

## Sūrah 46: al-Ahqāf

### Period of Revelation

It is determined by an historical event that has been mentioned in v. 29-32. This incident of the visit of the Jinn and their going back after listening to the Qur'ān had occurred, according to agreed hadith and biographical literature, at the time when the Prophet had halted at Makkah during his return journey from Tā'if to Makkah. And according to all authentic hadith he had gone to Tā'if three years before the Hijrah; therefore it is determined that this Sūrah was sent down towards the end of the 10th year or in the early part of the 11th year of the Prophethood.

### Historical Background

The 10th year of the Prophethood was a year of extreme persecution and distress in the Prophet's life. The Quraysh and the other tribes had continued their boycott of the Banu Hashim and the Muslims for three years and the Prophet, the people of his family and Companions lay besieged in Shi'b Abi Talib. The Quraysh had blocked up this locality from every side so that no supplies of any kind could reach the besieged people. Only during the Hajj season they were allowed to come out and buy some articles of necessity. But even at that time whenever Abu Lahab noticed any of them approaching the market place or a trading caravan he would call out to the merchants exhorting them to announce forbidding rates of their articles for them, and would pledge that he himself would buy those articles so that they did not suffer any loss. This boycott which continued uninterrupted for three years had broken the back of the Muslims and the Banu Hashim; so much so that at times they were even forced to eat grass and the leaves of trees.

At last, when the siege was lifted this year, Abu Talib, the Prophet's uncle, who had been shielding him for ten long years, died, and hardly a month later his wife, Khadijah, who had been a source of peace and consolation for him ever since the beginning of the call, also passed away. Because of these tragic incidents, which closely followed each other, the Prophet used to refer to this year as the year of sorrow and grief.

After the death of Khadijah and Abu Talib the disbelievers of Makkah became even bolder against the Prophet. They started treating him even more harshly. So much so that it became difficult for him to step out of his house. Of these days Ibn Hisham has related the incident that a Quraysh scoundrel one day threw dust at him openly in the street.

At last, the Prophet left for Tā'if with the intention that he should invite the Bani Tha'qif to Islām, for even if they did not accept Islām, they might at least be persuaded to allow him to work for his mission peacefully. He did not have the facility of any conveyance at that time, and traveled all the way to Tā'if on foot. According to some hadith, he had gone there alone, but according to others, he was accompanied by Zayd bin Harithah. He stayed at Tā'if for a few days, and approached each of the chiefs and nobles of the Bani Tha'qif and talked to him about his mission. But not only they refused to listen to him, but plainly gave him the notice that he should leave their city, for they feared that his preaching might "spoil" their younger generation. Thus, he was compelled to leave Tā'if. When he was leaving the city, the chiefs of Tha'qif set their slaves and scoundrels behind him, who went on crying at him, abusing him and pelting him with stones for a long way from either side of the road till he became broken down with wounds and his shoes were filled with blood. Worn and exhausted he took shelter in the shade of the wall of a garden outside Tā'if, and prayed:

*"O God, to Thee I complain of my weakness, little resource, and lowliness before men. O Most Merciful, Thou art the Lord of the weak, and Thou art my Lord. To whom wilt Thou confide me? To one afar who will misuse me? Or to an enemy to whom Thou hast given power over me? If Thou art not angry with me I care not. Thy favor is more wide for me. I take refuge in the light of Thy countenance by which the darkness is illumined, and the things of this world and the next are rightly ordered, lest Thy anger descend upon me or Thy wrath light upon me. It is for Thee to be satisfied until Thou art well pleased. There is no power and no might save in Thee."*

Grieved and heartbroken when he returned and reached near Qarn al-Manazil, he felt as though the sky was overcast by clouds. He looked up and saw Gabriel in front of him, who called out: *“God has heard the way your people have responded. He has, therefore, sent this angel in charge of the mountains. You may command him as you please.”* Then the angel of the mountains greeted him and submitted: *“If you like I would overturn the mountains from either side upon these people.”* The Prophet replied: *“No, but I expect that God will create from their seed those who will worship none but God, the One.”* (Bukhari)

After this he went to stay for a few days at Makkah, perplexed as to how he would face the people of Makkah, who, he thought, would be still further emboldened against him after hearing what had happened at Tāʾif. It was here that one night when he was reciting the Qurʾān in the Prayer, a group of the Jinn happened to pass by and listened to the Qurʾān, believed in it, and returned to their people to preach Islām. Thus, God gave His Prophet the good news that if the men were running away from his invitation, there were many of the Jinn, who had become its believers, and they were spreading his message among their own kind.

### Subject Matter and Topics

Such were the conditions when this Sūrah was sent down. Anyone who keeps this background in view, on the one hand, and studies this Sūrah, on the other, will have no doubt left in his mind that this is not at all the composition of Muhammad, but “a Revelation from the All Mighty, All Wise God.” For nowhere in this Sūrah, from the beginning to the end, does one find even a tinge of the human feelings and reactions, which are naturally produced in a man who is passing through such hard conditions. Had it been the word of Muhammad whom the occurrence of personal griefs one after the other and the countless and the recent bitter experience at Tāʾif had caused extreme anguish and distress, it would have reflected in some degree the state of the mind of the man who was the subject of these afflictions and griefs. Consider the prayer that we have cited above: it contains his own language, its every word is saturated with the feelings that he had at the time. But this Sūrah which was sent down precisely in the same period and was recited even by him under the same conditions, is absolutely free from every sign or trace of the time.

The subject matter of the Sūrah is to warn the disbelievers of the errors in which they were involved, and also persisted arrogantly, and were condemning the man who was trying to redeem them. They regarded the world as a useless and purposeless place where they were not answerable to anyone. They thought that invitation to Tawhid (Oneness of God) was false and stuck to the belief that their own deities were actually the associates of God. They were not inclined to believe that the Qurʾān was the Word of the Lord of the worlds. They had a strange erroneous concept of apostleship on the basis of which they were proposing strange criteria of judging the Prophet’s claim to it. In their estimation one great proof of Islām’s not being based on the truth was that their elders and important chiefs of the tribes and so called leaders of their nation were not accepting it and only a few young men, and some poor folks and some slaves had affirmed faith in it. They thought that Resurrection and life after death and the rewards and punishments of the Hereafter were fabrications whose occurrence was absolutely out of the question.

In this Sūrah each of these misconceptions has been refuted in a brief but rational way, and the disbelievers have been warned that if they would reject the invitation of the Qurʾān and the Prophethood of the Prophet Muhammad by prejudice and stubbornness instead of trying to understand its truth rationally, they would only be preparing for their own doom.

**Sūrah 46: al-Ahqāf**<sup>1373</sup>

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

1. Hā, Meem.<sup>1374</sup>
2. The revelation of the Book is from God, the Exalted in Might, the Wise.
3. We did not create the heavens and earth and what is between them except in truth and [for] a specified term. But those who disbelieve, from that of which they are warned, are turning away.
4. Say, [O Muhammad], "Have you considered that which you invoke besides God? Show me what they have created of the earth; or did they have partnership in [creation of] the heavens? Bring me a scripture [revealed] before this or a [remaining] trace of knowledge, if you should be truthful."
5. And who is more astray than he who invokes besides God those who will not respond to him until the Day of Resurrection [i.e., never], and they, of their invocation, are unaware.
6. And when the people are gathered [that Day], they [who were invoked] will be enemies to them, and they will be deniers of their worship.
7. And when Our verses are recited to them as clear evidences, those who disbelieve say of the truth when it has come to them, "This is obvious magic."
8. Or do they say, "He has invented it"? Say, "If I have invented it, you will not possess for me [the power of protection] from God at all. He is most knowing of that in which you are involved.<sup>1375</sup> Sufficient is He as Witness between me and you, and He is the Forgiving the Merciful."
9. Say, "I am not something original among the messengers,<sup>1376</sup> nor do I know what will be done with me or with you. I only follow that which is revealed to me, and I am not but a clear warner."
10. Say, "Have you considered: if it [i.e., the Qur'ān] was from God, and you disbelieved in it while a witness from the Children of Israel has testified to something similar<sup>1377</sup> and believed while you were arrogant...?"<sup>1378</sup> Indeed, God does not guide the wrongdoing people.
11. And those who disbelieve say of those who believe, "If it had [truly] been good, they would not have preceded us to it." And when they are not guided by it, they will say, "This is an ancient falsehood."
12. And before it was the scripture of Moses to lead and as a mercy. And this is a confirming Book in an Arabic tongue to warn those who have wronged and as good tidings to the doers of good.

<sup>1373</sup> *Al-Ahqāf*: The Curving Sand Tracts, a characteristic of the region once inhabited by the tribe of 'Aad.

<sup>1374</sup> See footnote to 2:1.

<sup>1375</sup> Of false implications and suggestions.

<sup>1376</sup> i.e., I am neither the first messenger to be sent, nor do I bring something different from the other messengers.

<sup>1377</sup> Based upon information from the Torah.

<sup>1378</sup> The conclusion is estimated to be "...would you not then be the most unjust of people?" or "...in what condition would you then be?"

13. Indeed, those who have said, "Our Lord is God," and then remained on a right course - there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve.
14. Those are the companions of Paradise, abiding eternally therein as reward for what they used to do.
15. And We have enjoined upon man, to his parents, good treatment. His mother carried him with hardship and gave birth to him with hardship, and his gestation and weaning [period] is thirty months. [He grows] until, when he reaches maturity and reaches [the age of] forty years, he says, "My Lord, enable me<sup>1379</sup> to be grateful for Your favor which You have bestowed upon me and upon my parents and to work righteousness of which You will approve and make righteous for me my offspring. Indeed, I have repented to You, and indeed, I am of the Muslims."
16. Those are the ones from whom We will accept the best of what they did and overlook their misdeeds, [their being] among the companions of Paradise. [That is] the promise of truth which they had been promised.
17. But one who says to his parents, "Uff!<sup>1380</sup> to you; do you promise me that I will be brought forth [from the earth] when generations before me have already passed on [into oblivion]?" while they call to God for help [and to their son], "Woe to you! Believe! Indeed, the promise of God is truth." But he says, "This is not but legends of the former peoples" -
18. Those are the ones upon whom the word [i.e., decree] has come into effect, [who will be] among nations which had passed on before them of jinn and men. Indeed, they [all] were losers.
19. And for all there are degrees [of reward and punishment] for what they have done, and [it is] so that He may fully compensate them for their deeds, and they will not be wronged.
20. And the Day those who disbelieved are exposed to the Fire [it will be said], "You exhausted your pleasures during your worldly life and enjoyed them, so this Day you will be awarded the punishment of [extreme] humiliation because you were arrogant upon the earth without right and because you were defiantly disobedient."
21. And mention, [O Muhammad], the brother of 'Aad,<sup>1381</sup> when he warned his people in [the region of] al-Ahqāf - and warners had already passed on before him and after him - [saying], "Do not worship except God. Indeed, I fear for you the punishment of a terrible day."<sup>1382</sup>
22. They said, "Have you come to delude us away from our gods? Then bring us what you promise us, if you should be of the truthful."
23. He said, "Knowledge [of its time] is only with God, and I convey to you that with which I was sent; but I see you [to be] a people behaving ignorantly."

<sup>1379</sup> Literally, "gather within me the utmost strength and ability."

<sup>1380</sup> An expression of distaste and irritation.

<sup>1381</sup> i.e., the prophet Hūd.

<sup>1382</sup> Upon the earth. It could also refer to "a tremendous Day," i.e., that of resurrection.

24. And when they saw it as a cloud approaching their valleys, they said, "This is a cloud bringing us rain!" Rather, it is that for which you were impatient:<sup>1383</sup> a wind, within it a painful punishment,
25. Destroying everything by command of its Lord. And they became so that nothing was seen [of them] except their dwellings. Thus do We recompense the criminal people.
26. And We had certainly established them in such as We have not established you, and We made for them hearing and vision and hearts [i.e., intellect]. But their hearing and vision and hearts availed them not from anything [of the punishment] when they were [continually] rejecting the signs of God; and they were enveloped by what they used to ridicule.
27. And We have already destroyed what surrounds you of [those] cities, and We have diversified the signs [or verses] that perhaps they might return [from disbelief].
28. Then why did those they took besides God as deities by which to approach [Him]<sup>1384</sup> not aid them? But they had strayed [i.e., departed] from them. And that was their falsehood and what they were inventing.
29. And [mention, O Muhammad], when We directed to you a few of the jinn, listening to the Qur'ān. And when they attended it, they said, "Listen quietly." And when it was concluded, they went back to their people as warners.
30. They said, "O our people, indeed we have heard a [recited] Book revealed after Moses confirming what was before it which guides to the truth and to a straight path.
31. O our people, respond to the Caller [i.e., Messenger] of God<sup>1385</sup> and believe in him; He [i.e., God] will forgive for you your sins and protect you from a painful punishment.
32. But he who does not respond to the Caller of God will not cause failure [to Him] upon earth, and he will not have besides Him any protectors. Those are in manifest error."
33. Do they not see that God, who created the heavens and earth and did not fail in their creation, is able to give life to the dead? Yes. Indeed, He is over all things competent.
34. And the Day those who disbelieved are exposed to the Fire [it will be said], "Is this not the truth?" They will say, "Yes, by our Lord." He will say, "Then taste the punishment because you used to disbelieve."<sup>1386</sup>
35. So be patient, [O Muhammad], as were those of determination among the messengers and do not be impatient for them.<sup>1387</sup> It will be - on the Day they see that which they are promised - as though they had not remained [in the world] except an hour of a day. [This is] notification. And will [any] be destroyed except the defiantly disobedient people?

<sup>1383</sup> When you challenged your prophet. See verse 22 of this *sūrah*.

<sup>1384</sup> According to their claim.

<sup>1385</sup> Prophet Muhammad.

<sup>1386</sup> Or "for what you used to deny."

<sup>1387</sup> i.e., for God's punishment of the disbelievers.