

# SURAH 16 (AN-NAHL / THE BEE)

FAITH: Islam | TEXT: The Holy Qur'an | VOLUME: The Meaning of the Holy Quran | AUTHOR: Rashad Khalifa (Translator)

## OVERVIEW

Surah 16, known as 'The Bee' (An-Nahl), serves as a comprehensive polemic against polytheism (Shirk) and a treatise on Divine Providence. The text systematically lists natural phenomena—rain, livestock, vegetation, and the instinct of the bee—as undeniable proofs of a singular, omnipotent Creator. It contrasts the helplessness of idols with the creative power of God. Theologically, it establishes a strict framework of submission where God is the sole source of guidance and misguidance (predestination). It addresses the accusations against the Messenger regarding the fabrication of scripture, asserting that the 'Holy Spirit' (understood in Islam as Angel Gabriel) brought the revelation. The text concludes with ethical mandates regarding justice, oaths, and dietary laws, explicitly linking entry into Paradise to the merit of human works, thereby presenting a soteriology diametrically opposed to the Evangelical doctrine of Sola Fide.

## KEY FIGURES

GOD (Allah), The Messenger (Muhammad), Abraham, The Holy Spirit (Angel Gabriel), Satan

## DOCTRINES ANALYZED

### 1. SOTERIOLOGY OF MERIT

**Assertion:** Entrance into Paradise is a direct payment or reward for righteous deeds performed.

*"Enter Paradise (now) as a reward for your works." (16:32)*

**Evangelical Comparison:** In Evangelical theology, good works are the fruit of salvation, not the root (Ephesians 2:8-10). This text reverses that order, explicitly stating in verse 16:32 and 16:97 that the eternal reward is a payment ('recompense') for actions taken. This establishes a transactional relationship with the Divine rather than a covenant of grace.

### 2. STRICT UNITARIAN MONOTHEISM (TAWHID)

**Assertion:** God is singular with no partners; attributing divinity to any other is the highest sin.

*"Do not worship two gods; there is only one god." (16:51)*

**Evangelical Comparison:** The text operates on a binary: either God is one (monad), or there are multiple gods (polytheism). It does not allow for the Trinitarian category of one God in three persons. Verse 16:51's command not to worship 'two gods' is often used polemically against the Christian understanding of Jesus, viewing Christ's divinity as setting up a 'partner' beside God.

### 3. DOUBLE PREDESTINATION

**Assertion:** God actively wills both the guidance of believers and the straying of unbelievers.

*"GOD does not guide the ones He had committed to straying." (16:37); "He sends astray whoever chooses to go astray, and He guides whoever wishes to be guided." (16:93)*

**Evangelical Comparison:** The text suggests that once God commits someone to straying, no human agency or intercession can help them (16:37). This creates a theological tension with the command to evangelize, as the text implies the spiritual fate of the hearer is already sealed by Divine decree, independent of the Gospel offer.

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

**Divergence Status:** Yes

**Theological Gap:** The fundamental gap lies in the mechanism of redemption. Surah 16 posits that man is capable of earning Paradise through 'righteous works' (16:32) and that God's favor is maintained through gratitude and law-keeping. Evangelicalism posits that man is dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1) and requires a substitute (Christ) to satisfy God's wrath. Furthermore, the text's definition of God (Tawhid) explicitly excludes the possibility of the Incarnation, rendering the Gospel 'foolishness' or 'shirk' to the adherent.

### Shared Values:

Monotheism (existence of one Creator); Rejection of idolatry; Importance of gratitude; Reality of Judgment Day; Ethics of justice and charity

### Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Salvation is explicitly declared a 'reward for your works' (16:32).
2. [Critical] Theology Proper (Trinity) – Commands 'Do not worship two gods' (16:51), rejecting the relational nature of the Trinity.
3. [Major] Sola Gratia (Grace Alone) – God's guidance is conditional or arbitrary (16:93), not a free gift of grace to the helpless.

### Semantic Warnings:

#### "Holy Spirit"

**In Text:** An angelic messenger (Gabriel) who brings revelation (16:102).

**Evangelical:** The third Person of the Trinity, fully God, indwelling the believer.

**Example:** *In 16:102, the Holy Spirit is a courier of text; in Acts 13:2, the Holy Spirit is God speaking and directing the church.*

#### "Messiah/Messenger"

**In Text:** A human warner sent to a specific community to preach monotheism.

**Evangelical:** Jesus is the unique Son of God, the Word made flesh.

**Example:** *16:36 states messengers are sent to 'every community' to say 'Worship God', flattening Jesus's role to that of a generic prophet.*

## SOTERIOLOGY

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**Salvation Defined:** Entry into the Gardens of Eden (Paradise) and avoidance of Hell.

**How Attained:** By belief in the One God and the accumulation of righteous works (16:32, 16:97).

**Basis of Assurance:** There is no absolute assurance; it depends on God's will to guide or stray (16:93) and the believer's performance.

**Comparison to Sola Fide:** The text asks 'Are they equal?' regarding those who work vs. those who don't (16:76), whereas Sola Fide declares all unequal to God's standard and justified only by Christ's merit (Romans 3:23-24).

## MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

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### Explicit Commands:

1. Worship God alone (16:36)
2. Do not rush God's command (16:1)
3. Seek refuge in God from Satan before reading the Quran (16:98)
4. Fulfill covenants and oaths (16:91)
5. Eat only lawful (Halal) food (16:114)
6. Invite to the path of the Lord with wisdom (16:125)

### Implicit Obligations:

1. Observe nature as theological proof
2. Show gratitude for physical provisions to avoid judgment
3. Patience under persecution (16:127)

### Ritual Requirements:

1. Prostration (implied by 16:49)
2. Recitation of the Quran (16:98)

## EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

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### Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 32, the angels say 'Enter Paradise as a reward for your works.' How many works are enough to guarantee you have satisfied God's perfect standard?
2. Verse 93 says God sends astray whoever He chooses. Does this worry you that even if you try your hardest, God might choose to let you stray?
3. Verse 102 mentions the 'Holy Spirit.' Who do you understand the Holy Spirit to be, and how does that compare to the Spirit of God mentioned in the Torah and Gospel?

### Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Burden Bearer – Just as the animal carries a physical load the human cannot bear to a destination they cannot reach, Jesus carries the spiritual load of sin we cannot bear to bring us to God. [Matthew 11:28-30 ('Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden...')]
2. Dead vs. Alive – The text mocks dead idols. The Gospel presents a Living Savior who conquered death, unlike dead prophets or idols. [Revelation 1:18 ('I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever!')]

### Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The believer must constantly perform 'righteous works' to earn Paradise (16:32). There is no rest in a finished work; every day is a striving to tip the scales.
2. Isolation/Distance [Moderate] – God is described as 'Most High, far above' (16:1). While He provides blessings, He is ontologically distant, not a Father who adopts the believer.
3. Uncertainty/Fatalism [Severe] – The doctrine that God 'sends astray whoever He chooses' (16:93) creates a terrifying uncertainty about one's final standing, regardless of current piety.

## EPISTEMOLOGY

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**Knowledge Source:** Direct Revelation (Quran) and Natural Theology (Signs in creation).

**Verification Method:** Empirical observation of nature (rain, bees, cattle) serves as verification of the Revelation's truth.

**Evangelical Contrast:** Evangelicalism relies on the self-attesting authority of the Bible and the internal witness of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:16), whereas this text relies heavily on external natural phenomena as proof of its specific theological claims.

## TEXTUAL CRITICISM

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**Dating:** Meccan Period (Late), approx 610-622 AD.

**Authorship:** Attributed to Muhammad (via Gabriel); Khalifa translation (1978).

**Textual Issues:** Verse 16:101 addresses the contemporary accusation that Muhammad was 'substituting' verses (abrogation) or being taught by a foreigner (16:103).