

SURAH 13 (THE THUNDER)

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

OVERVIEW

Surah 13, titled 'The Thunder' (Ar-Ra'd), is a Meccan surah (though some scholars argue for Medinan verses) that addresses the skepticism of the Quraysh regarding the Resurrection and the Prophetic message. In this specific translation by Rashad Khalifa (1978), the text emphasizes God's sovereignty over nature—raising heavens without pillars, regulating celestial bodies, and managing the cycle of life and death—as irrefutable evidence of His power to resurrect the dead. The text presents a stark dichotomy between the 'blind' (disbelievers) and those who possess intelligence (believers). A central theme is the response to the demand for miracles; the text asserts that the revelation itself is the sign and that God guides or misguides according to His will, not based on visual spectacles. Uniquely to this version, Khalifa inserts his own name '(O Rashad)' in parentheses, implying a dual application of the messenger role to himself, a distinct theological deviation from mainstream Islam. The Surah concludes with a warning of the 'dreadful reckoning' for covenant-breakers and the promise of the 'Gardens of Eden' for those who persevere in Contact Prayers (Salat) and charity.

KEY FIGURES

GOD (Allah), The Messenger (identified as Rashad via interpolation), The Angels (Guardians/Recorders), The Disbelievers (Skeptics), The Righteous (Those who possess intelligence)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. GENERAL REVELATION AS SUFFICIENT PROOF

Assertion: The natural world (heavens, earth, crops, thunder) provides sufficient evidence for God and resurrection, rendering demands for supernatural miracles obstinate.

"The real wonder is their saying: 'After we turn into dust, do we get recreated anew?' ... They challenge you to bring doom upon them... (13:5-6)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical theology agrees that creation declares the glory of God (Psalm 19, Romans 1). However, this text argues that observing nature should lead directly to the acceptance of the Quranic message and fear of judgment. In Evangelicalism, general revelation condemns man by showing God's standard, but cannot save him; special revelation (the Gospel of Jesus Christ) is required for salvation. This text implies that rejecting the 'signs' of nature is tantamount to rejecting God, leading directly to 'shackles around their necks' (13:5).

2. SALVATION BY COVENANTAL WORKS

Assertion: Entry into Paradise is contingent upon fulfilling pledges, performing Contact Prayers (Salat), charity, and steadfast perseverance.

"They steadfastly persevere in seeking their Lord, observe the Contact Prayers (Salat)... These have deserved the best abode. (13:22)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text outlines a transactional soteriology. Verses 20-22 provide a checklist for the 'best abode': fulfilling pledges, joining what God commanded, reverencing the Lord, fearing the reckoning, persevering, observing Salat, and giving charity. While Evangelicals value these as fruits of the Spirit, this text presents them as the *cause* or *qualification* for entering the Gardens of Eden. There is no mention of substitutionary atonement; the believer must 'counter evil with good' to secure their destiny.

3. DIVINE DETERMINISM

Assertion: God actively sends people astray or guides them based on His will, though linked to their obedience.

"Say, 'GOD sends astray whomever He wills, and guides to Him only those who obey.' (13:27)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text presents a tension between human responsibility (13:11 'unless they themselves make the decision') and divine determinism (13:27 'God sends astray whomever He wills'). In Evangelical theology, God permits hardening or gives men over to their sin (Romans 1), but this text suggests God is the active agent in the misguidance of the specific individual who demands miracles. Furthermore, verse 31 states

'GOD will never change the predetermined destiny,' suggesting a fatalism that contrasts with the Biblical invitation to 'whosoever will.'

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the solution to the human predicament. Surah 13 acknowledges human sin ('transgressions' 13:6) but offers God's forgiveness based on His prerogative and the human's return to obedience (Salat, charity). There is no concept of necessary atonement; God simply 'erases whatever He wills' (13:39). Evangelicalism asserts that God is just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:26); sin must be punished in Christ. Additionally, the text's strict monotheism ('No god except He' 13:30) and the polemic against 'associating idols' is often directed at the Christian Trinity, creating an ontological gap in the understanding of God's nature.

Shared Values:

Monotheism (One Creator); Intelligent Design in Nature; Reality of Judgment/Hell; Sanctity of Family (joining what God commanded to be joined); Charity

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Claims post-Biblical revelation is necessary for guidance and that the Quran is the ultimate truth.
- 2. [Critical] Sola Fide – Salvation is contingent on 'Contact Prayers', 'spending', and 'perseverance' (13:22).
- 3. [Critical] Theology Proper (Trinity) – Strict Unitarianism; implicitly categorizes Trinitarianism as 'associating idols' (Shirk).

Semantic Warnings:

"Believer"

In Text: One who accepts the Quran (and in this translation, Rashad's message), performs Salat, and recognizes natural signs.
Evangelical: One who trusts in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins.
Example: *In 13:29, 'Those who believe... have deserved happiness.' An Evangelical reads 'believe' as faith in Christ; the text means faith in the Unitarian God and the Quranic message.*

"Word of God / Revelation"

In Text: The Quran (Arabic laws, 13:37).
Evangelical: Jesus Christ (The Logos, John 1) and the Bible.
Example: *When the text says 'What is revealed to you... is the truth' (13:1), it refers to the Quranic recitation, not the Biblical canon.*

SOTERIOLOGY

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

How Attained: By fulfilling pledges, maintaining ties, reverencing God, fearing judgment, persevering, performing Salat, and giving charity (13:20-22).

Basis of Assurance: There is no absolute assurance; one hopes they have done enough. 'God sends astray whomever He wills' (13:27) undermines security.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text explicitly links the 'best abode' to specific actions (Salat, charity). Ephesians 2:8-9 states salvation is 'not of works, lest any man should boast.' This text encourages striving *for* salvation, not *from* salvation.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Observe the Contact Prayers (Salat) (13:22)
- 2. Spend from provisions secretly and publicly (Charity) (13:22)

3. Fulfill the pledge to God (13:20)
4. Do not violate the covenant (13:20)
5. Counter evil with good (13:22)
6. Worship God alone and associate no idols with Him (13:36)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Observe nature to find proofs of God (13:3-4)
2. Accept the Quran (or the message revealed to Rashad) as truth without demanding miracles (13:7)
3. Fear the reckoning (13:21)

Ritual Requirements:

1. Contact Prayers (Salat)
2. Prostration (implied by the cosmos in 13:15)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 11, it says God doesn't change a people's condition until they change themselves. How do you know when you have changed enough to warrant God's favor?
2. Verse 39 mentions the 'Master Record.' On what basis do you hope your name is written there for good, considering verse 25 warns about those who violate the covenant?
3. The text says 'Thunder praises His glory' (v. 13). When you see the power of nature, does it make you feel safe or afraid of judgment?
4. Verse 22 lists requirements for the best abode, including 'countering evil with good.' Have you ever failed to do that? How is that failure atoned for?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Foam vs. The Benefit – This is a powerful analogy for works vs. spirit. Our self-righteousness is like foam—impressive for a moment but weightless and vanishing. Only the work of Christ (the solid water/metal) remains and truly benefits. [1 Corinthians 3:12-13 (Wood, hay, stubble vs. Gold, silver, precious stones).]
2. The Lightning: Fear and Hope – The Cross is the ultimate lightning bolt. It strikes with the fear of God's judgment on sin, but brings the hope of salvation because it struck Jesus instead of us. [Romans 3:23-24 (Judgment and Justification).]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The adherent must constantly 'persevere,' 'observe Salat,' and 'counter evil with good' to earn the abode. There is no rest in a finished work.
2. Uncertainty of Election [Moderate] – Verse 27 ('God sends astray whomever He wills') creates a terrifying possibility that one's lack of faith is actually God's active will against them, leading to fatalism.
3. Fear of the Dreadful Reckoning [Severe] – Verse 21 mentions fearing the 'dreadful reckoning.' Without an Advocate (Jesus), the believer stands alone before the 'most efficient Reckoner' (13:41).

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Natural Theology (Observation) + Special Revelation (The Book).

Verification Method: Intellectual reflection on natural phenomena (crops, rain, thunder) confirms the revelation.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the testimony of the Holy Spirit through the written Word of God (1 Cor 2:10-13). This text relies heavily on rational deduction from nature ('proofs for people who think' 13:3) as the primary validation for its truth claims.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 1978 (Translation date); Original Arabic 7th Century.

Authorship: Rashad Khalifa (Translator/Interpreter).

Textual Issues: Khalifa inserts '(O Rashad)' in verses 30 and 38. This is a massive textual interpolation not found in the Arabic text, which traditionally addresses Muhammad. Khalifa used this to claim he was the 'Messenger of the Covenant.'