

SURAH 37 (AS-SAFFAT)

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

OVERVIEW

Surah 37, known as As-Saffat (The Arrangers/Those Ranged in Ranks), is a vigorous defense of Tawhid (monotheism) and the Afterlife. The text opens with oaths sworn by angels, asserting that God is One. It proceeds to dismantle the arguments of Meccan polytheists who denied the resurrection, portraying a vivid scene of the Day of Judgment where skeptics blame one another. The core of the Surah reviews the narratives of Noah, Abraham, Moses, Aaron, Elias, Lot, and Jonah, framing their survival and victory as rewards for their status as 'believing servants' and 'doers of good.' A critical theological pivot occurs in the narrative of Abraham, where the text describes the sacrifice of his son (interpreted by Khalifa as Ismail) and the subsequent divine ransom. The Surah concludes with a polemic against the attribution of daughters to God and a direct denial that God begets children, positioning this claim as a fabrication. The text establishes a worldview where salvation is the result of absolute devotion and submission to the Creator.

KEY FIGURES

GOD (Allah), Abraham, Ismail (implied in text, explicit in Khalifa's parenthesis), Isaac, Noah, Moses, Aaron, Elias (Elijah), Lot, Jonah

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. ABSOLUTE MONOTHEISM (TAWHID)

Assertion: God is strictly One; attributing partners, children, or family to Him is a gross lie and blasphemy.

"[037:004] Your god is only one... [037:152] 'GOD has begotten a son.' Indeed, they are liars."

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelicalism affirms one God (Deuteronomy 6:4), it holds to a Trinitarian nature (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). Surah 37 explicitly targets the concept of 'begetting' as a fabrication (v151-152). This creates a fundamental theological impasse; the text defines the Evangelical understanding of Jesus's nature not merely as incorrect, but as a moral crime (lying against God).

2. SALVATION BY DEVOTION AND WORKS

Assertion: Salvation and deliverance are rewards granted to those who are 'absolutely devoted' and 'doers of good.'

"[037:040] Only GOD's servants who are absolutely devoted to Him alone (will be saved)... [037:061] This is what every worker should work for."

Evangelical Comparison: The Surah repeatedly uses the formula 'Thus do We reward the doers of good' (v80, 105, 110, 121, 131) following the deliverance of prophets. Verse 61 explicitly states, 'This is what every worker should work for.' Evangelical soteriology posits that salvation is 'not by works, so that no one can boast' (Ephesians 2:9) and that God justifies the *wicked* through faith (Romans 4:5). This text teaches God justifies the *righteous*.

3. THE GREAT RANSOM

Assertion: Abraham's son was spared death because God substituted a 'momentous sacrifice' (ransom).

"[037:107] We ransomed (Ismail) by substituting an animal sacrifice."

Evangelical Comparison: The text validates the concept of 'ransom' (fidaynahu)—that one life can be spared by the substitution of another. In the text, a ram substitutes for the son. In Evangelical theology, this event is a type/shadow of Christ, who is the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world (John 1:29). The text stops at the shadow (the animal) and denies the substance (the Son of God).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The gap is unbridgeable regarding Christology. Surah 37:151-152 is a polemic specifically designed to inoculate the reader against the Gospel. While Evangelicalism views the 'Son of God' as an ontological reality essential for mediation between God and man, this text views the title as a blasphemous fabrication. Furthermore, the soteriology is merit-based ('We thus reward the righteous'), whereas the Gospel is grace-based.

Shared Values:

Monotheism (existence of one Creator); Reality of Satan/Devils; Resurrection of the dead; Judgment Day; Veneration of Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Jonah

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Theology Proper (Trinity) – Explicit denial of God having a son; God is unitarian.
2. [Major] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Salvation is repeatedly framed as a reward for those who 'work' and are 'righteous'.
3. [Critical] Christology (Atonement) – The 'Ransom' is an animal for Ismail, not Christ for humanity. The need for a divine mediator is absent.

Semantic Warnings:

"Believer (Mu'min)"

In Text: One who submits to Allah, rejects idols, and accepts the Quranic prophetic narrative.

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

Example: *In v111, Abraham is a 'believing servant' because he submitted to the test. In Romans 4, Abraham is a believer because he trusted God's promise, and it was credited as righteousness apart from works.*

"Son of God"

In Text: A biological offspring or partner (rejected as blasphemy).

Evangelical: The eternal, uncreated second person of the Trinity, one in essence with the Father.

Example: *The text asks 'Did He choose the girls over the boys?' (v153), implying a biological/sexual understanding of sonship which Christianity also rejects, yet the text uses this to deny Christ's divinity entirely.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Victory (v172), Provisions in Gardens of Bliss (v41-43), Avoidance of Hell.

How Attained: By being 'absolutely devoted' (v40), 'believing' (v81), and 'working righteousness' (v61).

Basis of Assurance: There is no assurance of salvation in the present tense; it is a future hope based on the sufficiency of one's submission.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Surah 37:61 ('This is what every worker should work for') stands in direct opposition to Romans 4:4-5 ('Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes... his faith is credited as righteousness').

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Worship God alone (v4)
2. Reject idols/statues (v125)
3. Believe in the Resurrection (v18)
4. Disregard the mockers for a while (v174)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Absolute devotion without wavering
2. Acceptance of prophetic history as defined by the Quran
3. Rejection of Christian Trinitarian claims

Ritual Requirements:

1. Meditation/Remembrance of God (implied by Jonah's example in v143)

2. Hajj rites (implied by the Abrahamic narrative context)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 107, it says God 'ransomed' the son with a 'momentous sacrifice.' Why does God require a blood sacrifice to save a human life?
2. Verse 40 mentions 'servants who are absolutely devoted.' How do you handle the times when your devotion is not absolute? Does that disqualify you from salvation?
3. The text says in verse 61 that we must 'work' for this triumph. How much work is enough to guarantee you have satisfied God's standard?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Great Ransom (Zibhin Azeem) – Just as one ram died so that Abraham's son could live, Jesus (the Lamb of God) died so that we could live. The ram was a temporary substitute; Jesus is the eternal 'Momentous Sacrifice.' [John 1:29, Hebrews 10:4-10]
2. Jonah's Salvation – Jesus used the 'Sign of Jonah' as the only sign given to his generation—pointing to his death and resurrection (3 days in the earth). [Matthew 12:39-40]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance/Perfectionism [Severe] – The text repeatedly conditions salvation on being 'absolutely devoted' and a 'doer of good.' This creates a burden of maintaining a perfect standard of devotion to ensure one is among the 'servants' who are saved.
2. Intellectual/Theological Isolation [Severe] – By framing the Christian concept of Sonship as a 'lie' and 'blasphemy,' the text creates a high barrier of fear against even considering the Gospel, labeling it as the worst possible sin (Shirk).

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation confirmed by historical judgment on wicked nations.

Verification Method: Observation of nature (v6) and archaeological ruins of destroyed peoples (v137).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the Spirit bearing witness with the Word (1 John 5:6-9). This text relies on rational arguments against idolatry and the threat of judgment.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Meccan Period (Early-Middle)

Authorship: Attributed to Muhammad (Divine Revelation via Gabriel according to tradition).

Textual Issues: Khalifa's translation inserts '(Ismail)' in verse 107. The Arabic text says 'ghulam' (boy) without a name. Mainstream Islamic exegesis identifies him as Ismail based on the subsequent announcement of Isaac in verse 112, though early Islamic scholars were divided.