

SŪRAH 110

Al-Naşr

(Divine Help)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever Merciful.

When God's help and victory come, (1)

and you see people embracing God's religion in large numbers (2)

then extol your Lord's limitless glory, and praise Him, and seek His forgiveness. He is the One who accepts repentance. (3)

إِذَا جَاءَ نَصْرُ اللَّهِ وَالْفَتْحُ ﴿١﴾

وَرَأَيْتَ النَّاسَ يَدْخُلُونَ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ أَفْوَاجًا ﴿٢﴾

فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ وَأَسْتَغْفِرْهُ ۗ إِنَّهُ كَانَ تَوَّابًا ﴿٣﴾

Overview

This short *sūrah* brings the good news to Muḥammad, God's Messenger, that God's help will be forthcoming, as will victory and peoples' collective acceptance of His religion. It instructs him to turn towards his Lord in devoted adoration coupled with a humble request for His forgiveness. The *sūrah* also presents the nature and the righteousness of this faith and its ideology, which elevates humanity to a standard of dignity, dedication and freedom that it can never attain except through responding to the call of Islam and implementing the Islamic message.

Of the several traditions regarding the revelation of this *sūrah*, we quote the one related by Imām Aḥmad which runs as follows: “Ā'ishah said that God's Messenger used to repeat very frequently, towards the end of his life: All glorification and

praises are due to God. I seek His forgiveness; and I repent of my sins.' He also said: 'My Lord told me I would see a sign in my community. He ordered me to glorify and praise Him, the Forgiving, and ask His pardon when I see this sign. Indeed, I have. *When God's help and victory come, and you see people embracing God's religion in large numbers then extol your Lord's limitless glory, and praise Him, and seek His forgiveness. He is the One who accepts repentance.*'" [Related also by Muslim with a different chain of transmission.]

Ibn Kathīr says in his commentary on the Qur'ān: "The victory mentioned in this *sūrah* refers, as unanimously agreed, to the conquest of Makkah. The Arab tribes were awaiting the settlement of the conflict between the Quraysh and the Muslims, before making a decision about their acceptance of Islam, saying that if Muḥammad were to prevail over his people, he would indeed be a prophet. Consequently, when that was accomplished they accepted Islam in large numbers. Within two years of the conquest of Makkah, the whole Arabian Peninsula was dominated by Islam, and, all thanks to God, every Arab tribe declared its belief in Islam."

In his *Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Bukhārī quotes `Amr ibn Salamah as saying: "When Makkah fell to Islam, every tribe hastened to declare to God's Messenger its acceptance of Islam. They were waiting for it to take place, saying, 'Leave him alone with his people. He would indeed be a prophet if he prevailed over them...'"

These reports are chronologically in line with the wording of the *sūrah*, in the sense that its revelation was a sign of something to follow, with some instructions to the Prophet on what he should do when this event would take place.

There is, nevertheless, a different report which is not difficult to reconcile with the one we have already discussed. `Abdullāh ibn `Abbās, the Prophet's cousin and learned Companion, reports: "Umar used to let me join the company of elders who were present at Badr, but some of them felt uneasy and asked why I should be allowed with them when I was of the same age as their own children. But `Umar said to them, 'You know to what family he belongs.' One day `Umar invited them all and invited me as well. I felt that he wanted to show them why he gave me such a privilege. He asked them, 'What do you make of God's saying: *When God's help and victory come?*' Some of them replied, 'It is an order that we must praise Him and seek His forgiveness when He helps us to triumph and bestows His favours on us.' Others remained silent. Then `Umar asked me, 'Do you agree with this view, Ibn `Abbās?' I answered in the negative. `Umar asked me again, 'What, then, do you say?' I replied, 'It was a sign from God to His Messenger indicating the approach of the end of his life. It means: *when God's help and victory come, you should know that your end is near, then extol your Lord's limitless glory, and praise Him, and seek His forgiveness. He is the One who accepts repentance.*'" `Umar commented, 'To my knowledge, it only means what you have just said.'" [Related by al-Bukhārī.]

So it is possible that God's Messenger, having witnessed his Lord's sign, realized that he had fulfilled his mission in this life, and that it was time for him to depart, which was what Ibn `Abbās actually meant.

A different report related by al-Bayhaqī, also on Ibn `Abbās's authority, mentions that when this *sūrah* was first revealed, the Prophet asked his daughter, Fāṭimah, to come over and told her, 'My death has been announced to me.' She was seen to start crying. But a little later she smiled. Some time later she explained, "I cried when he told me of his approaching death. But he then said to me, Be patient, because you will be the first of my household to join me', so I smiled."

According to this last *ḥadīth*, the time of the revelation of the *sūrah* is actually fixed as coming later than the sign. That is, the victory and the people's collective acceptance of Islam. When events took place in this fashion the Prophet knew that his life would soon come to a close. But again the first account is more authentic and fits in more suitably with the import of the *sūrah*, especially as the incident concerning Fāṭimah and her crying and smiling is related in a different context which agrees with the version we prefer. This other report goes as follows: "Umm Salamah, the Prophet's wife, said: 'The Prophet invited Fāṭimah one day during the year of the victory and spoke to her in private. She cried. Then he spoke to her again and she was smiling. After he died, I asked her about the incident and she explained, God's Messenger told me he was soon to die, so I cried. Then he told me that I would be the next most celebrated woman in heaven, next to Maryam bint `Imrān, so I smiled.'" [Related by al-Tirmidhī.]

This report agrees with the general meaning of the Qur'ānic text and with what Imām Aḥmad related, which also appears in Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*. That is, there was a sign between God and His Messenger, which the *sūrah* specifies. Hence, when the victory that secured Makkah to Islam was accomplished, the Prophet knew that he was soon to meet his Lord. Hence he spoke to Fāṭimah in the manner described by Umm Salamah.

An Awaited Event

We will now consider the permanent import and instructions outlined in this short *sūrah*: "When God's help and victory come, and you see people embracing God's religion in large numbers, then extol your Lord's limitless glory, and praise Him, and seek His forgiveness. He is the One who accepts repentance." (Verses 1-3)

The beginning of the first verse implicitly presents a concept of what goes on in this universe and the events that take place in this life. It also covers the actual role of the Prophet and his followers in the progress of Islam, and to what extent it depends on their efforts. 'When God's help and victory...', denotes that it is help granted by God,

and it is He who brings about victory in His own good time, in the form He decides and for the purpose He determines. The Prophet and his Companions have nothing to do with it at all, and they obtain no personal gain from it. It suffices for them that He does it through them, appoints them as its guards and entrusts it to them. This is all they acquire from God's help, the victory and people's acceptance *en masse* of His religion.

According to this concept, the duty of the Prophet and his Companions whom God chose and gave the privilege of being the instruments of victory for His cause, was to turn to Him at the climax of victory in praise, expressing gratitude and seeking forgiveness. Gratitude and praise are for His being so generous as to have chosen them to be the standard-bearers of His religion; for the mercy and favour He did to all humanity by making His religion victorious; and for the conquest of Makkah and people's collective acceptance of Islam.

His forgiveness is sought for any defective feeling, privately entertained, such as vanity, which sometimes creep into one's heart when victory is attained after a long struggle. It is almost impossible for human beings to prevent this happening and therefore God's forgiveness is to be sought. Forgiveness also has to be sought for what might have been insinuated within one's heart during the long and cruel struggle and for petulance resulting from a conceived delay of victory, or the effects of convulsive despair, as the Qur'an mentions elsewhere: *"Do you reckon that you will enter paradise while you have not suffered like those [believers] who passed away before you? Affliction and adversity befell them, and so terribly shaken were they that the Messenger and the believers with him would exclaim, 'When will God's help come?' Surely, God's help is close at hand."* (2: 214)

It is also necessary to seek God's forgiveness for one's shortcomings in praising God and thanking Him for His infinite favours which are granted at all times. *"If you were to count God's favours, never will you be able to number them."* (16: 18) However great one's efforts in this respect are, they are never adequate.

Seeking forgiveness at a moment of triumph also arouses feelings of weakness and imperfection at a time when an attitude of pride and conceit seems natural. All these factors guarantee that no tyranny will afflict the vanquished. The victorious leader is made to realize that it is God who has appointed him, a man who has no power of his own and who is devoid of any strength, for a predetermined purpose; consequently the triumph and the conquest as well as the religion are all His, and to Him all things ultimately return.

This is the lofty, dignified ideal the Qur'an exhorts people to toil towards, an ideal in which man's exaltation is in neglecting his own pride and where his soul's freedom is in his subservience to God. The goal set is the total release of human souls

from their egoistic shackles, their only ambition being to attain God's pleasure. Along with this release there must be exerted effort which helps man flourish in the world, promotes human civilization and provides a rightly-guided, unblemished, constructive, just leadership devoted to God.

By contrast, man's efforts to liberate himself while in the grip of egoism, shackled by his zest for worldly things, or overpowered by his cravings, turn out to be absolutely useless unless he frees himself from personal desires and ambitions. His loyalty to God must be made to override everything else, particularly at the moment of triumph and the collection of booty. Such behaviour, which God wants humanity to attain, was the characteristic feature of all the Prophets.

Such was the case with the Prophet Joseph, when all he wanted was achieved and his dream came true: *"And he raised his parents to the highest place of honour, and they fell down on their knees, prostrating themselves before him. He said: 'Father, this is the real meaning of my dream of long ago. My Lord has made it come true. He has been gracious to me, releasing me from prison, and bringing you all from the desert after Satan had sown discord between me and my brothers. My Lord is gracious in whatever way He wishes. He is All-Knowing, truly Wise."* (12: 100)

Then, at that moment of climax, Joseph took himself away from the jubilations and embracing arms to turn towards his Lord, praising Him with a pure sense of gratitude: *"My Lord, You have given me power and imparted to me some understanding of the real meaning of statements. Originator of the heavens and the earth! You are my guardian in this world and in the life to come. Let me die as one who has surrendered himself to You, and admit me among the righteous."* (12: 101)

Thus any sense of his own egotism and happiness brought about by his reunion with his family vanished, and the picture we are left with is that of an individual, Joseph, praying to God to help him remain submissive to Him until he dies and to let him, out of His mercy and grace, join His righteous servants.

So, it was also with the Prophet Solomon, when he saw the Queen of Sheba's throne brought into his very reach: *"When he saw it set in his presence he said: 'This is of the bounty of my Lord, that He may try me whether I give thanks or remain ungrateful. He who gives thanks does so for his own good, and he who is ungrateful, well, my Lord is all sufficient and bountiful."* (27: 40)

And so indeed it was with Muḥammad throughout his life. In the moment of triumph, as the conquest of Makkah was accomplished, he entered the city on the back of his camel with his head bowed low. He forgot the joy of victory and thankfully bowed his head seeking his Lord's forgiveness, even though he had just conquered Makkah, whose people had openly and unashamedly persecuted and expelled him. This also was the practice of his Companions after him.

Thus, upon belief in God, was that great generation of humanity raised very high, reaching an unparalleled standard of greatness, power and freedom.