

# SURAH 21 (AL-ANBIYA / THE PROPHETS)

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

## OVERVIEW

Surah 21, titled 'The Prophets' (Al-Anbiya), serves as a comprehensive argument for the continuity of the monotheistic message throughout history. The text argues that Muhammad is not bringing a new doctrine but is reviving the singular message entrusted to all prior messengers, including Abraham, Noah, David, Solomon, Job, and Jesus. A central polemic in this text is the forceful rejection of polytheism and specifically the Christian doctrine of the Sonship of God, which is dismissed as a fabrication. The text emphasizes the 'Great Horror' of the Day of Judgment, portraying it as an inevitable physical reality where the heavens will be folded up. Uniquely in the Khalifa translation, modern scientific concepts (like the Big Bang and embryonic water origins) are read back into the text as proofs of divine authority. The narrative structure weaves through the trials of the prophets to demonstrate that God delivers the righteous who practice 'Contact Prayers' (Salat) and charity, while destroying those who are heedless. Ultimately, it establishes a soteriology based on strict accountability, where even a mustard seed's weight of deeds determines one's eternal fate.

## KEY FIGURES

God (Allah), Muhammad, Abraham, Noah, David, Solomon, Job, Jonah (Zan-Noon), Zechariah, Mary, Jesus (implied as son of Mary), Gog and Magog

## DOCTRINES ANALYZED

### 1. ABSOLUTE MONOTHEISM (TAWHID)

**Assertion:** God is singular, has no partners, and specifically has no offspring.

*"The Most Gracious has begotten a son! Glory be to Him. All (messengers) are (His) honored servants." (21:26)"*

**Evangelical Comparison:** While Evangelicalism affirms one God (Deuteronomy 6:4), it holds that this One God exists eternally in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Surah 21 explicitly attacks this by framing the 'sonship' of God as a biological or polytheistic impossibility rather than a relational and ontological reality within the Godhead. The text reduces Jesus to an 'honored servant' and a 'portent,' stripping Him of the divinity essential to the Evangelical understanding of the Atonement.

### 2. SOTERIOLOGY OF SCALES

**Assertion:** Salvation is determined by a precise weighing of deeds on the Day of Judgment.

*"We will establish the scales of justice on the Day of Resurrection... Even the equivalent of a mustard seed will be accounted for." (21:47)"*

**Evangelical Comparison:** Evangelical theology teaches that human works are 'filthy rags' (Isaiah 64:6) and that justification comes solely through faith in Christ's finished work (Ephesians 2:8-9). Surah 21 presents a forensic system where the individual must present their own righteousness. There is no concept of substitutionary atonement; instead, the text emphasizes that 'no soul will suffer the least injustice' based on their own performance, placing the burden of perfection on the adherent.

### 3. PROPHETIC UNIFORMITY

**Assertion:** All prophets, including biblical figures, taught identical Islamic monotheism and practices.

*"We made them imams who guided in accordance with our commandments... and how to observe the Contact Prayers (Salat) and the obligatory charity (Zakat)." (21:73)"*

**Evangelical Comparison:** The text engages in a retrospective theology, asserting that Isaac and Jacob practiced specific Islamic rituals like Salat and Zakat. Evangelicalism views the biblical patriarchs as living under different covenants (Abrahamic, Mosaic) that pointed forward to Christ, rather than practicing a static form of Islamic law. This doctrine effectively erases the progressive revelation of Scripture described in Hebrews 1:1-2.

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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### Divergence Status: Yes

**Theological Gap:** The theological gap is absolute regarding the nature of God and the means of salvation. Surah 21:26 explicitly denies the core tenet of Christianity—the Sonship of Christ—labeling it a falsehood. Furthermore, the soteriology of Surah 21 is entirely forensic and works-based (the scales), offering no solution for the problem of sin other than human effort and God's prerogative mercy. Evangelicalism posits that God's justice was satisfied at the Cross (Romans 3:25-26), a concept absent in this text. The text's 'Jesus' is a prophet who needs saving, not a Savior who saves.

### Shared Values:

Monotheism; Reality of Judgment Day; Existence of Angels; Creation by God; Moral accountability; Reverence for biblical patriarchs

### Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Theology Proper (Trinity) – Explicit denial of God having a son (21:26).
2. [Critical] Christology – Jesus is reduced to a created being and a sign, denying His pre-existence and deity.
3. [Critical] Sola Fide – Salvation is contingent on the balance of the scales of justice (21:47).
4. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Claims to correct and supersede the biblical record of the prophets.

### Semantic Warnings:

#### "Righteousness"

**In Text:** Moral behavior, ritual observance (Salat), and correct belief (Tawhid).

**Evangelical:** A legal standing granted by God through faith in Christ (Imputed Righteousness, Philippians 3:9).

**Example:** In 21:94, 'works righteousness' earns a record; in Titus 3:5, we are saved 'not by works of righteousness which we have done.'

#### "Messiah/Jesus"

**In Text:** A human messenger, son of Mary, a sign/portent, not divine.

**Evangelical:** The Eternal Word made flesh, fully God and fully man.

**Example:** 21:26 calls Jesus an 'honored servant'; John 1:1 calls Him 'God.'

## SOTERIOLOGY

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**Salvation Defined:** Deliverance from the Fire (Hell) and entry into an abode of desire (Paradise).

**How Attained:** Through belief in One God, rejection of idolatry, and the accumulation of righteous deeds weighed on scales.

**Basis of Assurance:** There is no absolute assurance; one hopes in God's mercy but fears the scales. The text emphasizes the 'terror' of the judgment.

**Comparison to Sola Fide:** Diametrically opposed. 21:47 establishes a 'Mustard Seed' standard of judgment by works, whereas Matthew 17:20 uses the 'Mustard Seed' as a metaphor for faith. The text demands payment; the Gospel offers payment.

## MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

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### Explicit Commands:

1. Worship God alone (21:25, 21:92)
2. Do not rush God's signs/judgment (21:37)
3. Ask those who know the scripture if ignorant (21:7)
4. Believe in the One God (21:108)

### Implicit Obligations:

1. Reject the divinity of Jesus

2. Accept Muhammad as the consummation of previous messages
3. Fear the Day of Judgment
4. View the natural world as a set of signs pointing to God

**Ritual Requirements:**

1. Observe Contact Prayers (Salat) (21:73)
2. Give Obligatory Charity (Zakat) (21:73)

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## EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

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**Discovery Questions:**

1. In verse 47, it says even a mustard seed of deeds is accounted for. How do you deal with the 'mustard seeds' of sin in your life if God is perfectly just?
2. Verse 26 says God has no son. If God is love, and love requires a relationship, who did God love before He created the angels and humans?
3. The text mentions the 'Statute Book' given to Moses (v. 48). Have you ever read the Torah to see what it says about the sacrifices required for sin?
4. Verse 105 quotes the Psalms about the righteous inheriting the earth. How does David define 'righteousness' in Psalm 32?

**Redemptive Analogies:**

1. The Scales of Justice – N/A
2. The Unbearable Weight – Use this to show the impossibility of self-salvation. If every tiny thought/deed is weighed, we are doomed. This creates the need for a substitute whose weight of glory tips the scales in our favor. [Daniel 5:27 ('Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting') -> 2 Corinthians 5:21]
3. The Guarded Ceiling – Just as God protects the earth physically, we need spiritual protection from the 'fire' mentioned in v. 39. Christ is the door/covering. [John 10:9]

**Spiritual Weight:**

1. Uncertainty/Fear [Severe] – The believer lives under the constant threat of the 'Great Horror' (v. 103) and the suddenness of judgment (v. 40), without the assurance of a Mediator.
2. Performance Pressure [Severe] – The 'Mustard Seed' accountability (v. 47) creates a hyper-vigilant state where every minor action is scrutinized, leading to either legalism or despair.
3. Works-Righteousness [Moderate] – The burden of saving oneself through 'Contact Prayers' and charity, knowing that past nations were annihilated for failure.
4. Cognitive Dissonance [Moderate] – The text claims to confirm previous scriptures (v. 105) while contradicting their core message (the Atonement), forcing the adherent to believe the Bible is corrupted without evidence.

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## EPISTEMOLOGY

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**Knowledge Source:** Revelation confirmed by natural signs (creation) and historical retribution patterns.

**Verification Method:** Observation of the natural world (heavens, earth, water) and reflection on the destruction of past wicked nations.

**Evangelical Contrast:** Biblical epistemology relies on the historical reality of the Resurrection and the internal witness of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 15:14, Romans 8:16). This text relies on 'sign-based' reasoning and fear of retribution.

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## TEXTUAL CRITICISM

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**Dating:** 7th Century AD (Traditional); 1978 (This Translation).

**Authorship:** Attributed to God via Angel Gabriel to Muhammad; Translated by Rashad Khalifa.

**Textual Issues:** Khalifa's translation is notable for its 'scientific' renderings (e.g., 'Big Bang' in v.30) and his rejection of Hadith, which influences his translation choices (e.g., 'Contact Prayers').