

SURAH 15 (AL-HIJR)

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

OVERVIEW

Surah 15, titled Al-Hijr (The Rocky Tract), is a Meccan surah that primarily addresses the themes of divine protection over revelation and the consequences of rejecting God's messengers. The text opens with a strong assertion that God Himself is the guardian of the 'reminder' (the Quran), guaranteeing its preservation against corruption—a direct challenge to the perceived corruption of previous scriptures. The narrative core of the Surah details the creation of humanity from 'aged mud' and the subsequent refusal of Iblis (Satan) to prostrate before Adam. This act of defiance establishes the cosmic conflict: Iblis vows to mislead all humanity except for God's 'devoted' servants. The text then pivots to historical precedents of judgment, specifically the visitation of angels to Abraham and the subsequent destruction of Sodom (Lot's people) and the people of Al-Hijr (Thamud), serving as a terrifying warning to the Prophet's contemporaries. The Surah concludes with pastoral encouragement to the Prophet to persevere in worship and disregard the mockers until 'certainty' (death) comes.

KEY FIGURES

GOD (Allah), Iblis (Satan), Abraham, Lot, The Angels (Messengers), People of Al-Hijr (Thamud), The Prophet (Muhammad)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. DIVINE PRESERVATION OF SCRIPTURE

Assertion: God explicitly guarantees the preservation of the Quran, implying it cannot be altered or lost.

"Absolutely, we have revealed the reminder, and, absolutely, we will preserve it." (Surah 15:9)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the Bible is the 'faith once for all delivered' (Jude 1:3) and God's word that 'stands forever' (Isaiah 40:8). Surah 15:9 is a cornerstone Islamic doctrine (Tahrif) implying that while God sent previous books, only the Quran enjoys a divine guarantee of textual purity. This creates a direct epistemological conflict: the Christian relies on the Bible's sufficiency, while this text claims the Bible is superseded and the Quran is the only divinely guarded text.

2. SATANIC DOMINION VS. HUMAN DEVOTION

Assertion: Satan has the power to mislead all humans except those who maintain absolute devotion to God.

"I will surely entice them on earth; I will send them all astray. Except those among Your worshipers who are devoted absolutely to You alone." (Surah 15:39-40)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text presents a soteriological model where immunity from Satan is predicated on the quality of the worshiper's devotion ('devoted absolutely'). In contrast, Evangelical theology asserts that believers are protected not by the perfection of their devotion, but by their position in Christ (Romans 8:1, 1 John 4:4). The Quranic model places the burden of resistance on the subject's performance; the Biblical model places the burden of protection on the Savior.

3. ANGELIC PROSTRATION TO MAN

Assertion: God commanded angels to prostrate before Adam; Iblis's refusal was his primary sin.

"Once I perfect him... you shall fall prostrate before him." (Surah 15:29)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Revelation 22:8-9, when John attempts to prostrate before an angel, he is rebuked: 'Do not do it! ... Worship God!' The Biblical hierarchy strictly forbids creature-worship. Surah 15 depicts God commanding angels to prostrate to a human. While Islamic theology interprets this as 'respect' rather than 'worship,' the act (sujud) is the same used for Allah. This blurs the Creator-creature distinction essential to Biblical theology.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the solution to the human predicament. In Surah 15, the problem is ignorance and Satanic deception, and the solution is 'the reminder' (Quran) and absolute devotion. In Evangelicalism, the problem is spiritual death and guilt, and the solution is substitutionary atonement. This text offers no mediator between the holy God and the 'aged mud' human; the angels are messengers, not mediators. Consequently, the adherent bears the full weight of maintaining their own spiritual security against a supernatural enemy.

Shared Values:

Monotheism; Reality of Satan and Angels; Divine Judgment; Historical reality of Abraham and Lot; Creation of the cosmos by God

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Claims the Quran is the final, protected 'reminder', implying the Bible is lost or corrupted.
2. [Critical] Sola Fide – Security from Satan is conditional on the human's 'absolute devotion' (works/effort) rather than faith in Christ.
3. [Critical] Christology – Jesus is absent; salvation is through listening to messengers and avoiding idolatry, negating the need for a Savior.
4. [Major] Theology Proper – God commands angels to prostrate to a creature (Adam), violating the biblical distinction that worship belongs to God alone.

Semantic Warnings:

"Certainty (Yaqin)"

In Text: Often interpreted in exegesis as 'death' (the inevitable reality), or the state of conviction reached through worship.

Evangelical: Assurance of salvation based on the promises of God in Christ (Hebrews 11:1).

Example: *In v. 99, 'worship... in order to attain certainty' implies working until the end to secure one's state. Biblical certainty is the starting point of the Christian life, not just the finish line.*

"Spirit (Ruh)"

In Text: A created life-force or divine breath blown into Adam (v. 29), not a person of the Godhead.

Evangelical: The Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity.

Example: *God blowing 'My spirit' into Adam in the Quran is an act of animation, not the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as a seal of redemption (Eph 1:13).*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Protection from Satan's misleading influence and avoidance of the 'painful retribution' (Hell).

How Attained: By being a 'devoted servant' (v. 40), believing the messengers, and righteous deeds.

Basis of Assurance: There is no guaranteed assurance; one must worship until death (v. 99) and hope to be found among the 'devoted.'

Comparison to Sola Fide: Explicitly rejects faith alone. Verse 93 says God will question them about 'everything they have done.' Justification is forensic based on deeds, not imputed righteousness.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Proclaim the warning openly (v. 89)
2. Disregard idol worshipers (v. 94)
3. Sing praises of the Lord (v. 98)
4. Be with the prostrators (v. 98)
5. Worship until certainty/death attains (v. 99)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Believe in the messengers despite mockery
2. Maintain absolute devotion to avoid Satan's influence
3. Observe the signs of nature as proof of God

Ritual Requirements:

1. Prostration (Salah/Prayer) implied in v. 98
2. Praise (Tasbih) implied in v. 98

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 40, it says Satan can mislead anyone except those 'devoted absolutely.' How do you measure if your devotion is absolute enough to stop a supernatural enemy?
2. Verse 9 says God preserves His reminder. If God is capable of preserving the Quran, why was He unable or unwilling to preserve the Torah and Gospel mentioned in the Quran?
3. The text mentions God blowing His spirit into Adam (v. 29). What does it mean to you to have the spirit of God, and does that give you a relationship with Him?
4. Verse 49 calls God the 'Forgiver,' but verse 93 says you will be questioned about 'everything' you have done. How do you reconcile God's forgiveness with a complete audit of your deeds?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Closed Gate to the Sky – Humanity cannot ascend to God or believe by mere signs. We need God to come down to us. Jesus is the true 'Gate' (John 10:9) and the ladder between heaven and earth (John 1:51). [John 1:51, John 10:9]
2. The Breath of Spirit – God gave life to Adam, but we lost spiritual life in the Fall. Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit into us for new life, not just physical existence. [John 20:22, Genesis 2:7]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty [Severe] – The adherent is told to worship until 'certainty' (death) comes, with no assurance of salvation before that point. This creates a lifelong anxiety about one's final standing.
2. Performance Pressure [Severe] – The condition for escaping Satan is 'absolute devotion' (v. 40). Any slip into sin can be interpreted as a lack of devotion, making the adherent vulnerable to Satan. This creates a high-stakes performance treadmill.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation confirmed by natural theology (creation signs) and historical judgment (ruins).

Verification Method: Adherents are pointed to the order of the cosmos (v. 16-22) and the ruins of destroyed civilizations (v. 75-76) as empirical proofs.

Evangelical Contrast: While the Bible affirms natural revelation (Psalm 19, Romans 1), it posits that special revelation (Scripture) focuses on the Messiah. This text uses natural revelation to confirm a non-Christocentric monotheism. Furthermore, Biblical certainty comes from the Holy Spirit's witness to the Word (1 Thess 1:5), whereas this text demands worship *to attain* certainty.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

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

Authorship: Attributed to Muhammad via Gabriel; Khalifa translation (1978) is by Rashad Khalifa.

Textual Issues: Khalifa's translation is unique; he translates 'Muslims' as 'Submitters' (v. 2) and emphasizes the number 19. Standard translations may differ slightly in wording but the core theology remains.