

SURAH 38

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

OVERVIEW

Surah 38 (Saad) serves as a polemic against the arrogance of the Quraysh leaders who rejected Muhammad's monotheistic message. The text opens by validating the Quran as containing 'the proof' and warns the current generation by citing the destruction of past nations (Noah, 'Aad, Pharaoh). The core of the Surah presents a series of prophetic narratives—specifically David (Dawud), Solomon (Sulaiman), and Job (Ayyub)—emphasizing their power, their testing by God, and their subsequent repentance and 'turning back' (awwab) to God. A critical theological feature is the retelling of David's judgment of the two litigants (the parable of the ewe lamb). Unlike the Biblical account which implicates David in adultery and murder, this text presents the incident as a test of judicial fairness or a minor lapse in judgment, reinforcing the Islamic doctrine of prophetic protection from major sin. The Surah concludes with the narrative of the creation of Adam and Iblis's (Satan's) refusal to prostrate, establishing the cosmic battle between Satan's vow to mislead humanity and God's promise to fill Hell with the ungrateful. The text emphasizes that salvation is attained through belief, righteousness, and remembrance of the Day of Reckoning.

KEY FIGURES

God (Allah), The Messenger (Muhammad), David (Dawud), Solomon (Sulaiman), Job (Ayyub), Satan (Iblis), Adam

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. PROPHETIC INTEGRITY (ISMAH)

Assertion: Prophets like David and Solomon are 'excellent servants' who may face tests or momentary lapses but are fundamentally righteous and not guilty of major moral failings like adultery.

"David... thought that we were testing him. He then implored his Lord for forgiveness... We forgave him in this matter. (38:24-25)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the sins of the prophets (e.g., David's affair with Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11) serve to highlight the universal depravity of man and the desperate need for God's grace. The Quranic account in Surah 38 alludes to the parable of the sheep (2 Samuel 12) but strips it of the context of adultery and murder. Instead, David's error is interpreted as judging too hastily between litigants or a minor lapse in etiquette. This supports the Islamic doctrine of 'Ismah' (protection from sin), which creates a theological gap: if the best men (prophets) do not need redemption from deep moral failure, the need for a Savior is negated.

2. ANTHROPOCENTRIC PROSTRATION

Assertion: God commanded the angels to prostrate before Adam as a sign of respect for His creation.

"Once I design him, and blow into him from My spirit, you shall fall prostrate before him. (38:72)"

Evangelical Comparison: In the Bible, the refusal to worship God is the primal sin. In Surah 38, the primal sin of Satan is his refusal to bow to ***man*** (Adam) when commanded by God. Evangelical theology views bowing to a created being as idolatry (Exodus 20). This text frames Satan's fall as a failure of humility toward humanity and disobedience to a divine command, rather than a desire to usurp God's throne (Isaiah 14).

3. MERIT-BASED ESCHATOLOGY

Assertion: Entrance to the Gardens of Eden is a result of what believers have 'deserved' through righteousness.

"This is what you have deserved on the Day of Reckoning. (38:53)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text explicitly links the 'wonderful destiny' and 'Gardens of Eden' to the concept of desert ('This is what you have deserved'). While God is called the 'Grantor' (v. 9, 35), the mechanism of salvation is the believer's submission and righteous works. This stands in direct antithesis to Ephesians 2:8-9, which states salvation is a gift, not of works, specifically so that no one can boast or claim they 'deserved' it.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the nature of sin and salvation. In Surah 38, sin is a lapse in judgment or a failure of gratitude, remedied by a return to obedience (Tawbah) and God's arbitrary mercy. There is no concept of original sin or a corrupted nature that requires a substitute; thus, the Cross is rendered unnecessary. Furthermore, the text re-engineers the biographies of David and Solomon to remove their deep moral failures, thereby removing the biblical evidence that even the 'best' humans are desperately wicked and in need of a Savior. The Christological gap is absolute: Jesus is not mentioned here, but the theology leaves no room for His atoning work.

Shared Values:

Monotheism; Reality of Satan/Devil; Judgment Day; Necessity of Repentance; Value of Patience; Historical reality of David, Solomon, Job

Friction Points:

1. [Major] Theology Proper (God alone is worthy of worship) – God commands angels to prostrate to Adam (v. 72), violating the distinction that prostration belongs only to the Creator.
2. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – The text alters established biblical history (David's sin) claiming superior authority/correction.
3. [Critical] Sola Fide – Salvation is explicitly linked to what one has 'deserved' (v. 53) through works and submission.

Semantic Warnings:

"Forgiveness"

In Text: God overlooking a fault due to the petitioner's repentance and future good works.

Evangelical: God dismissing the penalty of sin because it was paid for by a substitute (Christ), satisfying justice (Romans 3:25-26).

Example: *In 38:25, David is forgiven simply because he asked; in 2 Samuel 12:13, David is forgiven, but the consequences remain, and the sacrificial system (pointing to Christ) is the basis of his restoration.*

"Spirit (Ruh)"

In Text: A created life-force or divine breath blown into Adam (v. 72).

Evangelical: God is Spirit (John 4:24); The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity.

Example: *God blowing 'My spirit' into Adam in the Quran implies imparting life/soul, not the indwelling of the Third Person of the Trinity.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Entry into the Gardens of Eden, avoidance of Hellfire.

How Attained: By believing, working righteousness (v. 24), and being a 'submitter' (v. 44).

Basis of Assurance: Based on God's promise to the righteous, but contingent on the individual's performance and final state.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Surah 38:24 explicitly pairs belief with 'working righteousness' as the criteria for being among the 'few' who are saved. This opposes Romans 4:5 ('to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly').

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Be patient in the face of utterances (v. 17)
2. Remember the servants of God (David, Job, Abraham) (v. 17, 41, 45)
3. Judge among people equitably (v. 26)
4. Do not follow personal opinion (v. 26)
5. Say: There is no other god beside GOD (v. 65)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Muhammad as a warner
2. Reject the concept of multiple gods or partners to God
3. Reflect on the verses of the scripture (v. 29)
4. Seek forgiveness immediately upon realizing a mistake (modeled by David and Solomon)

Ritual Requirements:

1. Prostration (implied by David's action in v. 24)
2. Prayer/Petition for forgiveness

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In the story of David and the sheep (v. 23-24), David repents immediately. In the Torah/Bible, this story is about David's adultery. Why do you think the Quran omits the specific sin David committed?
2. Verse 53 says the Garden is what people have 'deserved.' Do you feel you have done enough right now to deserve God's perfect paradise?
3. God commands the angels to prostrate to Adam in verse 72. If prostration is an act of worship, how do you understand this command in light of Tawhid (monotheism)?
4. Satan's fall is described here as refusing to bow to a human. In the Bible, Satan falls because he wanted to be like God. How does this change your view of what sin actually is?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Parable of the Ewe Lamb – This story is the bridge to the Biblical account of David's deep sin. It opens the door to discuss the *true* weight of sin—that it wasn't just a judicial error, but a heart issue requiring a new heart (Psalm 51). [2 Samuel 12:1-7, Psalm 51:1-10]
2. The Inevitable Blow – The text warns of sudden judgment. The Gospel offers the only shelter from that judgment through Christ, who took the 'blow' of God's wrath for us. [1 Thessalonians 5:2-9]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety [Moderate] – The text repeatedly emphasizes that the righteous 'deserved' their reward and that only 'few' believe and work righteousness (v. 24). This creates a burden to be among the elite few through self-effort.
2. Cognitive Dissonance [Moderate] – The adherent must accept that previous scriptures (Torah/Psalms) are corrupted because they depict prophets as sinners, while simultaneously respecting those prophets. They must believe the Quran corrects history without historical evidence.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation (Wahi) given to the Messenger.

Verification Method: Reflection on the text itself ('Those who possess intelligence will take heed' - v. 29) and the observation of historical destruction of past nations.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the consistency of the Old and New Testaments (2 Timothy 3:16). This text claims knowledge of 'feuding in the High Society' (heavenly realm) solely through immediate inspiration (v. 69), bypassing the biblical canon.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

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

Authorship: Attributed to Muhammad via Gabrieleic revelation; Khalifa translation (1978) claims to restore the 'original' meaning.

Textual Issues: The 'Sad' (S.) initial letter is part of the 'Muqatta'at' (mysterious letters). Khalifa builds his 'Code 19' theory heavily on the count of this letter, sometimes altering traditional spelling counts to fit the mathematical miracle theory.