

Sura 61: Al-Saff (The Ranks)

In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy

Verses 1 to 14:

1. *All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth glorify God, and He is the Eminent, the Wise.*
2. *Believers, why do you say that which you do not do?*
3. *It is most hateful in the sight of God that you say that which you do not do.*
4. *God loves those who fight in His way in ranks, as if they were a solid structure.*
5. *And remember, when Moses said to his people, "My people, why do you hurt me, although you know that I am the messenger of God (sent) to you?" And when they swerved, God let their hearts swerve. God does not guide those who are transgressors.*
6. *And remember, when Jesus, the son of Mary said, "Children of Israel, I am the messenger of God (sent) to you, confirming the Torah (which came) before me, and giving glad tidings of a messenger to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad." But when he came to them with clear signs, they said, "This is obvious magic."*
7. *Who is a greater wrongdoer than one who fabricates a lie against God, when he is summoned to submit to God? And God does not guide the wrongdoers.*
8. *Their intention is to extinguish God's light (by blowing) with their mouths. But God will perfect His light, even though the disbelievers are averse to it.*
9. *It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, that he may proclaim it over all religion, even though the idolaters may be averse to it.*
10. *Believers, shall I lead you to a bargain that will save you from a painful torment?*
11. *Believe in God and His Messenger, and strive (your utmost) in the cause of God, with your possessions and yourselves. That will be best for you, if you but knew.*
12. *He will forgive you your sins, and admit you into Gardens beneath which rivers flow, and into beautiful mansions in Gardens of Eternity. That is indeed the supreme achievement.*
13. *And another (favor will He bestow) which you love, help from God and a speedy victory. So give the glad tidings to the believers.*
14. *Believers, be the supporters of God; as Jesus the son of Mary said to the disciples, "Who will be my supporters for God?" The disciples said, "We are God's supporters." And a party of the Children of Israel believed, while a party disbelieved. Then We strengthened those who believed against their foe, and they became the uppermost. (61: 1 – 14)*

This Sura has two basic objectives which are apparent from the narrative. The first objective is to establish in the psyche of the believers that Islam is the final form of the divine project which God sent down to guide the human race. The verses refer to the Message that was revealed to Prophet Moses (PBUH) and show how the Children of Israel abdicated their duties. Then Jesus (PBUH) was sent to continue Moses' (PBUH) work and to state that another Messenger will follow to complete God's divine project.

The second objective which emanates from the first objective is to outline the responsibility of the believers in establishing this religion on earth. The believers should be sincere in striving in the cause of God with their possessions and persons.

The whole universe glorifies God announcing that Islam came to establish the divine project in its final form. Muslims are entrusted with establishing this religion which professes the Oneness

of God, *“All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth glorify God, and He is the Eminent, the Wise.”*

The believers were rebuked for what some of them committed; they committed something that God hates. How can they not practice what they preach, *“Believers, why do you say that which you do not do? It is most hateful in the sight of God that you say that which you do not do.”* Ibn Jareer mentioned that these verses were revealed as a message of rebuke to the believers who said they would fight in the cause of God, but when fighting was ordained they declined to fight. The verses state that God hates such behavior. The Quran usually uses an incident or an event as a platform to launch a general principle. The principle is that the believers should not say what they do not do because God hates those who do not practice what they preach.

The verses then continue to address fighting in the cause of God, *“God loves those who fight in His way in ranks, as if they were a solid structure.”* The believers should fight as a solid unit in the cause of God.

The following verses deal with the stages of revelation of the divine project. First, came Moses (PBUH), *“And remember, when Moses said to his people, ‘My people, why do you hurt me, although you know that I am the messenger of God (sent) to you?’ And when they swerved, God let their hearts swerve. God does not guide those who are transgressors.”* He was then followed by Jesus (PBUH), *“And remember, when Jesus, the son of Mary said, ‘Children of Israel, I am the messenger of God (sent) to you, confirming the Torah (which came) before me, and giving glad tidings of a messenger to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad.’ But when he came to them with clear signs, they said, ‘This is obvious magic.’”* The Children of Israel treated Prophet Moses (PBUH), who saved them from the persecution of Pharaoh and his chiefs, badly. The Quran told many stories about the difficult experience that Prophet Moses (PBUH) had with the Children of Israel. In this verse Prophet Moses (PBUH) rebukes them mildly, *“My people, why do you hurt me.”* However, they were adamant in their transgression so God let their hearts swerve. They were no longer qualified to carry the responsibility of establishing God’s religion on earth. Then Jesus (PBUH) came to continue Moses’ (PBUH) task and to bring the glad tidings of another prophet who will bring about the last phase of a complete and comprehensive project that addresses the intellect of the mature humanity.

These verses show how the different stages of the same religion were revealed to guide the human race to the straight path. Each stage came in a different form suitable for the needs and abilities of the human race at the time of its revelation. The verse mentions the good news that Jesus (PBUH) brought to the Children of Israel about the expected Messenger. The truth of the statement was accepted by many of their scholars e.g. Abdullah ibn Salam. It is historically known that the Jews were expecting a Messenger from God, but they had hoped that it would be one of them. So, they refused to accept the new religion since the Messenger was not a Jew. They fought Islam and the Muslims in different ways, *“Who is a greater wrongdoer than one who fabricates a lie against God, when he is summoned to submit to God? And God does not guide the wrongdoers.”*

They tried in vain to extinguish God’s light, *“Their intention is to extinguish God’s light (by blowing) with their mouths. But God will perfect His light, even though the disbelievers are averse to it.”* The verse establishes a fact and paints an image of desperation. It is a fact that they fought the message with their words claiming that it was clear magic. Their words expressed their desperate effort to extinguish the light that Islam brought. However, God fulfilled His promise and Islam was soon established.

God sent His messenger to establish the religion of truth, *“It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, that he may proclaim it over all religion, even though the idolaters may be averse to it.”* The religion was established in more than one way. The content of the religion was established in its original form and did not suffer the mutilation that happened to all other religions; and it was established when it spread to all parts of the world.

The following verse addresses the believers with the endearing term, *“Believers.”* Then it guides them to a very profitable bargain, *“shall I lead you to a bargain that will save you from a painful torment?”* The question whips up their curiosity; then it provides the answer, *“Believe in God and His Messenger, and strive (your utmost) in the cause of God, with your possessions and yourselves. That will be best for you, if you but knew.”* They have already fulfilled the first part of their end of the bargain, they believed in God and His Messenger. So they need to fulfill the second part, to *“strive (your utmost) in the cause of God, with your possessions and yourselves.”* The Quran then outlines God’s end of the bargain, *“He will forgive you your sins, and admit you into Gardens beneath which rivers flow, and into beautiful mansions in Gardens of Eternity. That is indeed the supreme achievement. And another (favor will He bestow) which you love, help from God and a speedy victory. So give the glad tidings to the believers.”* They will be granted forgiveness, mansions in the Gardens of Eternity, and speedy victory. What else would they desire? This is indeed the supreme achievement.

The Sura is concluded by a command which raises the rank of the believers. They will become God’s supporters. What an honor! *“Believers, be the supporters of God; as Jesus the son of Mary said to the disciples, ‘Who will be my supporters for God?’ The disciples said, ‘We are God’s supporters.’ And a party of the Children of Israel believed, while a party disbelieved. Then We strengthened those who believed against their foe, and they became the uppermost.”* The verse’s objective is to make a point not to narrate a story. The point is made that when the disciples of Jesus (PBUH) supported God and His Messenger, Jesus (PBUH), God gave them victory over their enemy. There are two possible interpretations for this verse. The first interpretation is that those who believed in Jesus (PBUH) are all Christians. God made them dominant over the Jews. The second interpretation is that those who believed in Jesus (PBUH) are those who believed in him as a prophet not as a son of God. They became dominant by the clarity and strength of their argument which supports the oneness of God.

The lesson to be learnt from the verse is that God supports those who support His cause. God will make them victors and they will overcome their enemies.