

Sūrah 41: Fussilat

Period of Revelation

According to authentic hadith, it was sent down after the affirmation of the Faith by Hamza, the uncle of the Prophet and before the affirmation of the Faith by Umar. Muhammad bin Ishaq, the earliest biographer of the Prophet, has related on the authority of Muhammad bin Ka'b al-Qurzi, the famous follower of the Companions, that one day some of the Quraysh chiefs were sitting in their assembly in the Masjid al-Haram, while in another corner of the Mosque there was the Prophet sitting by himself. This was the time when Hamza had already embraced Islām and the people of the Quraysh were feeling upset at the growing numbers of the Muslims. On this occasion, Utbah bin Rabi'ah (the father-in-law of Abu Sufyan) said to the Quraysh chiefs: *"Gentlemen, if you like I would go and speak to Muhammad and put before him some proposals; maybe that he accepts one of them, to which we may also agree, and so he stops opposing us."* They all agreed to this, and Utbah went and sat by the Prophet. When the Prophet turned to him, he said: *"Nephew, you know the high status that you enjoy in the community by virtue of your ancestry and family relations, but you have put your people to great trouble: you have created divisions among them and you consider them to be fools: you talk ill of their religion and gods, and say things as though all our forefathers were pagans. Now listen to me and I shall make some suggestions. Consider them well: maybe that you accept one of them."* The Prophet said: *"Abul Walid, say what you want to say and I shall listen to you."* He said, *"Nephew, if by what you are doing, you want wealth, we will give you enough of it so that you will be the richest man among us; if you want to become an important man, we will make you our chief and will never decide a matter without you; if you want to be a king, we will accept you as our king; and if you are visited by a Jinn, whom you cannot get rid of by your own power, we will arrange the best physicians and have you treated at our own expense."* Utbah went on speaking in this strain and the Prophet went on listening to him quietly. Then he said, *"Have you said, O Abul Walid, what you had to say?"* He replied that he had. The Prophet said: *"Well, now listen to me."* Then pronouncing Bismillah ir Rahman-ir-Rahim he began to recite this very Sūrah, and Utbah kept on listening to it, putting his hands behind his back and leaning on them as he listened. Coming to the verse of prostration (v. 37) the Prophet prostrated himself; then raising his head, said, *"This was my reply, O Abul Walid, now you may act as you please."* Then Utbah arose and walked back towards the chiefs, the people saw him from afar, and said: *"By God! Utbah's face is changed. He does not look the same man that he was when he went from here."* Then, when he came back and sat down, the people asked, *"What have you heard?"* He replied, *"By God! I have heard something the like of which I had never heard before. By God, it's neither poetry, nor sorcery, nor magic. O chiefs of the Quraysh, listen to what I say and leave this man to himself. I think what he recites is going to have its effect. If the other Arabs overcome him, you will be saved from raising your hand against your brother, and the others will deal with him. But if he overcame Arabia, his sovereignty would be your sovereignty and his honour your honour."* Hearing this the chiefs spoke out: *"You too, O father of Walid, have been bewitched by his tongue."* Utbah replied, *"I have given you my opinion; now you may act as you please."* (Ibn Hisham, vol. I, pp. 313-314).

Theme and Subject Matter

In the discourse that God sent down in response to what Utbah said, no attention whatever was paid to the absurd proposals that he had made to the Prophet. For what he had said was, in fact, an attack on the Prophet's intention and his intellect. His assumption was that as there was no possibility of his being a Prophet and the Qur'ān being God's Revelation, inevitably the motive of his invitation must either be the desire to obtain wealth and political power, or, God forbid, he had lost his reason. In the first case, he wanted to make a bargain with the Prophet; in the second, he was insulting him when he said that the Quraysh chiefs would have him cured of his madness at their own expense. Obviously, when the opponents come down to such absurd things, no gentleman would like to answer them, but would ignore them and say what he himself had to say.

Therefore, ignoring what Utbah said, this Sūrah makes antagonism its subject of discussion, which the unbelieving Quraysh were showing stubbornly and wickedly in order to defeat the message of the Qur'ān. They would say to the Prophet, "You may try however hard you try: we would not listen to you. We have put co-

verings on our hearts and we have closed our ears. There is a wall between you and us, which would never let us meet together.”

They had given a clear notice to the Prophet to the effect: “You may continue your mission of inviting the people to yourself, but we would go on opposing you as hard as we can to frustrate your mission.”

For this object they had devised the following plan: Whenever the Prophet or a follower of his would try to recite the Qur’ān before the people, they would at once raise such a hue and cry that no one could hear anything. They were desperately trying to misconstrue the verses of the Qur’ān and spread every kind of misunderstanding among the people. They misconstrued everything and found fault even with the straightforward things. They would isolate words and sentences from their right context, from here and there, and would add their own words in order to put new meanings on them so as to mislead the people about the Qur’ān and the Messenger who presented it.

They would raise strange objections a specimen of which has been presented in this Sūrah. They said, “If an Arab presents a discourse in Arabic, what could be the miracle in it? Arabic is his mother tongue. Anyone could compose anything that he pleased in his mother tongue and then make the claim that he had received it from God. It would be a miracle if the person would suddenly arise and make an eloquent speech in a foreign tongue which he did not know. Then only could one say that the discourse was not of his own composition but a revelation from God.”

Here is a resume of what has been said in answer to this deaf and blind opposition:

1. The Qur’ān is most certainly the Word of God, which He has sent down in Arabic. The ignorant people do not find any light of knowledge in the truths that have been presented in it plainly and clearly, but the people of understanding are seeing this light as well as benefiting by it. It is surely God’s mercy that He has sent down this Word for the guidance of man. If a person regarded it as an affliction, it would be his own misfortune. Good news is for those who benefit by it and warning for those who turn away from it.
2. If you have put coverings on your hearts and have made yourselves deaf, it is none of the Prophet’s job to make the one hear who does not want to hear, and the one who does not want to understand, understand forcibly. He is a man like you; he can make only those to hear and understand, who are inclined to hear and understand.
3. Whether you close down your eyes and ears and put coverings on your hearts, the fact, however, is that your God is only One God, and you are not the servant of any one else. Your stubbornness cannot change this reality in any way. If you accept this truth and correct your behavior accordingly you will do good only to yourselves, and if you reject it, you will only be preparing your own doom.
4. Do you have any understanding as to whom you disbelieve and with whom you associate others in divinity? It is with regard to that God Who has created this limitless universe, Who is the Creator of the earth and heavens, from Whose blessings you are benefiting on the earth, and on Whose provisions you are being fed and sustained. You set up His mean creatures as His associates and then you are made to understand the truth you turn away in stubbornness.
5. If you still do not believe, then be aware that a sudden torment is about to visit you, the like of which had visited the ‘Aad and the Thamūd, and this torment also will not be the final punishment of your crimes, but there is in addition the accountability and the fire of Hell in the Hereafter.
6. Wretched is the man who gets as company such satans from among men and Jinn, who show him nothing but green and pleasant, who make his follies seem fair to him, who neither let him think aright himself nor let him hear right from others. But on the Day of Reckoning when their doom overtakes them, each one of them will say that if he happened to get hold of those who had misled and deceived him in the world, he would trample them under his foot.

7. This Qur'ān is an unchangeable Book. You can not defeat it by your machinations and falsehoods. Whether falsehood comes from the front or makes a secret and indirect attack from behind, it cannot succeed in refuting it.
8. Today when this Qur'ān is being presented in your own language so that you may understand it, you say that it should have been sent down in some foreign tongue. But had We sent it in a foreign tongue for your guidance, you would yourselves have called it a joke, as if to say, "What a strange thing! The Arabs are being given guidance in a non-Arabic language, which nobody understands." This means that you, in fact, have no desire to obtain guidance. You are only inventing ever new excuses for not affirming the faith.
9. Have you ever considered that if it became established that the Qur'ān was really from God, then what fate you would meet by denying it and opposing it so vehemently as you do?
10. Today you do not believe but soon you will see with your own eyes that the message of this Qur'ān had pervaded the whole world and you have yourselves been overwhelmed by it. Then you will come to know that what you were being told was the very truth.

Besides giving these answers to the opponents, attention has been paid to the problems which the believers and the Prophet himself were facing in that environment of active resistance. Not to speak of preaching the message to others, the believers were even finding it difficult to follow the way of the Faith. Any one about whom it became known that he had become a Muslim, life would become an agony. As against the dreadful combination of the enemy and its all pervading power, they were feeling utterly helpless and powerless. In this state, in the first place, they were consoled and encouraged, as if to say: "You are not, in fact, helpless and powerless, for any person who believes in God as his Lord and adheres to this belief and way of life resolutely, God's angels descend on him and help and support him at every stage, from the life of this world till the Hereafter." Then they were encouraged with the consolation: "The best man is he who does good, invites others to God and proclaims firmly that he is a Muslim."

The question the Prophet had at that time was as to how he should carve out a way of preaching his message when he had to face such heavy odds on every side. The solution he was given to this question was: "Although apparently the obstacles seem to be insurmountable, the weapon of good morals and character can smash and melt them away. Use this weapon patiently, and whenever Satan provokes you and incites you to use some other device, seek refuge in God."

Sūrah 41: Fussilat¹²⁸³

In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate,
the Most Merciful

1. Hā, Meem.¹²⁸⁴
2. [This is] a revelation from the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful –
3. A Book whose verses have been detailed, an Arabic Qur’ān¹²⁸⁵ for a people who know,
4. As a giver of good tidings and a warner; but most of them turn away, so they do not hear.
5. And they say, “Our hearts are within coverings [i.e., screened] from that to which you invite us, and in our ears is deafness, and between us and you is a partition, so work;¹²⁸⁶ indeed, we are working.”
6. Say, [O Muhammad], “I am only a man like you to whom it has been revealed that your god is but one God; so take a straight course to Him and seek His forgiveness.” And woe to those who associate others with God –
7. Those who do not give zakāh, and in the Hereafter they are disbelievers.
8. Indeed, those who believe and do righteous deeds – for them is a reward uninterrupted.
9. Say, “Do you indeed disbelieve in He who created the earth in two days and
10. And He placed on it [i.e., the earth] firmly set mountains over its surface, and He blessed it and determined therein its [creatures’] sustenance in four days without distinction¹²⁸⁷ – for [the information of] those who ask.
11. Then He directed Himself¹²⁸⁸ to the heaven while it was smoke and said to it and to the earth, “Come [into being],¹²⁸⁹ willingly or by compulsion.” They said, “We have come willingly.”
12. And He completed them as seven heavens within two days and inspired [i.e., made known] in each heaven its command. And We adorned the nearest heaven with lamps [i.e., stars, for beauty] and as protection.¹²⁹⁰ That is the determination of the Exalted in Might, the Knowing.
13. But if they turn away, then say, “I have warned you of a thunderbolt like the thunderbolt [that struck] ‘Aad and Thamūd.
14. [That occurred] when the messengers had come to them before them and after them, [saying], “Worship not except God.” They said, “If our Lord had willed,¹²⁹¹ He would have sent down the angels, so indeed we, in that with which you have been sent, are disbelievers.”
15. As for ‘Aad, they were arrogant upon the earth without right and said, “Who

¹²⁸³ *Fussilat*: They (i.e., God’s verses) Have Been Detailed or Presented in Detail. The *sūrah* is also referred to as *Hā Meem as-Sajdah*.

¹²⁸⁴ See footnote to 2:1.

¹²⁸⁵ i.e., revealed in the Arabic language.

¹²⁸⁶ For your own religion or work against us.

¹²⁸⁷ Also “four equal days” or “four days of completion.”

¹²⁸⁸ See footnote to 2:19.

¹²⁸⁹ Literally, “become” or “do [as commanded].”

¹²⁹⁰ From the devils who attempt to steal information from the angels.

¹²⁹¹ To send messengers.

- is greater than us in strength?” Did they not consider that God who created them was greater than them in strength? But they were rejecting Our signs.
16. So We sent upon them a screaming wind during days of misfortune to make them taste the punishment of disgrace in the worldly life; but the punishment of the Hereafter is more disgracing, and they will not be helped.
 17. And as for Thamūd, We guided them, but they preferred blindness over guidance, so the thunderbolt of humiliating punishment seized them for what they used to earn.
 18. And We saved those who believed and used to fear God.
 19. And [mention, O Muhammad], the Day when the enemies of God will be gathered to the Fire while they are [driven], assembled in rows,
 20. Until, when they reach it, their hearing and their eyes and their skins will testify against them of what they used to do.
 21. And they will say to their skins, “Why have you testified against us?” They will say, “We were made to speak by God, who has made everything speak; and He created you the first time, and to Him you are returned.
 22. And you were not covering [i.e., protecting] yourselves,¹²⁹² lest your hearing testify against you or your sight or your skins, but you assumed that God does not know much of what you do.
 23. And that was your assumption which you assumed about your Lord. It has brought you to ruin, and you have become among the losers.”
 24. So [even] if they are patient, the Fire is a residence for them; and if they ask to appease [God], they will not be of those who are allowed to appease.
 25. And We appointed for them companions¹²⁹³ who made attractive to them what was before them and what was behind them [of sin], and the word [i.e., decree] has come into effect upon them among nations which had passed on before them of jinn and men. Indeed, they [all] were losers.
 26. And those who disbelieve say, “Do not listen to this Qur’ān and speak noisily¹²⁹⁴ during [the recitation of] it that perhaps you will overcome.”
 27. But We will surely cause those who disbelieve to taste a severe punishment, and We will surely recompense them for the worst of what they had been doing.
 28. That is the recompense of the enemies of God – the Fire. For them therein is the home of eternity as recompense for what they, of Our verses, were rejecting.
 29. And those who disbelieved will [then] say, “Our Lord, show us those who misled us of the jinn and men [so] we

¹²⁹² With righteousness or by fearing God.

¹²⁹³ In this world among the evil *jinn* and men.

¹²⁹⁴ Other meanings include “speak improperly” and/or “make a clamor.” The purpose of this was to prevent the hearing or understanding of the Qur’ān.

may put them under our feet¹²⁹⁵ that they will be among the lowest.”

30. Indeed, those who have said, “Our Lord is God” and then remained on a right course – the angels will descend upon them, [saying], “Do not fear and do not grieve but receive good tidings of Paradise, which you were promised.
31. We [angels] were your allies in worldly life and [are so] in the Hereafter. And you will have therein whatever your souls desire, and you will have therein whatever you request [or wish]
32. As accommodation from a [Lord who is] Forgiving and Merciful.”
33. And who is better in speech than one who invites to God and does righteousness and says, “Indeed, I am of the Muslims.”
34. And not equal are the good deed and the bad. Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better; and thereupon, the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend.
35. But none is granted it except those who are patient, and none is granted it except one having a great portion [of good].
36. And if there comes to you from Satan an evil suggestion, then seek refuge in God. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Knowing.
37. And of His signs are the night and day and the sun and moon. Do not prostrate to the sun or to the moon, but

prostate to God, who created them, if it should be Him that you worship.¹²⁹⁶

38. But if they are arrogant – then those who are near your Lord [i.e., the angels] exalt Him by night and by day, and they do not become weary.
39. And of His signs is that you see the earth stilled, but when We send down upon it rain, it quivers and grows. Indeed, He who has given it life is the Giver of Life to the dead. Indeed, He is over all things competent.
40. Indeed, those who inject deviation into Our verses¹²⁹⁷ are not concealed from Us. So, is he who is cast into the Fire better or he who comes secure on the Day of Resurrection? Do whatever you will; indeed, He is Seeing of what you do.
41. Indeed, those who disbelieve in the message [i.e., the Qur’ān]¹²⁹⁸ after it has come to them...¹²⁹⁹ And indeed, it is a mighty¹³⁰⁰ Book.
42. Falsehood cannot approach it from before it or from behind it; [it is] a revelation from a [Lord who is] Wise and Praiseworthy.
43. Nothing is said to you, [O Muhammad], except what was already said to the messengers before you. Indeed, your Lord is a possessor of forgiveness and a possessor of painful penalty.

¹²⁹⁵ In the lowest depths of Hell. Or “that we may step on them” in revenge.

¹²⁹⁶ i.e., Do not worship God through His creations but worship Him directly and exclusively.

¹²⁹⁷ Through deviant recitations or interpretations.

¹²⁹⁸ i.e., reject it or prefer deviant interpretation.

¹²⁹⁹ The conclusion is understood to be “...will have earned an indescribable punishment.”

¹³⁰⁰ Inimitable, resistant to attack, protected by God.

44. And if We had made it a foreign [i.e., non-Arabic] Qur'ān, they would have said, "Why are its verses not explained in detail [in our language]? Is it a foreign [recitation] and an Arab [messenger]?" Say, "It is, for those who believe, a guidance and cure." And those who do not believe – in their ears is deafness, and it is upon them blindness. Those are being called from a distant place.¹³⁰¹
45. And We had already given Moses the Scripture, but it came under disagreement.¹³⁰² And if not for a word [i.e., decree]¹³⁰³ that preceded from your Lord, it would have been concluded between them. And indeed they are, concerning it [i.e., the Qur'ān], in disquieting doubt.
46. Whoever does righteousness – it is for his [own] soul; and whoever does evil [does so] against it. And your Lord is not ever unjust to [His] servants.
47. To Him [alone] is attributed knowledge of the Hour. And fruits emerge not from their coverings nor does a female conceive or give birth except with His knowledge. And the Day He will call to them, "Where are My 'partners'?" they will say, "We announce to You that there is [no longer] among us any witness [to that]."
48. And lost from them will be those they were invoking before, and they will be certain that they have no place of escape.
49. Man is not weary of supplication for good [things], but if evil touches him, he is hopeless and despairing.
50. And if We let him taste mercy from Us after an adversity which has touched him, he will surely say, "This is [due] to me,¹³⁰⁴ and I do not think the Hour will occur; and [even] if I should be returned to my Lord, indeed, for me there will be with Him the best." But We will surely inform those who disbelieved about what they did, and We will surely make them taste a massive punishment.
51. And when We bestow favor upon man, he turns away and distances himself; but when evil touches him, then he is full of extensive supplication.
52. Say, "Have you considered: if it [i.e., the Qur'ān] is from God and you disbelieved in it, who would be more astray than one who is in extreme dissension?"
53. We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth.¹³⁰⁵ But is it not sufficient concerning your Lord that He is, over all things, a Witness?
54. Unquestionably, they are in doubt about the meeting with their Lord. Unquestionably He is, of all things, encompassing.

¹³⁰¹ For all practical purposes, since they neither hear nor understand.

¹³⁰² An alternative meaning is "he was opposed over it."

¹³⁰³ See footnote to 10:19.

¹³⁰⁴ Because of my effort, knowledge, excellence, etc.

¹³⁰⁵ Or "that He is the Truth."