

SURAH 14 (IBRAHIM)

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

OVERVIEW

Surah 14, titled 'Abraham' (Ibrahim), serves as a theological polemic against idolatry and ingratitude. The text opens by declaring the Quran's purpose: to lead people from darkness to light. It employs a dual-track narrative structure. First, it recounts the struggles of previous messengers (specifically Moses, Noah, 'Aad, and Thamoud), emphasizing that prophets are merely human vessels without independent power, and that God sovereignly guides or misguides whom He wills. Second, it presents a terrifying eschatological vision where earthly hierarchies collapse; followers blame leaders, and Satan disavows his own disciples. The text pivots to the patriarch Abraham, presenting his prayer for Mecca as a model of monotheistic devotion and establishing the 'Contact Prayers' (Salat) as a primary signifier of the faithful. The central theological axiom is found in verse 7: gratitude leads to increase, while ingratitude invites severe retribution. This translation by Rashad Khalifa is notable for its specific rendering of Islamic terms, such as translating 'Salat' as 'Contact Prayers,' reflecting his unique interpretive lens within the broader Islamic tradition.

KEY FIGURES

God (Allah), Abraham (Ibrahim), Moses (Musa), Satan (Iblis), Noah (Nuh), Ismail, Isaac

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. DIVINE DETERMINISM (QADAR)

Assertion: God explicitly sends astray whomever He wills and guides whomever He wills (14:4).

"GOD then sends astray whomever He wills, and guides whomever He wills. He is the Almighty, the Most Wise. (14:4)"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, the agency of salvation is heavily weighted toward Divine Will to the extent of active misguidance. While Evangelical theology acknowledges election (Ephesians 1), it maintains that God is not the author of confusion or sin (James 1:13) and desires all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). The Quranic assertion that God 'sends astray' creates a theological determinism that complicates the concept of human responsibility in a way distinct from the Biblical tension between sovereignty and free will.

2. CONDITIONAL FAVOR VIA GRATITUDE

Assertion: Divine increase is contingent upon human gratitude; punishment is the result of ingratitude.

"Your Lord has decreed: 'The more you thank Me, the more I give you.' But if you turn unappreciative, then My retribution is severe. (14:7)"

Evangelical Comparison: This doctrine creates a merit-based feedback loop. In Evangelicalism, gratitude is a *response* to grace already received (Colossians 3:17), not a *condition* for receiving more grace or avoiding retribution. The text implies that security in God is volatile and dependent on the believer's continuous performance of 'appreciation,' whereas Biblical assurance rests on the finished work of Christ (Hebrews 10:14).

3. STRICT HUMAN PROPHETHOOD

Assertion: Messengers are categorically defined as humans with no inherent power, refuting any notion of incarnation.

"Their messengers said to them, 'We are no more than humans like you...' (14:11)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text emphasizes that messengers are identical in nature to their audience ('humans like you'), distinguished only by God's choice to bless them. This is a polemic against elevating prophets to divinity. For Evangelicals, while true for Moses or Abraham, this category error is fatal when applied to Jesus, whom the Bible identifies as the Word made flesh (John 1:14) and the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mechanism of reconciliation. Surah 14 offers 'another chance to redeem yourselves' (14:10) through forgiveness of sins contingent on responding to the call and maintaining gratitude. Evangelicalism posits that man is dead in trespasses (Ephesians 2:1) and cannot redeem himself; redemption is an accomplished work by Christ, not a 'chance' for self-improvement. Furthermore, the text's Christology (via its general prophetology) reduces Jesus to a mere warner, whereas the Gospel presents Him as the Savior. The text's God is a sovereign judge who guides and misguides; the Gospel's God is a Father who sent His Son to save the lost.

Shared Values:

Monotheism; Reality of Judgment Day; Existence of Satan/Devil; Importance of Prayer; Charity; Gratitude to the Creator

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Claims to be a new revelation (14:1) correcting/superseding the Bible.
2. [Major] Sola Gratia – Blessing and safety are conditional on the work of gratitude (14:7).
3. [Major] Theology Proper (Nature of God) – God actively 'sends astray' (14:4), contradicting the character of God who desires all to be saved.
4. [Critical] Christology – Reduces all messengers to 'no more than humans' (14:11), denying Christ's divinity.

Semantic Warnings:

"Believer"

In Text: One who accepts the Unitarian message of the Quran and performs Contact Prayers.

Evangelical: One who trusts in the finished work of Jesus Christ for salvation.

Example: *In 14:41, Abraham prays for 'the believers.'* In the text, this excludes Trinitarian Christians who are considered to have 'set up rivals' (14:30).

"Forgiveness"

In Text: God overlooking sins based on repentance and future obedience (14:10).

Evangelical: Legal justification through the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ (Romans 3:24-25).

Example: *The text says God invites you to 'forgive your sins'* (14:10) as a result of obedience, whereas the Bible says we have forgiveness **in** Christ's blood (Ephesians 1:7).

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Admission into gardens with flowing streams (14:23) and avoidance of Hell (14:16).

How Attained: By believing, leading a righteous life (14:23), and maintaining gratitude (14:7).

Basis of Assurance: None explicitly offered; dependent on God's will to guide or misguide (14:4).

Comparison to Sola Fide: Explicitly rejects faith alone. Verse 14:23 pairs belief immediately with 'lead a righteous life' as the condition for entry to paradise. There is no concept of imputed righteousness; it is personal righteousness.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Observe the Contact Prayers (Salat) (14:31, 14:37, 14:40)
2. Give to charity secretly and publicly (14:31)
3. Warn the people of the day of retribution (14:44)
4. Do not think God is unaware of transgressors (14:42)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Express constant gratitude to avoid retribution (14:7)
2. Reject the leadership of those who do not follow God (14:21)
3. Recognize natural phenomena (rain, sun, moon) as proofs of God (14:32-33)

Ritual Requirements:

1. Contact Prayers (Salat) - mentioned as a primary identifier of the faithful

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 4, it says God 'sends astray whomever He wills.' How do you find comfort knowing that your guidance depends entirely on God's will, not just your desire to know Him?
2. Verse 7 says 'The more you thank Me, the more I give you.' Do you ever worry that a time of suffering in your life might be God punishing you for not being thankful enough?
3. In verse 22, Satan says he had no power over people, he only invited them. If Satan is not to blame, and we are weak, who helps us carry the burden of the sins we have already committed?
4. Verse 10 mentions God giving us a chance to 'redeem ourselves.' How many chances do you think you need, and how do you know when you have done enough?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Good Tree – Jesus identifies Himself as the Vine and us as the branches (John 15). We cannot produce the 'good crop' of righteousness on our own; we must be grafted into Him. [John 15:5]
2. Darkness to Light – This is exactly what Jesus does. He is the Light of the World. We don't just need a book to tell us about the light; we need the Light Himself to enter our hearts. [John 8:12, 1 Peter 2:9]
3. Satan's Betrayal – This highlights the utter hopelessness of the sinner at judgment. It creates a longing for an Advocate who will *not* betray us but will stand in our place. [1 John 2:1]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty/Fatalism [Severe] – The doctrine that God actively 'sends astray' (14:4) creates a deep psychological anxiety. A believer cannot be truly sure if they are currently being guided or if they are among those God has willed to stray, regardless of their current efforts.
2. Performance Pressure [Moderate] – The conditional promise 'The more you thank Me, the more I give you' (14:7) turns every misfortune into a potential indictment of the believer's lack of gratitude. It creates a 'prosperity gospel' dynamic where suffering equals spiritual failure.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation (The Book) and Natural Theology (Signs in Creation).

Verification Method: Observation of the natural world (14:32-34) and historical observation of ruined civilizations ('Aad, Thamoud) (14:45).

Evangelical Contrast: While the Bible affirms natural revelation (Romans 1:20), it posits that special revelation (Scripture) centers on Christ (Luke 24:27). This text centers knowledge on the recognition of Unitarian Monotheism and the fear of judgment, lacking the epistemological certainty of the indwelling Holy Spirit testifying to sonship (Romans 8:16).

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Meccan Period (Late)

Authorship: Attributed to Muhammad (Divine Revelation via Gabriel according to tradition).

Textual Issues: Khalifa's translation (1978) is idiosyncratic, notably translating 'Salat' as 'Contact Prayers' and emphasizing the number 19 mathematical code (implied in his other works, though less visible in this specific text excerpt).