

SURAH 35

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

OVERVIEW

Surah 35, titled 'The Originator' (Fatir), presents a rigorous monotheistic argument centered on God's role as the initiator of creation and the sole source of mercy and provision. The text draws heavily on natural theology—citing rain, wind, the two seas, and the movement of celestial bodies—as undeniable proofs of God's power, contrasting this with the impotence of idols who cannot even hear the prayers of their worshippers. Theologically, the Surah establishes a strict binary between the 'blind' (disbelievers) and the 'seer' (believers), asserting that spiritual insight is a divine gift. Crucially, it outlines a soteriology based on personal responsibility and merit; it explicitly rejects the concept of bearing another's burden (vicarious atonement) and defines salvation as a commercial transaction or 'investment' involving prayer, charity, and recitation. The text concludes with a warning of judgment, depicting the damned pleading for a return to earth not to have faith, but specifically to 'work righteousness,' reinforcing the text's works-based framework.

KEY FIGURES

GOD (The Originator/Fatir), The Warner (Prophet Muhammad), The Devil (Satan), Angels (Messengers with wings), Previous Messengers

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. REJECTION OF VICARIOUS ATONEMENT

Assertion: No soul can bear the sin burden of another; every individual is solely responsible for their own sin debt.

"No soul can carry the sins of another soul. If a soul that is loaded with sins implores another to bear part of its load, no other soul can carry any part of it (35:18)"

Evangelical Comparison: This doctrine serves as a precise antithesis to the Gospel. While Evangelicalism teaches that Christ 'bore our sins in his body on the tree' (1 Peter 2:24) precisely because humans cannot bear their own load, this text asserts the impossibility of such a transfer. It locks the adherent into a system of solitary spiritual liability, removing the possibility of a Savior who acts as a substitute.

2. SOTERIOLOGY BY INVESTMENT (WORKS)

Assertion: Salvation is attained through a combination of reciting scripture, observing prayers, and giving charity, viewed as a trade that yields profit.

"Surely, those who recite the book of GOD, observe the Contact Prayers (Salat), and... spend... are engaged in an investment that never loses. (35:29)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text utilizes commercial language ('investment,' 'recompense,' 'loss') to describe salvation. In Evangelical theology, salvation is a gift of grace received by faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), not a business transaction. Here, the believer is an active investor hoping for a return on their ritual performance, rather than a beneficiary of an inheritance secured by Christ.

3. DIVINE DETERMINISM

Assertion: God actively wills some to go astray and others to be guided; human agency is secondary to Divine Will.

"GOD thus sends astray whoever wills (to go astray), and He guides whoever wills (to be guided). (35:8)"

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelicalism holds to God's sovereignty, it balances this with the genuine offer of the Gospel to all (John 3:16). This text suggests a fatalistic determination where God adorns evil works in the eyes of the misled (35:8), creating a tension with the concept of a God who 'desires all people to be saved' (1 Timothy 2:4).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental incompatibility lies in verse 35:18, 'No soul can carry the sins of another.' This is a direct polemic against the Christian doctrine of the Atonement. Evangelicalism stands on the premise that Christ became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). This text declares that metaphysical impossibility. Furthermore, the text presents salvation as a commercial exchange ('investment') dependent on human performance, whereas the Gospel presents it as a finished work of grace received by faith.

Shared Values:

Monotheism (One Creator); Existence of Angels and Satan; Resurrection of the dead; Moral accountability; Creation ex nihilo

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Christology (Atonement) – Explicit denial that one being can bear the sins of another (35:18).
- 2. [Major] Sola Fide – Salvation is described as a trade/investment of works (prayer, charity) (35:29).
- 3. [Major] Theology Proper (God's Character) – God is depicted as actively deceiving or 'adorning evil works' in the eyes of those He wills to send astray (35:8).

Semantic Warnings:

"Forgiveness"

In Text: A response from God to 'righteous life' and belief (35:7), contingent on God's will.
Evangelical: A legal pardon granted based on the shed blood of Christ, received by faith (Ephesians 1:7).
Example: *In 35:7, forgiveness is paired with 'great recompense' as a result of leading a righteous life.*

"Believer"

In Text: One who accepts Tawhid (oneness of God), rejects idols, and performs Salat.
Evangelical: One who trusts specifically in the finished work of Jesus Christ for justification.
Example: *A 'believer' in this text (35:7) is defined by their rejection of idols and performance of works, not by trust in a Savior.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Forgiveness, great recompense (35:7), and entry into Gardens of Eden (35:33).
How Attained: By believing, leading a righteous life (35:7), purifying one's soul (35:18), and investing in prayer and charity (35:29).
Basis of Assurance: The promise that the 'investment' of works 'never loses' (35:29), contingent on the performance of those works.
Comparison to Sola Fide: The text explicitly links forgiveness to 'leading a righteous life' (35:7), whereas Romans 4:5 states that God justifies the ungodly who have faith.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Remember GOD's blessings (35:3)
- 2. Treat the devil as an enemy (35:6)
- 3. Do not grieve over the disbelievers (35:8)
- 4. Consider the idols and their lack of creative power (35:40)

Implicit Obligations:

- 1. Observe nature as proof of God's existence (35:27-28)
- 2. Accept Muhammad as a warner sent with truth (35:24)
- 3. Acknowledge total dependence on God (35:15)

Ritual Requirements:

1. Observe the Contact Prayers (Salat) (35:18, 35:29)
2. Recite the book of GOD (35:29)
3. Spend/Give charity secretly and publicly (35:29)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 18, it says no soul can carry the sins of another. Does this worry you regarding your own heavy burden of sin?
2. Verse 37 describes people in hell begging to return to 'work righteousness.' If salvation is based on working righteousness, how much work is enough to be safe?
3. Verse 29 calls prayer and charity an 'investment.' If you were to face God today, would your investment be sufficient to buy your way into Eden?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Burden of Sin – The text acknowledges the crushing weight of sin ('loaded with sins'). The Gospel agrees the burden is too heavy for us or any other human to bear. This creates the perfect setup for Jesus, who says 'Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden' (Matthew 11:28). [Matthew 11:28-30]
2. The Desire for a Guaranteed Investment – Humans naturally seek security and a guarantee. The text offers this through works. The Gospel offers a 'guarantee' (deposit) through the Holy Spirit, sealed not by our performance but by Christ's promise. [Ephesians 1:13-14]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The believer is cast as an investor who must constantly perform rituals (Salat, charity) to secure a return. There is no rest, only the constant pressure to ensure the 'investment' is sufficient.
2. Isolation in Guilt [Severe] – Verse 18 explicitly isolates the sinner: 'No soul can carry the sins of another.' The believer bears their guilt alone, with no mediator and no substitute, leading to profound spiritual loneliness.
3. Uncertainty of Divine Will [Moderate] – Since God 'sends astray whoever wills' (35:8), the adherent can never be truly certain if they are being guided or if their evil works are merely being 'adorned' in their eyes by God.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation (The Book) combined with Empirical Observation (Natural Theology).

Verification Method: Adherents are instructed to observe the natural world (rain, wind, geology, biology) as verification of the text's theological claims.

Evangelical Contrast: While the Bible affirms general revelation (Psalm 19, Romans 1), it posits that special revelation (Scripture) is necessary for salvation (2 Timothy 3:15). This text relies heavily on the 'argument from design' to validate its specific prophetic claims.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 1978 (Translation date)

Authorship: Rashad Khalifa (Translator)

Textual Issues: Khalifa's translation is known for its 'Quranist' bias (rejecting Hadith) and his later claim to be a Messenger of the Covenant. He translates 'Salat' as 'Contact Prayers,' a term unique to his movement.