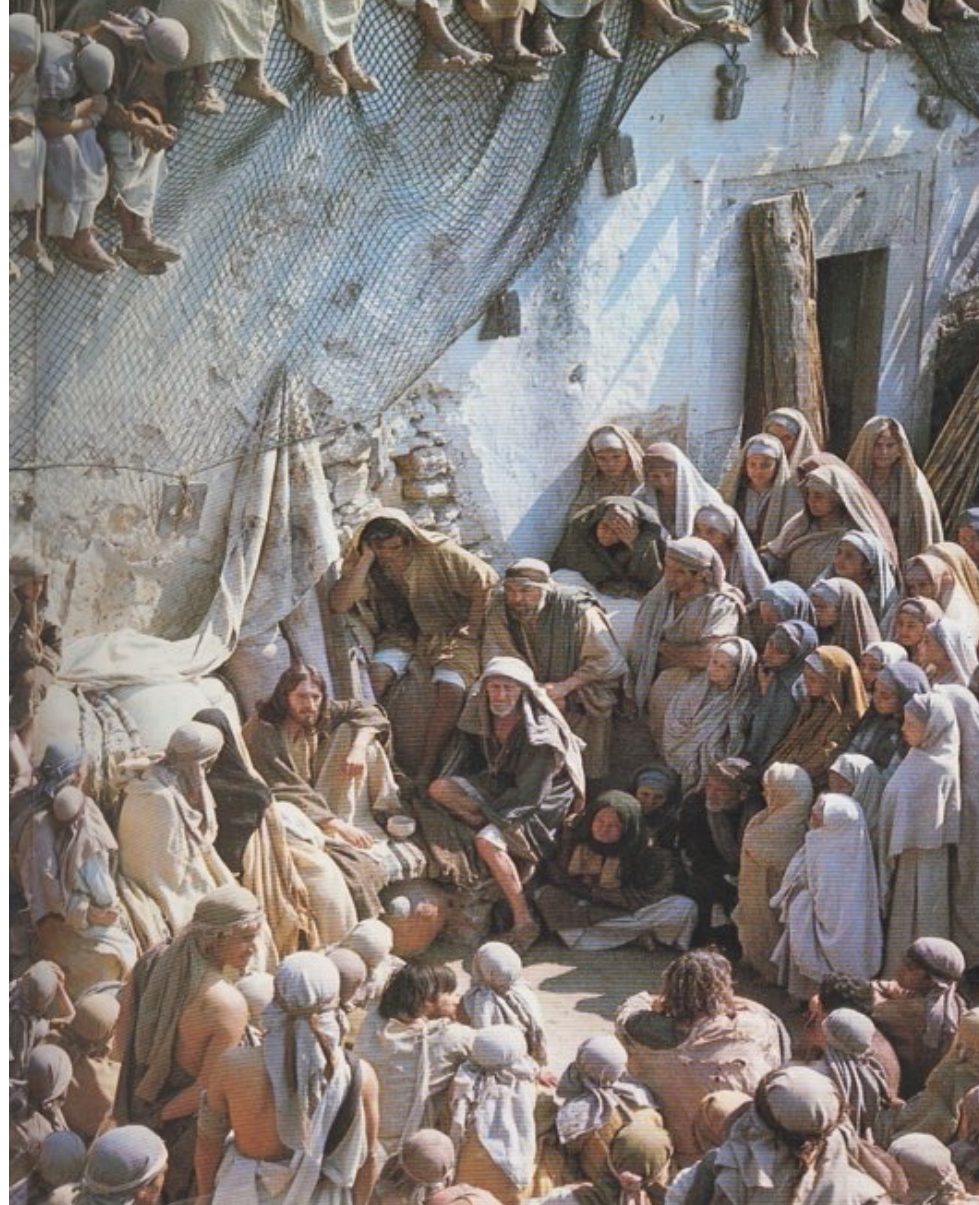


10. Sûrahs 28-46



Sûrah 28 (from Mecca).

This section tells the story of Moses (verses 3-44), and of the earth swallowing up Korah (lines 76-81; see Numbers 16).

Sûrah 28:56 'Surely thou dost not guide whomsoever thou lovest, but God guides whomsoever He will'.

Muslims believe that the guidance found in the Quran does not have its origin in Muhammad, but in God. Muhammad is God's Messenger.

Jesus, too, sees God, his Father, as the source of guidance: 'I speak as the Father instructed me ... I declare what I have seen in my Father's presence'(John 8:28, 38).

As noted in Part One, for us Christians it is Jesus' person that reveals God. The words of the sacred texts point to him and so to the God he reveals.

Sûrah 28:59 *'The Lord never destroys towns until he sends a messenger to their mother city to recite unto them Our signs. And We never destroy towns, save when their people are wrongdoers'.*

This underlines the justice and mercy of God. However, the image of a God who destroys cities is a dangerous one, for it can justify our destruction of cities in God's name when we judge that the cause is right, when the people are *'wrongdoers'*.

Jesus' image of God as Love, and his refusal to identify our enemies as God's enemies, is very different from the image of God found here.

Sûrah 29 (from Mecca).

Sûrah 29:46 *‘Dispute not with the people of the Book, save in the most virtuous manner, unless it be with those of them who have done wrong. And say, “We believe in that which was sent down unto us and was sent down unto you; our God and your God are One, and unto Him are we submitters”.*

It is not surprising to find such a positive view of Christians in Muhammad’s Meccan period, when he was trying to win Christians over to join the Muslim community. The Quran respects the revelation given to Moses and to Jesus, for it is the One God who has revealed God’s Self to them and to Muhammad. It has problems with Jews and Christians because it sees them as not living in ways that are faithful to revelation. If they did, they would accept the revelation sent down to Muhammad, and see it as completing earlier revelations (see Sûrah 2:136).

Sûrah 30 (from Mecca).

This section speaks of the victory of the Persian Empire over the Eastern Roman Empire, the Byzantines, in the early years of the seventh century. It claims that this victory will be reversed (verses 2-3). Muhammad looks forward to the universal kingdom of those who believe the revelations coming through him (the Muslim). God will continue to destroy kingdoms that are not obedient to God's will:

Sûrah 30:38 'Give to the kinsman his right, and to the indigent and the traveller. That is better for those who desire the Face of God. It is they who will prosper'.

As we noted in Presentation 6, The Quran consistently calls for care for the needy and the stranger. Christians share this value.

Sûrah 30:43 'Set thy face to the upright religion, before there comes a day from God that none can repel. That day they will be spread asunder [some to Heaven and some to Hell]'

A constant theme in the Quran is that nothing can thwart God's will. As we saw in Presentation 2, Christians include in our reflections the truth that God has willed that we be free and respects this freedom unconditionally. This means that we cannot conclude from the fact that something happens that it is God's will. When we sin we act against God's will, and God respects our decision. It matters what decisions we make and we will be judged accordingly. God is constantly gracing us and inspiring us to what is good, but God does not micro-manage creation. God loves, God does not control, the world.

Sûrah 31 (from Mecca).

This section speaks of an Arab wise man, Luqmân, and his advice to his son (verses 12ff).

Sûrah 31:18-19 'Turn not your cheek at men in scorn, nor walk exultantly upon the earth. Surely God does not love any vainglorious boaster. Be moderate in thy pace and lower thy voice. Truly, the vilest of voices is those of asses'.

Sound practical advice similar to the kind of 'wisdom' one finds in the Hebrew Wisdom Literature. In the New Testament James writes: 'You boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil' (James 4:16).

Sûrah 31:22-23 *'Whosoever submits his face to God and is virtuous has indeed grasped the most unfailing handhold, and unto God is the end of all affairs. And whosoever does not believe, let not his disbelief grieve thee. Unto Us is their return; then We shall inform them of that which they did. Truly God knows what lies within breasts'*

In reference to God's judgment the Book of the Apocalypse uses the image of books: the 'book' in which all our deeds are recorded (In other words, God knows us thoroughly). And the 'book of life', in which all are named who have responded to the grace offered them by the Risen Christ, even if they did not know that they were responding to him: 'I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books' (Revelation 20:12).

Judgment should be left to God. As Jesus said: 'Judge not and you will not be judged' (Matthew 7:1).

Sûrah 32 (from Mecca).

Sûrah 32:4, 7-9 'God it is Who created the heavens and the earth, and that which is between them in six days ... He made beautiful all that He created, and began the creation of man from clay; then He made his seed from a draught of base fluid. Then He fashioned him and breathed into him His Spirit'.

The Quran is drawing on the story of creation in the Book of Genesis.

Sûrah 32:23 'Indeed We gave Moses the Book; so be not in doubt regarding the meeting with Him; and We made him a guide for the Children of Israel'.

In Presentation 1 we noted how the Quran draws on the Hebrew Scriptures.

Sûrah 33 (from Medina).

Sûrah 33:25 'God turned back those who disbelieved in their rage; they attained no good. God sufficed the believers in battle, and God is Strong, Mighty'.

The background to this section is the failed attempt by a coalition to destroy the Muslims at the Battle of the Trench in 627AD. The coalition included Bani Nadîr, a Jewish tribe that Muhammad had expelled from Medina, Muhammad's own tribe, the Quraysh of Mecca, the desert tribe of Ghatafân, and the Banû Qurayzah, a Jewish tribe of Medina. The attempt failed in spite of the fact that Muhammad had, allegedly, about three thousand troops and faced the enemy who had an army of about ten thousand, as well as six hundred horses and many camels. After a month the siege of Medina was lifted. The Battle of the Trench was the last attempt by the Quraysh of Mecca to defeat Muhammad.

This sûrah speaks of Muhammad's wives who are to 'obey God and His Messenger' (verses 30-34). It speaks of Muhammad's marriage to his cousin Zeynah. Muhammad had arranged for Zeynah to marry Zeyd his adopted son. When the marriage ended in divorce, he took her as his wife (verse 37).

As noted earlier, when he was twenty-five Muhammad married Khadijah, who was fifteen years his senior. He was fifty when she died. After her death he took many wives. He could marry as many women as he desired.

Sûrah 33:40 'Muhammad is not the father of any man among you; rather he is the Messenger of God and the Seal of the Prophets. And God is Knower of all things'.

Muhammad had two sons. Both died in childhood. The Quran claims that Muhammad is God's final 'seal' on the prophets, completing God's revelation.

Sûrah 33:50 permits Muhammad to have many wives. We examined it when reflecting on relations of men and women in the Quran in Presentation 4.

Sûrah 33:59 *'O Prophet! Tell your wives and daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks over themselves'* (see also 24:31).

Like Sûrah 24:31 and 60, this concerns modesty. According to *The Study Quran*, the exact amount to be covered 'has been debated' (page 1038 column 1).

Sûrah 34 (from Mecca).

This section includes a story of the flooding of Sheba (Yemen; verses 15-17), seen as a punishment from God.

Sûrah 35 (from Mecca).

This section speaks of the power of the Creator.

Sûrah 35:7 ‘Those who disbelieve, theirs will be a severe punishment. And those who believe and perform righteous deeds, theirs will be forgiveness and a great reward’.

Sûrah 35:37 ‘They cry out therein [in hell], “Our Lord! Remove us, that we may work righteousness other than that which we used to do.” Did We not give you long life, enough for whoever would reflect to reflect therein? And the warner [Muhammad] came unto you to taste [the punishment]! The wrongdoers will have no helpers’.

See Presentation 6 for an analysis of the constant references to hell in the Quran.

Sûrah 36 (from Mecca).

The Study Quran states: ‘Several scholars maintain that *Ya Sin* (the title for this sûrah) is the heart of the Quran because it addresses its central teachings regarding God, prophethood and the Hereafter. The sûrah begins with an address to the Prophet that clarifies both his mission and the nature of revelation’ (page 1069).

Sûrah 36:1-6 ‘By the Wise Quran, truly thou are among the message bearers, upon a straight path, a revelation of the Mighty, the Merciful, that thou mayest warn a people whose fathers were not warned, so they were heedless.’

Sûrah 36:12 ‘Truly We give life to the dead and record that which they have sent forth and that which they have left behind [their good deeds]. And We have counted all things in a clear registry’.

Paul speaks of the 'book of life' in which the names of those who have done good are registered (Philippians 4:3). It is an expression found, too, in the Book of Revelation, the Apocalypse: 'I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books (Revelation 20:12).

Sûrah 36:82-83 'His Command, when he desires a thing, is only to say it, "Be!" and it is. So glory be to Him in whose hand lies the dominion of all things, and unto Whom you will be returned' .

Sûrah 37 (from Mecca).

This section refers to Noah (verses 75-82), Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac (verses 83-112), Moses and Aaron (verses 114-122), Elijah (verses 123-132), Lot (verses 133-138) and Jonah (verses 139-148).

The stories from the Jewish Scriptures speak of God's punishment. The Quran identifies this punishment as the fire of hell. See Part One where we compared the Muslim and Christian teaching on hell.

Sûrah 38 (from Mecca).

This section highlights the rejection that Muhammad was receiving from the polytheists. He sees himself as like Noah, who was also rejected (verses 13-17). It speaks of David who was 'forever turning in repentance' (verses 18-27), and of Solomon (verses 31-41), and Job (verses 41-45). Like Muhammad they suffered trials. It mentions 'Abraham, Isaac and Jacob' (verse 46), 'Ishmael and Elisha'(verse 48).

Sûrah 38:52 includes in the joys of heaven '*maidens of modest gaze, of like age*'. We looked at this when examining the relations of men and women in the Quran.

Sûrah 39 (mostly from Mecca).

Sûrah 39:12 *'I have been commanded to be the first of those who submit' [Muslimûn].*

Sûrah 39:53 [said by many to from Medina] *'O My servants who have been prodigal to the detriment of their own souls! Despair not of God's Mercy. Truly God forgives all sins. Truly, He is the Forgiving, the Merciful'.*

For a reflection of forgiveness and mercy see the commentary on Sûrah 3:89.

Sûrah 39:70 *'Each soul is paid in full for what it did. And He is best aware of what they do'.*

Muhammad has a lot to say about the final Judgment – hell for those who would not submit (especially verses 71-72), and heaven for the believers (especially verses 73-75). See Part One for an analysis of the Christian and Muslim notion of hell.

Sûrah 40 (from Mecca).

This section speaks of a member of Pharaoh's court, a believer, who tried to persuade Pharaoh to heed Moses (verses 28-45). It speaks of Noah (verse 31) and Joseph (verse 34). Hell is a major theme of the section. See Presentation 6.

Sûrah 40:2-3 'The revelation of the Book from God, the Mighty, the Knower, Forgiver of sins, Acceptor of repentance, severe in retribution, Possessed of Bounty. There is no God but He'.

Sûrah 40:7 'Those who bear the Throne, and those who dwell nigh unto it, hymn the praises of their Lord and believe in Him and seek forgiveness for those who believe: Our Lord! You encompass all things in Mercy and Knowledge. Forgive those who repent and follow Your way, and shield them from the punishment of Hellfire'.

Sûrah 40:60 'Your Lord has said: "Call upon Me, and I will respond to you. Truly those who are too arrogant to worship Me, they will enter hell debased'.

Sûrah 41 (from Mecca).

This section speaks of the punishment sent by God on those who refused to heed God's revelation through earlier Arab prophets. This sûrah repeats a constant theme: punishment in hell for those who reject the words that comes to them through Muhammad.

Sûrah 41:6 'I am only a human being like you. It is revealed to me that your God is only one God. So go straight to Him and seek forgiveness from Him. Woe to the idolaters'.

Muhammad constantly insist on his role as God's final prophet, the seal of the prophets. Consistent with his conviction that there is only one God, he stresses here his humanity. Behind this may be his misunderstanding of the Christian belief in the divinity of Jesus. He wants his followers to *'Go straight to God and seek forgiveness from God'*.

Sûrah 42 (from Mecca).

Sûrah 42:13-15 'God has prescribed for you as religion that which He enjoined upon Noah, and that which We revealed to you, and that which We enjoined upon Abraham, Moses and Jesus, that you uphold religion and not become divided therein. Grievous for the idolaters is that to which thou callest them. God chooses for Himself whomsoever He will, and guides unto Himself whosoever turns in repentance. They [Jews and Christians] did not become divided till after knowledge had come to them, out of envy among themselves. And were it not for a Word that had preceded from the Lord to a term appointed, judgment would have been made between them. Yet truly those who were bequeathed the Book after them are indeed confounded by doubt regarding it. 'Therefore, summon and stand firm as you have been commanded. Follow not their caprices, and say, "I believe in that which God has sent down from a Book, and I have been commanded to establish justice among you. God is our Lord and your Lord. Unto us our deeds, and unto you your deeds; there is no argument between us and you. God will gather us together, and unto Him is the journey's end'.

Muhammad was convinced that there is only One God, and that God would 'gather together' the Jews, the Christians, and the Muslims. He was rightly concerned at the divisions that were apparent between different Jewish and Christian communities. He understood that part of his mission from God was to unite them by bringing them into the community of the Muslims: those who submit, like Abraham, to God's revealed will. The Quran is pleading with them to join: *'God is our Lord and your Lord', 'there is no argument between us and you'*. During his Meccan period, Muhammad was reaching out to all to join his movement. What would he have thought if he had seen the divisions that soon broke out among the Muslims?

Sûrah 42:24 *'Truly God knows what lies within breasts'*.

Sûrah 42:42 *'There is only one way against those who wrong people and behave tyrannically upon the earth without right. For them there will be a painful punishment'*.

Sûrah 43 (from Mecca).

Sûrah 43:59 *“The son of Mary was naught but a servant whom We blessed and whom We made an example for the Children of Israel”.*

It is true that Jesus saw himself as God’s servant. He is always proclaiming his complete dependence upon God and his complete obedience. Muhammad, however, is attacking the Christian teaching of Jesus’ divinity – a teaching he misunderstands (see Presentation 5).

Sûrah 43:63 *‘When Jesus brought clear proofs (see 3:49; 5:110; 19:29-34) he said: I have come to you with wisdom, and to make clear to you some of that concerning which you differ. So reverence God, and obey me’.*

Sûrah 44 (from Mecca).

Sûrah 44:54 describes one of the rewards in Paradise: “*We shall wed them to wide-eyed* (perhaps better ‘black-eyed’) *maidens*”.

We examined this passage, along with others like it, when reflecting on the relationship between men and women in the Quran (see Presentation 4).

Sûrah 45 (from Mecca).

Sûrah 45:18 *'We placed thee upon a clear path.'*

The Arabic word translated here as 'clear path' is *shari'ah* [an avenue that leads to water]. It is the only time this word occurs in the Quran. It came to be used for Muslim law which places those who submit on a '*clear path*'.

Sûrah 45:23 *'Hast thou considered one who takes his caprice as his god, God having led him astray knowingly, and sealed his hearing and his heart, and placed a cover upon his sight?'*

The image behind '*caprice*' is a wind that blows a person off course, causing a fall. The Quran consistently sees events as issuing from God who controls his creation. If a person is blown off course, it is God who had decided it to be that way. The God whom Jesus reveals is very different: 'He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous' (Matt. 5:45).

Sûrah 46 (from Mecca).

Sûrah 46:9 'Say, "I am no innovation among the messengers, and I know not what will be done with me or with you. I only follow that which has been revealed to me, and I am naught but a clear warner'.

Muhammad saw himself as believing what was revealed to Moses and to Jesus and bringing their revelations to completion. His mission was to warn people of the consequences if they fail to heed God's final revelation coming to them through him.

Sûrah 46:15 speaks of the doom awaiting those who do not believe and who are not among those who submit (the Muslimun).



O God you search me