

Sūrah 16: an-Nahl

Period of Revelation

The following internal evidence shows that this Sūrah was revealed during the last Makkan stage of Prophethood:

1. V. 41 clearly shows that persecution had forced some Muslims to emigrate to Abassinyah before the revelation of this Sūrah.
2. It is evident from v. 106 that at that time the persecution of the Muslims was at its height. Therefore a problem had arisen in regard to the utterance of a blasphemous word without actual disbelief under unbearable conditions. The problem was that if one did so how should he be treated.
3. V. 112-114 clearly refer to the end of a seven year famine that had struck Makkah some years after the appointment of the Prophet as God's Messenger.

Central Theme

All the topics of the Sūrah revolve around different aspects of the Message i.e., refutation of Shirk (polytheism) proof of Tawhid and warning of the consequences of the rejection of and opposition and antagonism to the Message.

Topics of Discussion

The very first verse gives direct and strict warning to those who were rejecting the Message outright as if to say God's decision has already been made concerning your rejection of the Message. Why are you then clamouring for hastening it? Why don't you make use of the respite that is being given to you! And this was exactly what the disbelievers of Makkah needed at the time of the revelation of this Sūrah. For they challenged the Prophet over and over again: "Why don't you bring that scourge with which you have been threatening us! For we have not only rejected your Message but have been openly opposing it for a long time." Such a challenge had become a by-word with them which they frequently repeated as a clear proof that Muhammad was not a true Prophet.

Immediately after this warning they have been admonished to give up shirk (polytheism) for this false creed was the main obstacle in the way of the Message. Then the following topics come over and over again one after the other:

1. Very convincing proofs of Tawhid and refutation of Shirk have been based on the plain signs in the universe and in man's own self.
2. The objections of the disbelievers have been answered, their arguments refuted, their doubts removed and their false pretexts exposed.
3. Warnings have been given of the consequences of persistence in false ways and antagonism to the Message.
4. The moral changes which the Message of the Prophet aims to bring practically in human life have been presented briefly in an appealing manner. The polytheists have been told that belief in God which they also professed demanded that it should not be confined merely to lip service but this creed should take a definite shape in moral and practical life.

The Prophet and his companions have been comforted and told about the attitude they should adopt in the face of antagonism and persecution by the disbelievers.

Sūrah 16: an-Nahl⁶³⁴

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

1. The command of God is coming,⁶³⁵ so be not impatient for it. Exalted is He and high above what they associate with Him.
2. He sends down the angels, with the inspiration [i.e., revelation] of His command, upon whom He wills of His servants, [telling them], “Warn that there is no deity except Me; so fear Me.”
3. He created the heavens and earth in truth. High is He above what they associate with Him.
4. He created man from a sperm-drop; then at once⁶³⁶ he is a clear adversary.
5. And the grazing livestock He has created for you; in them is warmth⁶³⁷ and [numerous] benefits, and from them you eat.
6. And for you in them is [the enjoyment of] beauty when you bring them in [for the evening] and when you send them out [to pasture].
7. And they carry your loads to a land you could not have reached except with difficulty to yourselves. Indeed, your Lord is Kind and Merciful.
8. And [He created] the horses, mules and donkeys for you to ride and [as] adornment. And He creates that which you do not know.
9. And upon God⁶³⁸ is the direction of the [right] way, and among them [i.e., the various paths] are those deviating. And if He willed, He could have guided you all.
10. It is He who sends down rain from the sky; from it is drink and from it is foliage in which you pasture [animals].
11. He causes to grow for you thereby the crops, olives, palm trees, grapevines, and from all the fruits. Indeed in that is a sign for a people who give thought.
12. And He has subjected for you the night and day and the sun and moon, and the stars are subjected by His command. Indeed in that are signs for a people who reason.
13. And [He has subjected] whatever He multiplied for you on the earth of varying colors. Indeed in that is a sign for a people who remember.
14. And it is He who subjected the sea for you to eat from it tender meat and to extract from it ornaments which you wear. And you see the ships plowing through it, and [He subjected it] that you may seek of His bounty; and perhaps you will be grateful.
15. And He has cast into the earth firmly set mountains, lest it shift with you, and [made] rivers and roads, that you may be guided,

⁶³⁴ *An-Nahl*: The Bee.

⁶³⁵ Literally, “has come,” indicating the certainty and nearness of the Last Hour.

⁶³⁶ As soon as he becomes strong and independent.

⁶³⁷ i.e., in clothing, tents, furnishings, etc.

⁶³⁸ God has taken it upon Himself to guide man to the right path. The meaning has also been interpreted as “To God...”

16. And landmarks. And by the stars they are [also] guided. ⁶³⁹
17. Then is He who creates like one who does not create? So will you not be reminded?
18. And if you should count the favors of God, you could not enumerate them. Indeed, God is Forgiving and Merciful.
19. And God knows what you conceal and what you declare.
20. And those they invoke other than God create nothing, and they [themselves] are created.
21. They are, [in fact], dead,⁶⁴⁰ not alive, and they do not perceive when they will be resurrected.
22. Your god is one God. But those who do not believe in the Hereafter - their hearts are disapproving, and they are arrogant.
23. Assuredly, God knows what they conceal and what they declare. Indeed, He does not like the arrogant.
24. And when it is said to them, "What has your Lord sent down?" they say, "Legends of the former peoples,"
25. That they may bear their own burdens [i.e., sins] in full on the Day of Resurrection and some of the burdens of those whom they misguide without [i.e., by lack of] knowledge. Unquestionably, evil is that which they bear.
26. Those before them had already plotted, but God came at [i.e., uprooted] their building from the foundations, so the roof fell upon them from above them,⁶⁴¹ and the punishment came to them from where they did not perceive.
27. Then on the Day of Resurrection He will disgrace them and say, "Where are My 'partners' for whom you used to oppose [the believers]?" Those who were given knowledge will say, "Indeed disgrace, this Day, and evil are upon the disbelievers" -
28. The ones whom the angels take in death [while] wronging themselves,⁶⁴² and [who] then offer submission, [saying], "We were not doing any evil." But, yes! Indeed, God is Knowing of what you used to do.
29. So enter the gates of Hell to abide eternally therein, and how wretched is the residence of the arrogant.
30. And it will be said to those who feared God, "What did your Lord send down?" They will say, "[That which is] good." For those who do good in this world is good; and the home of the Hereafter is better. And how excellent is the home of the righteous -
31. Gardens of perpetual residence, which they will enter, beneath which rivers flow. They will have therein whatever they wish. Thus does God reward the righteous -
32. The ones whom the angels take in death, [being] good and pure; [the angels] will say, "Peace be upon you. Enter Paradise for what you used to do."

⁶³⁹ Through the desert or the sea at night.

⁶⁴⁰ i.e., inanimate or without understanding.

⁶⁴¹ i.e., God caused their plan to fail and exposed their plot.

⁶⁴² i.e., having made punishment due to them for their numerous sins and crimes.

33. Do they [i.e., the disbelievers] await [anything] except that the angels should come to them or there comes the command of your Lord? Thus did those do before them. And God wronged them not, but they had been wronging themselves.
34. So they were struck by the evil consequences of what they did and were enveloped by what they used to ridicule.
35. And those who associate others with God say, "If God had willed, we would not have worshipped anything other than Him, neither we nor our fathers, nor would we have forbidden anything through other than Him." Thus did those do before them. So is there upon the messengers except [the duty of] clear notification?
36. And We certainly sent into every nation a messenger, [saying], "Worship God and avoid tāghūt."⁶⁴³ And among them were those whom God guided, and among them were those upon whom error was [deservedly] decreed. So proceed [i.e., travel] through the earth and observe how was the end of the deniers.
37. [Even] if you should strive for their guidance, [O Muhammad], indeed, God does not guide those He sends astray,⁶⁴⁴ and they will have no helpers.
38. And they swear by God their strongest oaths [that] God will not resurrect one who dies. But yes - [it is] a true promise [binding] upon Him, but most of the people do not know.
39. [It is] so He will make clear to them [the truth of] that wherein they differ and so those who have disbelieved may know that they were liars.
40. Indeed, Our word to a thing when We intend it is but that We say to it, "Be," and it is.
41. And those who emigrated for [the cause of] God after they had been wronged - We will surely settle them in this world in a good place; but the reward of the Hereafter is greater, if only they could know.
42. [They are] those who endured patiently and upon their Lord relied.
43. And We sent not before you except men to whom We revealed [Our message]. So ask the people of the message [i.e., former scriptures] if you do not know.
44. [We sent them] with clear proofs and written ordinances. And We revealed to you the message [i.e., the Qur'ān] that you may make clear to the people what was sent down to them and that they might give thought.
45. Then, do those who have planned evil deeds feel secure that God will not cause the earth to swallow them or that the punishment will not come upon them from where they do not perceive?
46. Or that He would not seize them during their [usual] activity, and they could not cause failure [i.e., escape from Him]?

⁶⁴³ False objects of worship.

⁶⁴⁴ As a result of their choice to reject guidance.

47. Or that He would not seize them gradually [in a state of dread]⁶⁴⁵ But indeed, your Lord is Kind and Merciful.⁶⁴⁶
48. Have they not considered what things God has created? Their shadows incline to the right and to the left, prostrating to God, while they [i.e., those creations] are humble.
49. And to God prostrates whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth of creatures, and the angels [as well], and they are not arrogant.
50. They fear their Lord above them, and they do what they are commanded.
51. And God has said, "Do not take for yourselves two⁶⁴⁷ deities. He [i.e., God] is but one God, so fear only Me."
52. And to Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth, and to Him is [due] worship constantly. Then is it other than God that you fear?
53. And whatever you have of favor - it is from God. Then when adversity touches you, to Him you cry for help.
54. Then when He removes the adversity from you, at once a party of you associates others with their Lord
55. So they will deny what We have given them. Then enjoy yourselves, for you are going to know.
56. And they assign to what they do not know⁶⁴⁸ [i.e., false deities] a portion of
- that which We have provided them. By God, you will surely be questioned about what you used to invent.
57. And they attribute to God daughters⁶⁴⁹ - exalted is He - and for them is what they desire [i.e., sons].
58. And when one of them is informed of [the birth of] a female, his face becomes dark, and he suppresses grief.
59. He hides himself from the people because of the ill of which he has been informed. Should he keep it in humiliation or bury it in the ground? Unquestionably, evil is what they decide.
60. For those who do not believe in the Hereafter is the description [i.e., an attribute] of evil;⁶⁵⁰ and for God is the highest attribute. And He is Exalted in Might, the Wise.
61. And if God were to impose blame on the people for their wrongdoing, He would not have left upon it [i.e., the earth] any creature, but He defers them for a specified term. And when their term has come, they will not remain behind an hour, nor will they precede [it].
62. And they attribute to God that which they dislike [i.e., daughters], and their tongues assert the lie that they will have the best [from Him]. Assuredly, they will have the Fire, and they will be [therein] neglected.⁶⁵¹

⁶⁴⁵ i.e., being aware of what is about to strike them after having seen those near them succumb.

⁶⁴⁶ Postponing deserved punishment and giving opportunities for repentance.

⁶⁴⁷ Meaning more than one.

⁶⁴⁸ i.e., that of which they have no knowledge; rather, they have mere assumption based upon tradition or the claims of misguided men.

⁶⁴⁹ By claiming that the angels are His daughters.

⁶⁵⁰ Such as that described in the previous two verses.

⁶⁵¹ Another meaning is "...and they will be made to precede [all others thereto]."

63. By God, We did certainly send [messengers] to nations before you, but Satan made their deeds attractive to them. And he is their [i.e., the disbelievers] ally today [as well], and they will have a painful punishment.
64. And We have not revealed to you the Book, [O Muhammad], except for you to make clear to them that wherein they have differed and as guidance and mercy for a people who believe.
65. And God has sent down rain from the sky and given life thereby to the earth after its lifelessness. Indeed in that is a sign for a people who listen.
66. And indeed, for you in grazing livestock is a lesson. We give you drink from what is in their bellies - between excretion and blood - pure milk, palatable to drinkers.
67. And from the fruits of the palm trees and grapevines you take intoxicant and good provision.⁶⁵² Indeed in that is a sign for a people who reason.
68. And your Lord inspired to the bee, "Take for yourself among the mountains, houses [i.e., hives], and among the trees and [in] that which they construct.
69. Then eat from all the fruits⁶⁵³ and follow the ways of your Lord laid down [for you]." There emerges from their bellies a drink, varying in colors, in which there is healing for people. Indeed in that is a sign for a people who give thought.
70. And God created you; then He will take you in death. And among you is he who is reversed to the most decrepit [old] age so that he will not know, after [having had] knowledge, a thing. Indeed, God is Knowing and Competent.
71. And God has favored some of you over others in provision. But those who were favored [i.e., given more] would not hand over their provision to those whom their right hands possess [i.e., slaves] so they would be equal to them therein.⁶⁵⁴ Then is it the favor of God they reject?
72. And God has made for you from yourselves mates and has made for you from your mates sons and grandchildren and has provided for you from the good things. Then in falsehood do they believe and in the favor of God they disbelieve?
73. And they worship besides God that which does not possess for them [the power of] provision from the heavens and the earth at all, and [in fact], they are unable.
74. So do not assert similarities to God.⁶⁵⁵ Indeed, God knows and you do not know.
75. God presents an example: a slave [who is] owned and unable to do a thing and he to whom We have provided from Us good provision, so he spends from it secretly and publicly. Can they be equal? Praise to God! But most of them do not know.

⁶⁵² This verse was revealed before the prohibition of intoxicants. It alludes to the fact that there are both evil and good possibilities in certain things.

⁶⁵³ i.e., delicious substances found by the bee.

⁶⁵⁴ The argument presented in this verse is: if they cannot consider their own possessions equal to themselves, then how can they consider God's creations as being equal to Him?

⁶⁵⁵ As there is nothing comparable to Him.

76. And God presents an example of two men, one of them dumb and unable to do a thing, while he is a burden to his guardian. Wherever he directs him, he brings no good. Is he equal to one who commands justice, while he is on a straight path?
77. And to God belongs the unseen [aspects] of the heavens and the earth. And the command for the Hour is not but as a glance of the eye or even nearer. Indeed, God is over all things competent.
78. And God has extracted you from the wombs of your mothers not knowing a thing, and He made for you hearing and vision and hearts [i.e., intellect] that perhaps you would be grateful.
79. Do they not see the birds controlled in the atmosphere of the sky? None holds them up except God. Indeed in that are signs for a people who believe.
80. And God has made for you from your homes a place of rest and made for you from the hides of the animals tents which you find light on your day of travel and your day of encampment; and from their wool, fur and hair is furnishing and enjoyment [i.e., provision] for a time.
81. And God has made for you, from that which He has created, shadows [i.e., shade] and has made for you from the mountains, shelters and has made for you garments which protect you from the heat and garments [i.e., coats of mail] which protect you from your [enemy in] battle. Thus does He complete His favor upon you that you might submit [to Him].
82. But if they turn away, [O Muhammad] - then only upon you is [responsibility for] clear notification.
83. They recognize the favor of God; then they deny it. And most of them are disbelievers.
84. And [mention] the Day when We will resurrect from every nation a witness [i.e., their prophet]. Then it will not be permitted to the disbelievers [to apologize or make excuses], nor will they be asked to appease [God].
85. And when those who wronged see the punishment, it will not be lightened for them, nor will they be reprieved.
86. And when those who associated others with God see their “partners,” they will say, “Our Lord, these are our partners [to You] whom we used to invoke besides You.” But they will throw at them the statement, “Indeed, you are liars.”
87. And they will impart to God that Day [their] submission, and lost from them is what they used to invent.
88. Those who disbelieved and averted [others] from the way of God - We will increase them in punishment over [their] punishment for what corruption they were causing.
89. And [mention] the Day when We will resurrect among every nation a witness over them from themselves [i.e., their prophet]. And We will bring you, [O Muhammad], as a witness over these [i.e., your nation]. And We have sent down to you the Book as clarification

- for all things and as guidance and mercy and good tidings for the Muslims.⁶⁵⁶
90. Indeed, God orders justice and good conduct and giving to relatives and forbids immorality and bad conduct and oppression. He admonishes you that perhaps you will be reminded.
91. And fulfill the covenant of God when you have taken it, [O believers], and do not break oaths after their confirmation while you have made God, over you, a security [i.e., witness]. Indeed, God knows what you do.
92. And do not be like she who untwisted her spun thread after it was strong [by] taking your oaths as [means of] deceit between you because one community is more plentiful [in number or wealth] than another community.⁶⁵⁷ God only tries you thereby. And He will surely make clear to you on the Day of Resurrection that over which you used to differ.
93. And if God had willed, He could have made you [of] one religion, but He causes to stray whom He wills and guides whom He wills.⁶⁵⁸ And you will surely be questioned about what you used to do.
94. And do not take your oaths as [means of] deceit between you, lest a foot slip after it was [once] firm, and you would taste evil [in this world] for what [people] you diverted from the way of God,⁶⁵⁹ and you would have [in the Hereafter] a great punishment.
95. And do not exchange the covenant of God for a small price. Indeed, what is with God is best for you, if only you could know.
96. Whatever you have will end, but what God has is lasting. And We will surely give those who were patient their reward according to the best of what they used to do.
97. Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer - We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do.
98. So when you recite the Qur'ān, [first] seek refuge in God from Satan, the expelled [from His mercy].
99. Indeed, there is for him no authority over those who have believed and rely upon their Lord.
100. His authority is only over those who take him as an ally and those who through him associate others with God.
101. And when We substitute a verse in place of a verse - and God is most knowing of what He sends down - they say, "You, [O Muhammad], are but an inventor [of lies]." But most of them do not know.
102. Say, [O Muhammad], "The Pure Spirit [i.e., Gabriel] has brought it down from your Lord in truth to make firm those

⁶⁵⁶ Those who have submitted themselves to God.

⁶⁵⁷ i.e., do not swear falsely or break a treaty or contract merely for a worldly advantage.

⁶⁵⁸ According to His knowledge of each soul's preference.

⁶⁵⁹ Referring to those who would be dissuaded from Islām as a result of a Muslim's deceit and treachery.

- who believe and as guidance and good tidings to the Muslims.”
103. And We certainly know that they say, “It is only a human being who teaches him [i.e., the Prophet].” The tongue of the one they refer to is foreign,⁶⁶⁰ and this [recitation i.e., Qur’ān] is [in] a clear Arabic language.
104. Indeed, those who do not believe in the verses of God - God will not guide them, and for them is a painful punishment.
105. They only invent falsehood who do not believe in the verses of God, and it is those who are the liars.
106. Whoever disbelieves in [i.e., denies] God after his belief...⁶⁶¹ except for one who is forced [to renounce his religion] while his heart is secure in faith. But those who [willingly] open their breasts to disbelief, upon them is wrath from God, and for them is a great punishment;
107. That is because they preferred the worldly life over the Hereafter and that God does not guide the disbelieving people.
108. Those are the ones over whose hearts and hearing and vision God has sealed, and it is those who are the heedless.
109. Assuredly, it is they, in the Hereafter, who will be the losers.
110. Then, indeed your Lord, to those who emigrated after they had been compelled [to renounce their religion] and thereafter fought [for the cause of God] and were patient - indeed, your Lord, after that, is Forgiving and Merciful
111. On the Day when every soul will come disputing [i.e., pleading] for itself, and every soul will be fully compensated for what it did, and they will not be wronged [i.e., treated unjustly].
112. And God presents an example: a city [i.e., Makkah] which was safe and secure, its provision coming to it in abundance from every location, but it denied the favors of God. So God made it taste the envelopment of hunger and fear for what they had been doing.
113. And there had certainly come to them a Messenger from among themselves, but they denied him; so punishment overtook them while they were wrongdoers.
114. Then eat of what God has provided for you [which is] lawful and good. And be grateful for the favor of God, if it is [indeed] Him that you worship.
115. He has only forbidden to you dead animals,⁶⁶² blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than God. But whoever is forced [by necessity], neither desiring [it] nor transgressing [its limit] - then indeed, God is Forgiving and Merciful.
116. And do not say about what your tongues assert of untruth, “This is lawful and this is unlawful,” to invent falsehood about God. Indeed, those who

⁶⁶⁰ Having seen the Prophet speaking with a foreign man on occasion, the Quraysh accused him of repeating the man’s words.

⁶⁶¹ Based upon the conclusion of this verse, the omitted phrase concerning the apostate is understood to be “...has earned the wrath of God...”

⁶⁶² Those not slaughtered or hunted expressly for food.

- invent falsehood about God will not succeed.
117. [It is but] a brief enjoyment, and they will have a painful punishment.
118. And to those who are Jews We have prohibited that which We related to you before.⁶⁶³ And We did not wrong them [thereby], but they were wronging themselves.
119. Then, indeed your Lord, to those who have done wrong out of ignorance and then repent after that and correct themselves - indeed, your Lord, thereafter, is Forgiving and Merciful.
120. Indeed, Abraham was a [comprehensive] leader,⁶⁶⁴ devoutly obedient to God, inclining toward truth, and he was not of those who associate others with God.
121. [He was] grateful for His favors. He [i.e., God] chose him and guided him to a straight path.
122. And We gave him good in this world, and indeed, in the Hereafter he will be among the righteous.
123. Then We revealed to you, [O Muhammad], to follow the religion of Abraham, inclining toward truth; and he was not of those who associate with God.
124. The sabbath was only appointed for those who differed over it. And indeed, your Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that over which they used to differ.
125. Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided.
126. And if you punish [an enemy, O believers], punish with an equivalent of that with which you were harmed.⁶⁶⁵ But if you are patient - it is better for those who are patient.
127. And be patient, [O Muhammad], and your patience is not but through God. And do not grieve over them and do not be in distress over what they conspire.
128. Indeed, God is with those who fear Him and those who are doers of good.

⁶⁶³ See 6:146.

⁶⁶⁴ i.e., embodying all the excellent qualities which make one an example to be followed.

⁶⁶⁵ Not exceeding it.