

SURAH 20 (TA-HA)

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

OVERVIEW

Surah 20 (Ta-Ha), in Rashad Khalifa's translation, serves as a message of consolation to the Prophet and a warning to disbelievers. The text opens by asserting that the Quran is a reminder, not a source of hardship, sent by the Creator. The core of the text is an extended retelling of the life of Moses (Musa), detailing his call at the burning bush, his confrontation with Pharaoh, the conversion of Pharaoh's magicians, the Exodus, and the incident of the Golden Calf (attributed here to 'the Samarian'). This narrative parallels the Prophet's own struggles against opposition, reinforcing that God grants victory to His messengers. The text also touches briefly on the Fall of Adam, attributing it to forgetfulness rather than inherent depravity, and concludes with eschatological warnings about the Day of Resurrection. Throughout, the text emphasizes 'Contact Prayers' (Salat) and the strict oneness of God, rejecting any intercession not explicitly permitted by Him. It presents a worldview where salvation is the result of belief combined with righteous action, and where spiritual failure results in being 'forgotten' by God.

KEY FIGURES

GOD (Allah), Moses (Musa), Aaron (Harun), Pharaoh (Fir'aun), The Samarian (Samiri), Adam, Satan (Iblis), The Magicians

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. STRICT MONOTHEISM (TAWHID)

Assertion: There is absolutely no god but God; He possesses all authority and beautiful names.

"I am GOD; there is no other god beside Me. You shall worship Me alone" (Surah 20:14).

Evangelical Comparison: The text asserts an absolute monotheism that excludes any partners or distinct persons within the Godhead. While Evangelicals affirm one God (Deuteronomy 6:4), they hold to a Trinitarian nature (Father, Son, Spirit). This text's insistence on 'worship Me alone' (v. 14) is interpreted in Islam to preclude the worship of Jesus, creating a fundamental friction with the Evangelical doctrine of Christ's deity.

2. SALVATION BY FAITH AND WORKS

Assertion: Forgiveness and high rank are contingent upon repenting, believing, and leading a righteous life.

"I am surely Forgiving for those who repent, believe, lead a righteous life, and steadfastly remain guided" (Surah 20:82).

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicalism teaches justification by faith alone (Romans 4:5), where works are the fruit, not the root, of salvation. This text presents a conditional forgiveness: God is forgiving ***for*** those who perform specific actions (repent, believe, lead righteous life, remain guided). This establishes a merit-based system where the assurance of salvation rests on the believer's performance rather than Christ's finished work.

3. ANTHROPOLOGY OF SIN (FORGETFULNESS)

Assertion: Human sin is characterized as 'forgetting' the covenant or guidance, rather than inherent depravity.

"We tested Adam in the past, but he forgot, and we found him indecisive" (Surah 20:115).

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the Fall resulted in a sin nature passed to all humanity (Romans 5:12). This text describes Adam's error as forgetfulness and indecision, for which he was subsequently 'redeemed' (v. 122) without reference to blood atonement. This implies humans are born neutral and sin by forgetting guidance, rather than being born 'dead in trespasses' (Ephesians 2:1).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mechanism of redemption. In Surah 20, Adam sins, is chosen, and redeemed simply by God's fiat and guidance (v. 122), implying that sin does not require a blood sacrifice, only repentance and future obedience. Evangelicalism posits that God's justice requires a payment for sin (Hebrews 9:22), which is satisfied only in Christ. Furthermore, the text's Christology is non-existent (Jesus is not mentioned, but the strict unitarianism precludes Him), whereas Evangelicalism centers entirely on the person and work of Jesus. The text replaces the Savior with a system of guidance and law (Salat/righteousness).

Shared Values:

Monotheism; Reality of Divine Judgment; History of Moses and the Exodus; Existence of Satan/Devil; Resurrection of the dead; Importance of Prayer

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Theology Proper (Trinity) – Explicit denial of any deity beside Allah, rejecting the Trinitarian nature of God.
2. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Salvation is conditional on works, purification, and remaining guided (v. 82, 76).
3. [Critical] Christology (Atonement) – Adam is redeemed without sacrifice; sin is treated as a mistake (forgetting) rather than a debt requiring payment.

Semantic Warnings:

"Believer"

In Text: One who accepts the Quranic message, the oneness of God, and performs righteous works.

Evangelical: One who trusts solely in the finished work of Jesus Christ for salvation (Acts 16:31).

Example: In v. 75, a 'believer' is paired with 'led a righteous life' as a condition for heaven. In Romans 4:5, a believer is one who 'does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly.'

"Repentance"

In Text: Turning back to obedience and the observance of religious duties (Salat) to earn forgiveness.

Evangelical: A change of mind (metanoia) agreeing with God about one's sin and turning to Christ for mercy.

Example: In v. 82, forgiveness is for those who 'repent... and steadfastly remain guided.' In Christianity, repentance leads to faith, which results in immediate justification.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Attaining 'high ranks' and 'Gardens of Eden' (v. 75-76); avoiding the 'miserable load' of Hell (v. 100-101).

How Attained: By repenting, believing, leading a righteous life, purifying oneself, and steadfastly remaining guided (v. 82, 76).

Basis of Assurance: There is no absolute assurance; it is based on the hope that one's works and repentance are accepted. God is 'Forgiving' but the conditionality remains.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Surah 20:82 ('Forgiving for those who... lead a righteous life') stands in direct contrast to Titus 3:5 ('He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy').

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Worship Me alone (v. 14)
2. Observe the Contact Prayers (Salat) (v. 14, 132)
3. Go to Pharaoh and speak nicely (v. 42-44)
4. Eat from good things provided (v. 81)
5. Do not transgress (v. 81)
6. Glorify God before sunrise, sunset, and during the night (v. 130)
7. Do not covet what others have (v. 131)
8. Enjoin family to observe prayers (v. 132)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Trust in God's plan despite fear (v. 46, 68)
2. Reject idolatry and false gods (v. 97-98)
3. Maintain patience in the face of opposition (v. 130)

Ritual Requirements:

1. Contact Prayers (Salat) performed at specific times (v. 130, 132)
2. Removal of sandals in sacred spaces (implied by Moses' example in v. 12)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 126, God says people are forgotten because they forgot His revelations. How can you be certain you have remembered enough to ensure God won't forget you on Judgment Day?
2. The text mentions the 'Samaritan' leading the people astray with the calf during Moses' time. Since the Samaritans didn't exist as a people until centuries after Moses, how do you interpret this reference?
3. Verse 122 says Adam was redeemed and guided after he disobeyed. If God can simply forgive without a sacrifice, why did He establish the system of animal sacrifices with Moses in the Torah?
4. Verse 109 says intercession is useless unless permitted. Do you have an intercessor who has already been granted that permission permanently?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. Seeking Fire, Finding God – Humanity often seeks earthly solutions (warmth, light) but finds that our true need is the presence of the Holy God. [John 8:12 - 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness.']}
2. The Magicians' Surrender – Demonstrates that true encounter with God's power leads to immediate, radical transformation and a willingness to lose 'this lowly life' for the eternal one. [Philippians 3:7-8 - 'But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.']}
3. The Burden of Being Forgotten – The fear of being forgotten by God is the ultimate horror. The Gospel offers the assurance that we are never forgotten because we are in Christ. [Hebrews 13:5 - 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.']}

Spiritual Weight:

1. Fear of Abandonment [Severe] – The text explicitly states that God will 'forget' those who forget His revelations (v. 126). This creates a deep-seated anxiety that any lapse in religious memory or practice could result in eternal abandonment.
2. Performance Pressure [Moderate] – Salvation is tied to 'leading a righteous life' and 'purifying oneself' (v. 76, 82). The believer bears the full weight of their own sanctification without the assurance of Christ's imputed righteousness.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation confirmed by historical signs and nature.

Verification Method: Observation of the ruins of past generations (v. 128) and the eventual eschatological verification (v. 135).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the self-attesting nature of the 66-book canon and the internal witness of the Holy Spirit regarding the Son (1 John 5:10). This text relies on the Prophet's claim of reception and external 'signs' (ruins, nature) as proof, rejecting the biblical canon's sufficiency.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Meccan Period (approx. 615-619 AD).

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

Textual Issues: Khalifa's translation uses 'Contact Prayers' for Salat, reflecting his specific theological emphasis. The 'Samarian' (v. 85) is a well-known historical anachronism in critical scholarship.