

Sūrah 20: Tā Hā

Period of Revelation

The period of its revelation is the same as of Surah Maryam. It is just possible that it was sent down during the Migration to Abassinyah or just after it. Anyhow it is certain that this Sūrah was revealed before Umar embraced Islām.

According to a well known and authentic hadith when Umar set out to kill the Prophet he met a certain person who said *'Before you do anything else you should know that your own sister and brother-in-law have embraced Islām'* Hearing this he directly went to the house of his sister. There he found his sister Fātimah and his brother-in-law Said bin Zayd learning the contents of a scroll from Khabbab bin Art. When Fātimah saw him coming she hid the scroll at once but Umar had heard the recital so he began to interrogate them about it. Then he began to thrash his brother-in-law and wounded his sister who tried to protect him. At last both of them confessed *'We have become Muslims; you may do whatever you like.'* As Umar was moved to see blood running down from her head he said, *'Show me the thing you were reading.'* The sister asked him to promise on oath that he would not tear it and added *'You cannot touch it unless you have a bath.'* Accordingly, Umar took his bath and when he began to read the scroll which contained this Sūrah he spontaneously spoke out, *'What an excellent thing!'* At this Khabbab who had hidden himself at the sound of his footsteps came out of his hiding and said, *'By God I have high expectations that God will get great service from you to propagate the Message of His Prophet for just yesterday I heard the Holy Prophet praying to God 'My Lord make Abul Hakam bin Hisham (Abu Jahl) or Umar bin Khat-tab a supporter of Islām.' So O Umar turn to God turn to God.'* These words proved to be so persuasive that he at once accompanied Khabbab and went to the Prophet to embrace Islām. This happened a short time after the Migration to Abassinyah.

Theme and Topics of Discussion

This Sūrah begins with the enunciation of the object of the Revelation of the Qur'ān to this effect: "O Muhammad this Qur'ān has not been sent down to you to put you unnecessarily to some great affliction. It does not demand from you to perform the impossible task of imbuing the hearts of the obdurate disbelievers with Faith. It is merely an admonition meant to guide on to the Right Path those who fear God and want to save themselves from His punishment. This Qur'ān is the Word of the Master of the earth and the heavens and God-head belongs to Him alone: These two facts are eternal whether one believes them or not."

After this introduction the Surah abruptly moves on to relate the story of Prophet Moses without any apparent relevancy and without even hinting at its applicability to the events of the period. However if we read between the lines we realize that the discourse is addressed very relevantly to the people of Makkah. But before we explain the hidden meaning of the discourse we must keep in view the fact that the Arabs in general acknowledged Moses as a Prophet of God. This was so because they had "been influenced by the large number of the Jews around them and by" the neighbouring Christian kingdoms. Now let us state those things which are hidden between the lines of the story:

1. God does not appoint a Prophet by the beat of drums or by celebrating the occasion in a regular and formal ceremony as if to say We are appointing such and such a person as Our Prophet from today. On the contrary He bestows Prophethood in a confidential manner just as He did in the case of Prophet Moses. Therefore you should not consider it strange if Muhammad has been appointed as a Prophet all of a sudden and without any public proclamation.
2. The fundamental principles presented by Prophet Muhammad, Tawhid (oneness of God) and the Hereafter are just the same as were taught to Prophet Moses at the time of his appointment.
3. Prophet Muhammad has been made the standard bearer of the Message of the Truth among the people of the Quraysh all by himself without material provisions just as Prophet Moses was entrusted with the Mission to go to a tyrant king like Pharaoh and ask him to give up his attitude of

rebellion. These are the mysterious ways of God. He catches hold of a way farer of Midian on his way to Egypt and says Go and fight with the greatest tyrant of the time. He did not provide him with armies and provisions for this Mission. The only thing He did was to appoint his brother as his assistant at his request.

4. You O People of Makkah should note it well that Pharaoh employed the same devices against Prophet Moses as you are employing against Prophet Muhammad; frivolous objections accusations and cruel persecutions. You should know that God's Prophet came out victorious over Pharaoh who possessed large armies and war equipments. Incidentally the Muslims have been consoled and comforted though not in so many words that they should not be afraid of fighting with the Quraysh against fearful odds for the mission which is supported by God comes out victorious in the end. At the same time the Muslims have been exhorted to follow the excellent example of the magicians of Egypt who remained steadfast in their Faith though Pharaoh threatened them with horrible vengeance.
5. An incident from the story of the Israelites has been cited to show in what ridiculous manner the idolisation of false gods and goddesses starts and that the Prophets of God do not tolerate even the slightest tinge of this preposterous practice. Likewise Prophet Muhammad is following the former Prophets in opposing shirk and idol worship today.

Thus the story of Moses has been used to throw light on all those matters which were connected with the conflict between the Prophet and the Quraysh. Then at the end of the story the Quraysh have been briefly admonished as if to say The Qur'ān has been sent down in your tongue for your own good. If you listen to it and follow its admonition, you will be doing so for your own good but if you reject it, you will yourselves meet with an evil end."

After this the story of Prophet Adam has been related, as if to tell the Quraysh, "The way you are following is the way of Satan, whereas the right way for a man is to follow his father Adam. He was beguiled by Satan, but when he realized his error, he plainly confessed it and repented and again turned back to the service of God and won His favor. On the other hand, if a person follows Satan and sticks to his error obdurately in spite of admonition, he does harm to himself alone like Satan."

In the end, the Prophet and the Muslims have been advised not to be impatient in regard to the punishment to the disbelievers, as if to say, "God has His Own scheme concerning them. He does not seize them at once but gives them sufficient respite. Therefore you should not grow impatient but bear the persecutions with fortitude and go on conveying the Message."

In this connection, great emphasis has been laid on salat so that it may create in the believers the virtues of patience, forbearance, contentment, resignation to the will of God and self analysis for these are greatly needed in the service of the Message of the Truth.

Sūrah 20: Tā Hā⁷⁷⁰

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

1. Tā, Hā.⁷⁷¹
2. We have not sent down to you the Qurʾān that you be distressed
3. But only as a reminder for those who fear [God] -
4. A revelation from He who created the earth and highest heavens,
5. The Most Merciful [who is] above the Throne established.⁷⁷²
6. To Him belongs what is in the heavens and what is on the earth and what is between them and what is under the soil.
7. And if you speak aloud - then indeed, He knows the secret and what is [even] more hidden.
8. God - there is no deity except Him. To Him belong the best names.
9. And has the story of Moses reached you? -
10. When he saw a fire and said to his family, "Stay here; indeed, I have perceived a fire; perhaps I can bring you a torch or find at the fire some guidance."
11. And when he came to it, he was called, "O Moses,
12. Indeed, I am your Lord, so remove your sandals. Indeed, you are in the sacred valley of Tuwā.
13. And I have chosen you, so listen to what is revealed [to you].
14. Indeed, I am God. There is no deity except Me, so worship Me and establish prayer for My remembrance.
15. Indeed, the Hour is coming - I almost conceal it⁷⁷³ - so that every soul may be recompensed according to that for which it strives.
16. So do not let one avert you from it⁷⁷⁴ who does not believe in it and follows his desire, for you [then] would perish.
17. And what is that in your right hand, O Moses?"
18. He said, "It is my staff; I lean upon it, and I bring down leaves for my sheep and I have therein other uses."
19. [God] said, "Throw it down, O Moses."
20. So he threw it down, and thereupon it was a snake, moving swiftly.
21. [God] said, "Seize it and fear not; We will return it to its former condition.
22. And draw in your hand to your side; it will come out white without disease - another sign,
23. That We may show you [some] of Our greater signs.

⁷⁷⁰ *Tā Hā*: (the letters) *tā and hā*.

⁷⁷¹ See footnote to 2:1.

⁷⁷² i.e., having ascendancy over all creation. See footnote to 2:19.

⁷⁷³ Meaning that God keeps knowledge of the Hour hidden from everyone except Himself.

⁷⁷⁴ From preparation for the Hour or for the Hereafter.

24. Go to Pharaoh. Indeed, he has transgressed [i.e., tyrannized].”
25. [Moses] said, “My Lord, expand [i.e., relax] for me my breast [with assurance]
26. And ease for me my task
27. And untie the knot from my tongue
28. That they may understand my speech.
29. And appoint for me a minister [i.e., assistant] from my family -
30. Aaron, my brother.
31. Increase through him my strength
32. And let him share my task
33. That we may exalt You much
34. And remember You much.
35. Indeed, You are of us ever Seeing.”
36. [God] said, “You have been granted your request, O Moses.
37. And We had already conferred favor upon you another time,
38. When We inspired to your mother what We inspired,
39. [Saying], ‘Cast him into the chest and cast it into the river, and the river will throw it onto the bank; there will take him an enemy to Me and an enemy to him.’ And I bestowed upon you love from Me⁷⁷⁵ that you would be brought up under My eye [i.e., observation and care].
40. [And We favored you] when your sister went and said, ‘Shall I direct you to someone who will be responsible for him?’ So We restored you to your mother that she might be content and not grieve. And you killed someone,⁷⁷⁶ but We saved you from retaliation and tried you with a [severe] trial. And you remained [some] years among the people of Madyan. Then you came [here] at the decreed time, O Moses.
41. And I produced you for Myself.⁷⁷⁷
42. Go, you and your brother, with My signs and do not slacken in My remembrance.
43. Go, both of you, to Pharaoh. Indeed, he has transgressed.
44. And speak to him with gentle speech that perhaps he may be reminded or fear [God].”
45. They said, “Our Lord, indeed we are afraid that he will hasten [punishment] against us or that he will transgress.”
46. [God] said, “Fear not. Indeed, I am with you both; I hear and I see.
47. So go to him and say, ‘Indeed, we are messengers of your Lord, so send with us the Children of Israel and do not torment them. We have come to you with a sign from your Lord. And peace⁷⁷⁸ will be upon he who follows the guidance.

⁷⁷⁵ God put love of Moses into the hearts of the people.

⁷⁷⁶ The Copt who died after being struck by Moses.

⁷⁷⁷ God had already selected Moses and made him strong in body and character according to the requirements of his mission.

⁷⁷⁸ i.e., safety and security from God’s Punishment.

48. Indeed, it has been revealed to us that the punishment will be upon whoever denies and turns away.’”
49. [Pharaoh] said, “So who is the Lord of you two, O Moses?”
50. He said, “Our Lord is He who gave each thing its form and then guided [it].”
51. [Pharaoh] said, “Then what is the case of the former generations?”
52. [Moses] said, “The knowledge thereof is with my Lord in a record. My Lord neither errs nor forgets.”
53. [It is He] who has made for you the earth as a bed [spread out] and inserted therein for you roadways and sent down from the sky, rain and produced thereby categories of various plants.
54. Eat [therefrom] and pasture your livestock. Indeed, in that are signs for those of intelligence.
55. From it [i.e., the earth] We created you, and into it We will return you, and from it We will extract you another time.
56. And We certainly showed him [i.e., Pharaoh] Our signs - all of them - but he denied and refused.
57. He said, “Have you come to us to drive us out of our land with your magic, O Moses?”
58. Then we will surely bring you magic like it, so make between us and you an appointment, which we will not fail to
- keep and neither will you, in a place as-signed.”⁷⁷⁹
59. [Moses] said, “Your appointment is on the day of the festival when the people assemble at mid-morning.”⁷⁸⁰
60. So Pharaoh went away, put together his plan, and then came [to Moses].
61. Moses said to them [i.e., the magicians summoned by Pharaoh], “Woe to you! Do not invent a lie against God or He will exterminate you with a punishment; and he has failed who invents [such falsehood].”
62. So they disputed over their affair among themselves and concealed their private conversation.
63. They said, “Indeed, these are two magicians who want to drive you out of your land with their magic and do away with your most exemplary way [i.e., religion or tradition].
64. So resolve upon your plan and then come [forward] in line. And he has succeeded today who overcomes.”
65. They said, “O Moses, either you throw or we will be the first to throw.”
66. He said, “Rather, you throw.” And suddenly their ropes and staffs seemed to him from their magic that they were moving [like snakes].
67. And he sensed within himself apprehension, did Moses.

⁷⁷⁹ Literally, “marked”, as to be known. Another meaning is “a place midway [between us]” or “a level place.”

⁷⁸⁰ So that the signs of God would be seen clearly.

68. We [i.e., God] said, “Fear not. Indeed, it is you who are superior.
69. And throw what is in your right hand; it will swallow up what they have crafted. What they have crafted is but the trick of a magician, and the magician will not succeed wherever he is.”
70. So the magicians fell down in prostration.⁷⁸¹ They said, “We have believed in the Lord of Aaron and Moses.”
71. [Pharaoh] said, “You believed him [i.e., Moses] before I gave you permission. Indeed, he is your leader who has taught you magic. So I will surely cut off your hands and your feet on opposite sides, and I will crucify you on the trunks of palm trees, and you will surely know which of us is more severe in [giving] punishment and more enduring.”
72. They said, “Never will we prefer you over what has come to us of clear proofs and [over] He who created us.⁷⁸² So decree whatever you are to decree. You can only decree for this worldly life.
73. Indeed, we have believed in our Lord that He may forgive us our sins and what you compelled us [to do] of magic. And God is better and more enduring.”⁷⁸³
74. Indeed, whoever comes to his Lord as a criminal - indeed, for him is Hell; he will neither die therein nor live.
75. But whoever comes to Him as a believer having done righteous deeds - for those will be the highest degrees [in position]:
76. Gardens of perpetual residence beneath which rivers flow, wherein they abide eternally. And that is the reward of one who purifies himself.⁷⁸⁴
77. And We had inspired to Moses, “Travel by night with My servants and strike for them a dry path through the sea; you will not fear being overtaken [by Pharaoh] nor be afraid [of drowning].”
78. So Pharaoh pursued them with his soldiers, and there covered them from the sea that which covered them,⁷⁸⁵
79. And Pharaoh led his people astray and did not guide [them].
80. O Children of Israel, We delivered you from your enemy, and We made an appointment with you⁷⁸⁶ at the right side of the mount, and We sent down to you manna and quails,
81. [Saying], “Eat from the good things with which We have provided you and do not transgress [or oppress others] therein, lest My anger should descend upon you. And he upon whom My anger descends has certainly fallen [i.e., perished].”
82. But indeed, I am the Perpetual Forgiver of whoever repents and believes and does righteousness and then continues in guidance.

⁷⁸¹ After they had seen the miracles which God had given Moses and that they were realities and not merely impressions of magic.

⁷⁸² This phrase has also been interpreted as an oath, i.e., “...by Him who created us.”

⁷⁸³ In reward and in punishment.

⁷⁸⁴ From all uncleanness, the greatest of which is worship and obedience to other than God.

⁷⁸⁵ i.e., not only the water but that which only God knows – terror, pain, regret, etc.

⁷⁸⁶ i.e., with your prophet, to receive the scripture for you.

83. [God] said, “And what made you hasten from your people, O Moses?”
84. He said, “They are close upon my tracks, and I hastened to You, my Lord, that You be pleased.”
85. [God] said, “But indeed, We have tried your people after you [departed], and the Sāmīrī⁷⁸⁷ has led them astray.”
86. So Moses returned to his people, angry and grieved.⁷⁸⁸ He said, “O my people, did your Lord not make you a good promise?⁷⁸⁹ Then, was the time [of its fulfillment] too long for you, or did you wish that wrath from your Lord descend upon you, so you broke your promise [of obedience] to me?”
87. They said, “We did not break our promise to you by our will, but we were made to carry burdens from the ornaments of the people [of Pharaoh], so we threw them [into the fire], and thus did the Sāmīrī throw.”
88. And he extracted for them [the statue of] a calf which had a lowing sound, and they said, “This is your god and the god of Moses, but he forgot.”
89. Did they not see that it could not return to them any speech [i.e., response] and that it did not possess for them any harm or benefit?
90. And Aaron had already told them before [the return of Moses], “O my people, you are only being tested by it, and indeed, your Lord is the Most Merciful, so follow me and obey my order.”
91. They said, “We will never cease being devoted to it [i.e., the calf] until Moses returns to us.”
92. [Moses] said, “O Aaron, what prevented you, when you saw them going astray,
93. From following me? Then have you disobeyed my order?”
94. [Aaron] said, “O son of my mother, do not seize [me] by my beard or by my head. Indeed, I feared that you would say, ‘You caused division among the Children of Israel, and you did not observe [or await] my word.’”
95. [Moses] said, “And what is your case, O Sāmīrī?”
96. He said, “I saw what they did not see, so I took a handful [of dust] from the track of the messenger⁷⁹⁰ and threw it,⁷⁹¹ and thus did my soul entice me.”
97. [Moses] said, “Then go. And indeed, it is [decreed] for you in [this] life to say, ‘No contact.’⁷⁹² And indeed, you have an appointment [in the Hereafter] you will not fail to keep. And look at your ‘god’ to which you remained devoted. We will surely burn it and blow it [i.e., its ashes] into the sea with a blast.
98. Your god is only God, except for whom there is no deity. He has encompassed all things in knowledge.”

⁷⁸⁷ Translated as “the Samaritan” (from Samaria), a hypocrite among them who led the Children of Israel into idol-worship.

⁷⁸⁸ The meaning may also be “angry and enraged.”

⁷⁸⁹ That He would send down the Torah, containing guidance for you.

⁷⁹⁰ i.e., a hoof-print in the sand left by the angel Gabriel’s horse.

⁷⁹¹ Into the fire upon the melted ornaments in order to form the calf.

⁷⁹² i.e., Do not touch me. As chastisement, he was to be completely shunned by all people.

99. Thus, [O Muhammad], We relate to you from the news of what has preceded. And We have certainly given you from Us a message [i.e., the Qur'ān.]
100. Whoever turns away from it - then indeed, he will bear on the Day of Resurrection a burden [i.e., great sin],
101. [Abiding] eternally therein,⁷⁹³ and evil it is for them on the Day of Resurrection as a load -
102. The Day the Horn will be blown. And We will gather the criminals, that Day, blue-eyed.⁷⁹⁴
103. They will murmur among themselves, "You remained not but ten [days in the world]."
104. We are most knowing of what they say when the best of them in manner [i.e., wisdom or speech] will say, "You remained not but one day."
105. And they ask you about the mountains, so say, "My Lord will blow them away with a blast."⁷⁹⁵
106. And He will leave it [i.e., the earth] a level plain;
107. You will not see therein a depression or an elevation."
108. That Day, they [i.e., everyone] will follow [the call of] the Caller⁷⁹⁶ [with] no deviation therefrom, and [all] voices will be stilled before the Most Merciful, so you will not hear except a whisper [of footsteps].
109. That Day, no intercession will benefit except [that of] one to whom the Most Merciful has given permission and has accepted his word.
110. He [i.e., God] knows what is [presently] before them and what will be after them,⁷⁹⁷ but they do not encompass it [i.e., what He knows] in knowledge.
111. And [all] faces will be humbled before the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of existence. And he will have failed who carries injustice.⁷⁹⁸
112. But he who does of righteous deeds while he is a believer - he will neither fear injustice nor deprivation.
113. And thus We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'ān⁷⁹⁹ and have diversified therein the warnings that perhaps they will avoid [sin] or it would cause them remembrance.
114. So high [above all] is God, the Sovereign, the Truth. And, [O Muhammad], do not hasten with [recitation of] the Qur'ān before its revelation is completed to you, and say, "My Lord, increase me in knowledge."
115. And We had already taken a promise from Adam before, but he forgot; and We found not in him determination.⁸⁰⁰
116. And [mention] when We said to the angels, "Prostrate to Adam," and they prostrated, except Iblees;⁸⁰¹ he refused.

⁷⁹³ i.e., in the state of sin.

⁷⁹⁴ From terror, or blinded completely.

⁷⁹⁵ Once they have been reduced to dust.

⁷⁹⁶ To the gathering for judgement.

⁷⁹⁷ See footnote to 2:255.

⁷⁹⁸ i.e., sin or wrongdoing towards God or any of His creation.

⁷⁹⁹ i.e., revealed in the Arabic language.

⁸⁰⁰ To resist temptation.

⁸⁰¹ See footnote to 2:34.

117. So We said, “O Adam, indeed this is an enemy to you and to your wife. Then let him not remove you from Paradise so you would suffer.
118. Indeed, it is [promised] for you not to be hungry therein or be unclothed.
119. And indeed, you will not be thirsty therein or be hot from the sun.”
120. Then Satan whispered to him; he said, “O Adam, shall I direct you to the tree of eternity and possession that will not deteriorate?”
121. And they [i.e., Adam and his wife] ate of it, and their private parts became apparent to them, and they began to fasten over themselves from the leaves of Paradise. And Adam disobeyed his Lord and erred.
122. Then his Lord chose him and turned to him in forgiveness and guided [him].
123. [God] said, “Descend from it [i.e., Paradise] - all, [your descendants] being enemies to one another. And if there should come to you guidance from Me - then whoever follows My guidance will neither go astray [in the world] nor suffer [in the Hereafter].
124. And whoever turns away from My remembrance - indeed, he will have a depressed [i.e., difficult] life, and We will gather [i.e., raise] him on the Day of Resurrection blind.”
125. He will say, “My Lord, why have you raised me blind while I was [once] seeing?”
126. [God] will say, “Thus did Our signs come to you, and you forgot [i.e., disregarded] them; and thus will you this Day be forgotten.”
127. And thus do We recompense he who transgressed and did not believe in the signs of his Lord. And the punishment of the Hereafter is more severe and more enduring.⁸⁰²
128. Then, has it not become clear to them how many generations We destroyed before them as they walk among their dwellings? Indeed in that are signs for those of intelligence.
129. And if not for a word⁸⁰³ that preceded from your Lord, it [i.e., punishment] would have been an obligation [due immediately],⁸⁰⁴ and [if not for] a specified term [decreed].
130. So be patient over what they say and exalt [God] with praise of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before its setting; and during periods of the night [exalt Him] and at the ends of the day, that you may be satisfied.
131. And do not extend your eyes toward that by which We have given enjoyment to [some] categories of them, [its being but] the splendor of worldly life by which We test them. And the provision of your Lord is better and more enduring.
132. And enjoin prayer upon your family [and people] and be steadfast therein. We ask you not for provision; We provide for you, and the [best] outcome is for [those of] righteousness.

⁸⁰² Than that of this world.

⁸⁰³ See footnote to 10:19.

⁸⁰⁴ God would have punished the disbelievers in this world as He did with previous peoples.

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133. And they say, “Why does he not bring us a sign from his Lord?” Has there not come to them evidence of what was in the former scriptures?⁸⁰⁵
134. And if We had destroyed them with a punishment before him,⁸⁰⁶ they would have said, “Our Lord, why did You not send to us a messenger so we could have followed Your verses [i.e., teachings] before we were humiliated and disgraced?”
135. Say, “Each [of us] is waiting;⁸⁰⁷ so wait. For you will know who are the companions of the sound path and who is guided.”

⁸⁰⁵ Is not the Qur’ān an adequate proof of Muhammad’s prophethood and sufficient as a lasting miracle?

⁸⁰⁶ Prophet Muhammad. Also interpreted as “before it,” i.e., the Qur’ān.

⁸⁰⁷ For the outcome of this matter.