

SURAH 2 (AL-BAQARAH)

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

OVERVIEW

Surah 2, Al-Baqarah (The Heifer), serves as a comprehensive constitution for the Muslim community. In this translation by Rashad Khalifa, the text asserts the Quran's infallibility as a guide for the righteous. It covers the history of Adam, the Israelites (Children of Israel), and the transition of the covenant from the Jews to the Muslims (symbolized by the change of the Qiblah/direction of prayer). The text outlines the 'Five Pillars' including Contact Prayers (Salat), Obligatory Charity (Zakat), Fasting (Ramadan), and Pilgrimage (Hajj). Theologically, it vehemently defends the absolute oneness of God, rejecting the Christian concept of God having a son. It establishes a legal framework for marriage, divorce, commerce (banning usury), and warfare. The narrative posits that salvation is transactional-based on belief plus earned righteousness—and accuses Jews and Christians of distorting their scriptures. Uniquely to Khalifa's translation, verse 30 refers to Adam as a 'temporary god' (representative), a significant deviation from standard Islamic translation, reflecting Khalifa's specific theological nuances.

KEY FIGURES

GOD (Allah), Adam, Moses, Abraham, Jesus, son of Mary, Satan (Iblis), Gabriel, Saul (Taloot), David, Goliath (Jaloot)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. STRICT UNITARIAN MONOTHEISM (TAWHID)

Assertion: God is absolutely One, without partners, sons, or equals. He is the sole Creator and Sustainer.

"They said, 'GOD has begotten a son!' Be He glorified; never! To Him belongs everything in the heavens and the earth..." (2:116)

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelicalism affirms one God revealed in three persons (Trinity), Surah 2 explicitly rejects any division or multiplication within the Godhead. Specifically, verse 2:116 attacks the core Christian claim of Jesus being the Son of God. The text presents a God who is transcendent and sovereign but relates to humanity through law and revelation rather than incarnation. This creates a fundamental theological gap regarding the nature of God and the person of Jesus.

2. TRANSACTIONAL SOTERIOLOGY

Assertion: Salvation is attained through a combination of belief and 'earning' righteousness through works and adherence to law.

"GOD never burdens a soul beyond its means: to its credit is what it earns, and against it is what it commits." (2:286)

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicalism teaches justification by faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9), where Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer. Surah 2 presents a system where the human soul 'earns' credit through obedience (Salat, Zakat, Fasting) and incurs debt through sin. While God is described as Merciful, His mercy is often contingent on repentance and reform (2:160), rather than a guaranteed status based on a finished atonement.

3. PROPHETIC CONTINUITY AND SUPERSESSION

Assertion: Muhammad is the final messenger confirming previous scriptures; however, previous communities (Jews/Christians) corrupted their texts.

"We have sent down to you such clear revelations, and only the wicked will reject them." (2:99); "...woe to those who distort the scripture with their own hands..." (2:79)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text claims to confirm the Torah and Gospel but simultaneously undermines their authority by accusing their custodians of distortion (tahrif). It positions the Quran as the corrective and final authority. This violates Sola Scriptura, which holds the Bible as the sufficient and infallible rule of faith. The text demands belief in 'what was revealed to you [Muhammad]' (2:4) as a condition of righteousness.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental incompatibility lies in the mechanism of salvation and the nature of God. Surah 2 establishes a legalistic framework where human beings must 'earn' their way into God's favor through specific rituals (Salat, Hajj) and social laws. This is the antithesis of the Evangelical doctrine of Sola Gratia (Grace Alone). Furthermore, the text's Christology is explicitly polemical against Christianity; by reducing Jesus to a messenger and denying His Sonship (2:116), it removes the possibility of a divine atonement. Without the God-Man to mediate, the adherent is left to bear the burden of their own sin (2:286), hoping for mercy without the assurance of a paid ransom.

Shared Values:

Belief in one Creator God; Objective morality (truth, justice, charity); Reverence for prophets (Abraham, Moses, Jesus); Belief in a Day of Judgment and Afterlife; Importance of prayer and fasting

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Claims the Bible is corrupted (2:75, 79) and supersedes it with the Quran.
2. [Critical] Sola Fide – Salvation is contingent on 'earning' credit through works and rituals (2:286).
3. [Critical] Christology (Atonement) – Denies the necessity of redemption through Christ; claims God forgives simply by will/repentance without satisfaction of justice.
4. [Critical] Theology Proper (Trinity) – Explicit denial of God having a son (2:116); strict Unitarianism.

Semantic Warnings:

"Believer (Mu'min)"

In Text: One who believes in Allah, the Last Day, the Quran, and performs Islamic duties (Salat/Zakat).

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

Example: In 2:62, 'believers' are promised reward, but this is contingent on Islamic definitions of righteousness, not faith in Christ's atonement.

"Spirit (Ruh)"

In Text: The Angel Gabriel (often interpreted as the Holy Spirit supporting Jesus in 2:87, 2:253).

Evangelical: The Third Person of the Trinity, God Himself.

Example: Jesus is 'supported by the Holy Spirit' (2:87), but in Islamic theology, this is created support (Gabriel), not indwelling Divinity.

"Messiah/Christ"

In Text: A title for Jesus as a messenger, without implication of divinity.

Evangelical: The Anointed One, Son of God, King of Kings.

Example: Jesus is called 'Jesus, son of Mary' repeatedly to emphasize his humanity and lack of divine paternity.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Avoidance of Hellfire and entry into Gardens (Paradise) through belief and righteous living.

How Attained: By belief in God/Last Day, observance of the Five Pillars (Salat, Zakat, etc.), and moral behavior. It is a transaction: 'Who would lend GOD a loan of righteousness?' (2:245).

Basis of Assurance: There is no absolute assurance. One hopes for mercy based on the balance of their deeds. 'God forgives whomever He wills, and punishes whomever He wills' (2:284).

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly opposed. Surah 2:25 states those who 'believe AND lead a righteous life' are rewarded. James 2 is often cited by Muslims, but the Quranic context makes works the ***basis*** of merit, not just the fruit of faith.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Observe the Contact Prayers (Salat) (2:43, 2:110)

2. Give the obligatory charity (Zakat) (2:43, 2:110)
3. Fast during the month of Ramadan (2:183-185)
4. Perform Hajj and Umrah if able (2:196)
5. Do not eat pork, blood, or carrion (2:173)
6. Do not charge usury/interest (2:275)
7. Retaliation in murder cases (Qisas) is decreed (2:178)
8. Write down loan agreements (2:282)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Believe in the unseen (2:3)
2. Accept Muhammad as a messenger confirming previous scripture
3. Defend the community against aggression (2:190)
4. Maintain family structures through specific marriage/divorce protocols

Ritual Requirements:

1. Turning the face toward the Sacred Masjid (Mecca) during prayer (2:144)
2. Washing/Purification implied (2:222 mentions God loves those who are clean)
3. Animal sacrifice during Hajj (2:196)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In Surah 2:286, it says a soul gets credit for what it earns. How do you know when you have earned enough credit to guarantee Paradise?
2. Surah 2:253 mentions that some messengers are raised in rank above others, and Jesus was supported by the Holy Spirit. Why is Jesus singled out for this specific support in the text?
3. The text mentions in 2:37 that Adam received words from God and was redeemed. What were those words, and how does that relate to Jesus being called the 'Word of God' in other scriptures?
4. Surah 2:124 says God's covenant does not include transgressors. Since we all sin (transgress), how can anyone remain in the covenant without a perfect sacrifice?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Heifer (Al-Baqarah) – The Israelites were commanded to sacrifice a heifer to expose a murder and find purification. This points to the necessity of a sacrificial substitute to deal with sin and death. [Hebrews 9:13-14 ('For if the blood of bulls and goats... sanctifies for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ...')]
2. Adam's Redemption via 'Words' – Adam was not redeemed by his own works, but by receiving 'words' from God. Jesus is the Eternal Word of God who brings redemption. [John 1:1, 1:12 ('In the beginning was the Word... to all who received him... he gave the right to become children of God.')]
3. The Hardened Heart – The text admits the human problem is a hard heart that law cannot fix. We need a heart transplant, which is the promise of the New Covenant. [Ezekiel 36:26 ('I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.')]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety / Uncertainty [Severe] – The believer is under the constant pressure of 'earning' credit (2:286). There is no assurance of salvation, only the hope that good deeds outweigh bad ones. This creates a spiritual treadmill of anxiety.
2. Cognitive Dissonance [Moderate] – The text claims to confirm the Bible (2:41, 2:89) but contradicts its core message (Divinity of Christ). The believer must constantly suppress this contradiction by assuming the Bible is corrupted, despite historical evidence.
3. Distance from God [Moderate] – God is depicted as the Master/King (2:107) to be obeyed, not a Father to be known intimately. The denial of Sonship (2:116) removes the familial aspect of the believer's relationship

with God.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation (The Quran) serves as the primary source, supported by 'signs' in nature and history.

Verification Method: The 'Inimitability Challenge': Adherents are told that if they doubt the text, they should try to produce a chapter like it (2:23).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the historical resurrection of Christ and the self-authenticating witness of the Spirit through the closed canon of Scripture (1 Corinthians 15, 2 Timothy 3:16). The Quran relies on its own literary excellence and the assertion of Muhammad's prophethood as proof.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Medinan period (approx. 622-624 AD).

Authorship: Attributed to Muhammad (via revelation from Gabriel).

Textual Issues: Khalifa's translation is unique; he translates 'Salat' as 'Contact Prayers' and inserts parenthetical explanations. Verse 2:30 translates 'Khalifa' as 'temporary god' (representative), which is a highly unorthodox translation compared to standard 'vicegerent' or 'successor'.