

SURAH 104 (AL-HUMAZAH)

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

OVERVIEW

Surah 104, titled 'Al-Humazah' (The Traducer/Slanderer), is a short but potent Meccan surah that addresses social ethics and eschatology. In Rashad Khalifa's 1978 translation, the text opens with a divine pronouncement of 'Woe' upon those who engage in character assassination (backbiting/slander) and those consumed by materialism. The text exposes the psychological delusion of the hoarder: the belief that accumulated wealth can secure eternal existence or immunity from death. This delusion is shattered by the introduction of 'The Devastator' (Al-Hutamah), described as God's kindled fire. The imagery is visceral, describing a fire that burns 'inside out' (attacking the heart/viscera) and closes in upon the damned in 'extended columns,' symbolizing inescapable confinement. Theologically, it establishes a direct link between social/moral behavior and eternal retribution, emphasizing God's awareness of human speech and secret hoarding.

KEY FIGURES

God (The Judge/Owner of Hellfire), The Backbiter/Slanderer (The Sinner), The Wealth Hoarder (The Deluded)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. DIVINE RETRIBUTION FOR SOCIAL SINS

Assertion: God prepares specific, inescapable torture for those who slander others and hoard wealth.

"Woe to every backbiter, slanderer... he will be thrown into the Devastator. [104:001, 104:004]"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, the condemnation is behavior-specific: slander and hoarding lead directly to the 'Devastator.' Evangelical theology affirms that 'the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil' (1 Timothy 6:10) and that slander is characteristic of the unregenerate mind (Romans 1:29-30). However, the Evangelical baseline posits that all have sinned and fall short of God's glory (Romans 3:23), meaning everyone is theoretically subject to this 'Woe' apart from Christ. The Quranic text presents the punishment as a consequence of specific acts, whereas the Bible presents condemnation as the default state of fallen humanity from which one must be saved by grace (John 3:18).

2. THE FUTILITY OF MATERIALISM

Assertion: Wealth creates a false sense of security and cannot grant immortality.

"As if his money will make him immortal. Never; he will be thrown into the Devastator. [104:003-004]"

Evangelical Comparison: The text accurately diagnoses the human tendency to trust in riches for security, a sentiment echoed in Psalm 49:6-9 (wealth cannot redeem a life) and Luke 12:15-21 (the Parable of the Rich Fool). Both traditions agree that money cannot buy eternal life. The divergence lies in the remedy: the Quranic text implies the remedy is to stop hoarding and slandering to avoid hell, while the Evangelical remedy is to transfer trust from wealth to the Living God and the finished work of Christ (1 Timothy 6:17).

3. THE NATURE OF HELL (AL-HUTAMAH)

Assertion: Hell is a physical, confining fire created by God that burns the interior of a person.

"GOD's blazing Hellfire. It burns them inside out. [104:006-007]"

Evangelical Comparison: The text describes Hell as 'The Devastator' (Khalifa's translation of Al-Hutamah), emphasizing God's active role in the punishment ('GOD's blazing Hellfire'). The description of burning 'inside out' (literally reaching the hearts) suggests a torment that attacks the seat of the will and emotions. Evangelicalism affirms Hell as a place of 'outer darkness' and 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' (Matthew 25:30), primarily defined by separation from God (2 Thessalonians 1:9). While both use fire imagery, the Quranic focus here is on the inescapable, structural confinement ('extended columns') and visceral pain as a direct retribution for the specific sins of speech and greed.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap is Soteriological. Surah 104 presents a linear cause-and-effect: Sin (slander/greed) leads to Punishment (The Devastator). There is no mention of a Savior, a sacrifice, or forgiveness. The Evangelical Baseline asserts that while slander and greed are indeed damnable, the only escape from God's wrath is the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ (Romans 5:9). This text leaves the adherent alone with their moral performance and the terrifying prospect of failure. It operates under a Law paradigm without a Gospel solution.

Shared Values:

Condemnation of slander/gossip; Condemnation of greed/materialism; Belief in divine judgment; Belief in the existence of Hell; Rejection of money as a source of immortality

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – The text implies that escaping Hell is contingent upon one's moral behavior (not slandering/hoarding) rather than faith in a Savior.
2. [Critical] Christology (Sufficiency of Christ) – Christ is absent. The transaction is between the sinner's deeds and God's fire. There is no mediator.

Semantic Warnings:

"Immortality"

In Text: Eternal survival or immunity from death, which the sinner mistakenly thinks money can buy.

Evangelical: Eternal life, which is not just survival but a quality of life in relationship with God, granted only through Christ (John 17:3).

Example: *In Surah 104, immortality is something the sinner seeks through hoarding. In 1 Corinthians 15:53-54, immortality is a gift God puts upon the believer at the resurrection.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly defined as escaping 'The Devastator' (Hellfire).

How Attained: By abstaining from backbiting, slander, and the hoarding of wealth.

Basis of Assurance: None offered. The text is purely a warning (Nadhir).

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly opposes Sola Fide. The text suggests that bad works condemn, implying that good works (or the absence of bad ones) justify. Romans 3:20 states 'by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight,' whereas this text implies judgment is entirely based on deeds.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Implicit Obligations:

1. Abstain from backbiting and slander
2. Do not hoard wealth
3. Do not trust in money for security or immortality
4. Fear the punishment of God

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text says money can't make us immortal. What do you believe *can* make us immortal?
2. This Surah gives a terrifying warning about slander. How do you deal with the guilt of slander you may have already spoken in the past?
3. If the 'Devastator' is God's justice for our sins, is there any way to satisfy that justice without going there ourselves?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Desire for Immortality – The text correctly identifies the human longing for immortality and the failure of worldly means to secure it. This opens the door to present Jesus, who 'brought life and immortality to light through the gospel' (2 Timothy 1:10). [2 Timothy 1:10]
2. The Inescapable Prison – The imagery of being locked in with no escape highlights the hopelessness of judgment. The Gospel presents Jesus as the one who holds the keys to Death and Hades (Revelation 1:18) and opens the prison doors. [Revelation 1:18]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Fear of Judgment [Severe] – The believer lives under the threat of 'The Devastator' with no assurance of salvation. The graphic description of burning 'inside out' creates a visceral fear of God rather than a relational love.
2. Perfectionism/Self-Monitoring [Moderate] – The specific condemnation of 'every' backbiter creates a burden of hyper-vigilance over every word spoken. Since all humans stumble in speech (James 3:2), this creates a perpetual state of guilt and liability.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation

Verification Method: The text relies on rhetorical intimidation and the self-evident moral truth that slander/greed are evil to validate its eschatological claims.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the historical resurrection of Jesus as the guarantee of future judgment (Acts 17:31). This text relies on the assertion of the messenger. The Bible encourages testing spirits (1 John 4:1), whereas this text presents a closed loop of warning and threat.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Meccan Period (Early Islamic history, approx. 610-622 AD).

Authorship: Attributed to Muhammad (received via Gabriel); Translation by Rashad Khalifa (1978).

Textual Issues: Khalifa translates 'Al-Hutamah' as 'The Devastator.' Standard translations often use 'The Crusher' or 'The Breaking Fire.' Khalifa's translation style is generally modern and rejects traditional Hadith, focusing solely on the Quranic text.