

SURAH 40

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

OVERVIEW

Surah 40, presented here in Rashad Khalifa's 1978 translation, serves as a powerful polemic against polytheism and arrogance. The text opens by establishing God's dual nature as the 'Forgiver of sins' and the one 'strict in enforcing retribution.' The central narrative arc (verses 23-46) expands on the Biblical account of Moses and Pharaoh by introducing a 'believing man among Pharaoh's people' who concealed his faith. This figure serves as a rhetorical proxy for the prophet, arguing for monotheism using logic and warnings of historical destruction. The text heavily emphasizes the 'Day of Summoning' (Judgment Day), depicting the terrifying reality of Hell where no intercession is accepted for disbelievers. Theologically, it posits that salvation is the result of belief combined with righteous works, and that God's guidance is withheld from transgressors. It concludes by pointing to the natural world (livestock, creation) as irrefutable empirical evidence of God's sovereignty, rendering disbelief inexcusable.

KEY FIGURES

GOD (Allah), Moses, Pharaoh, The Believing Man (Pharaoh's relative), Haman, Joseph, Korah (Qaaron), Noah

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. TAWHID (ABSOLUTE MONOTHEISM)

Assertion: There is absolutely no deity other than God; attributing partners to Him is the ultimate sin.

"There is no other god beside Him. To Him is the ultimate destiny. (40:003)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text enforces a Unitarian monotheism that views any association of others with God as 'shirk' (idolatry). While Evangelicals affirm one God (Deuteronomy 6:4), they hold that this One God exists in three persons. Surah 40:3 and 40:65 ('He is the Living; there is no god except He') are interpreted in Islamic theology to categorically exclude the divinity of Christ or the Holy Spirit, creating a fundamental friction with the Nicene Creed.

2. CONDITIONAL SOTERIOLOGY (FAITH + WORKS)

Assertion: Entrance to Paradise is contingent upon the combination of belief and righteous actions.

"whoever works righteousness - male or female - while believing, these will enter Paradise (40:040)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicalism teaches justification by faith alone, apart from works (Romans 3:28). This text explicitly links the reward of Paradise to the performance of righteousness ('whoever works righteousness... while believing'). While grace is mentioned (God is the 'Forgiver'), the mechanism for receiving it is tied to human effort and submission, rather than the finished work of a substitute.

3. DIVINE RETRIBUTION AND PREDESTINATION

Assertion: God actively sends astray those who transgress and is strict in punishment.

"Whomever GOD sends astray, nothing can guide him. (40:033); strict in enforcing retribution (40:003)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text describes God as 'strict in enforcing retribution' and states that He 'seals the hearts of every arrogant tyrant' (40:35). While Calvinist streams of Evangelicalism hold to election, the Islamic view presented here often implies a retributive sealing based on the human's initial arrogance, yet also emphasizes that once God sends one astray, there is no hope. This lacks the redemptive tension of the Cross where retribution was satisfied on behalf of the sinner.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mechanism of reconciliation. Surah 40:3 describes God as the 'Forgiver of sins' but immediately couples this with 'strict in enforcing retribution.' In Islamic theology,

these attributes are balanced by the human's submission. There is no concept of propitiation—no sacrifice absorbs the retribution. Consequently, the believer is left in a state of uncertainty, hoping their submission outweighs their sin. Evangelicalism posits that the 'strict retribution' was poured out on Christ (Isaiah 53), allowing God to be both 'just and the justifier' (Romans 3:26). Furthermore, the text's rejection of intercessors (40:18) directly contradicts the High Priestly role of Jesus (Hebrews 7:25).

Shared Values:

Monotheism (existence of one Creator); Reality of Judgment Day; Existence of Angels; Necessity of Repentance; Historical reality of Moses and Joseph

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Theology Proper (Trinity) – Explicit denial of any partners or distinct persons within the Godhead (40:003, 40:012).
2. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Salvation is contingent on working righteousness (40:040).
3. [Critical] Christology (Mediation) – Denial of intercessors for the transgressors (40:018), negating Christ's role as Advocate.

Semantic Warnings:

"Forgiver (Ghafir)"

In Text: God as an executive authority who waives punishment for those who submit and repent.

Evangelical: God as a righteous judge who justifies the sinner through the payment of a ransom (Christ's blood).

Example: *In Surah 40, God forgives because He decides to; in Romans, God forgives because the debt is paid.*

"Believer (Mu'min)"

In Text: One who acknowledges God's oneness and rejects all idols/partners.

Evangelical: One who trusts specifically in the person and finished work of Jesus Christ.

Example: *The 'Believer' in 40:28 is a believer because he defends monotheism, not because he trusts in a savior.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Avoidance of Hell (Gehenna) and entrance into the Gardens of Eden (40:008).

How Attained: By repenting, following God's path (40:007), and working righteousness while believing (40:040).

Basis of Assurance: There is no absolute assurance; it depends on whether God chooses to 'protect them from falling in sin' (40:009).

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly opposed. Surah 40:40 requires works ('whoever works righteousness') as a condition for Paradise, whereas Romans 4:5 states 'to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.'

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Devote worship absolutely to GOD ALONE (40:014)
2. Do not be impressed by the apparent success of disbelievers (40:004)
3. Warn people about the Day of Summoning (40:018)
4. Be patient (40:055)
5. Ask forgiveness for your sin (40:055)
6. Glorify and praise your Lord night and day (40:055)
7. Implore God (40:060)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Observe nature/livestock as proofs of God (40:079-81)
2. Reject all intercessors other than God (40:018)
3. Study history to see the destruction of past disbelieving nations (40:021)

Ritual Requirements:

1. Night and Day glorification/praise (Likely referring to Salah/Prayer times) (40:055)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 9, it says 'Whomever You protect from falling in sin... has attained mercy.' Do you feel you have been fully protected from sin today? If not, what is your hope?
2. The 'Believer' in Pharaoh's court had to hide his faith (v28). Do you think God wants us to relate to Him out of fear or out of the confidence of being a beloved child?
3. Verse 18 says transgressors will have no intercessor. Since the Bible says 'all have sinned' (Romans 3:23), how can anyone be saved without an intercessor?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Interceding Believer – This man risked his life to speak truth and save his people from judgment. He is a shadow of Christ, the true 'Faithful Witness' who didn't just speak, but died to save His people. [Hebrews 7:25 - 'Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.']}
2. The Desire for Protection from Sin – The angels pray for believers to be kept from sin. In the Gospel, we are not just protected from future sin, but cleansed from past sin by the blood of Jesus. [1 John 1:7 - 'The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.']}

Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty of Acceptance [Severe] – The believer is told God is 'strict in enforcing retribution' (v3) and that salvation depends on God protecting them from sin (v9). This creates a psychological burden of never knowing if one has done enough or if God has decreed them to be 'sent astray' (v33).
2. Performance Anxiety [Moderate] – Verse 40 explicitly ties Paradise to 'working righteousness.' The believer carries the weight of their own salvation, knowing that a failure in works could result in the 'worst retribution' (v46).
3. Isolation [Severe] – The text emphasizes that on Judgment Day, 'transgressors will have no friend nor an intercessor' (v18). This strips the believer of the comfort of a Mediator, leaving them to face the Holy God alone based on their own record.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation (Wahyl) confirmed by Empirical Observation (Ayat/Signs)

Verification Method: Adherents are instructed to 'roam the earth' (40:021, 40:082) to see archaeological evidence of destroyed nations and to observe biological design (embryology, livestock) as proof of divinity.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the self-attesting Word of God and the historical resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15). This text relies heavily on the 'argument from destruction' (might makes right/truth) and natural theology as primary proofs.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 7th Century AD (Original Arabic); 1978 (Khalifa Translation)

Authorship: Attributed to Muhammad (Divine Revelation); Translated by Rashad Khalifa.

Textual Issues: Rashad Khalifa's translation is controversial even within Islam due to his 'Quranism' (rejection of Hadith) and his 'Code 19' theory. The opening letters 'H. M.' (Ha Mim) are part of the 'Muqatta'at' (mysterious letters) which Khalifa used for numerological calculations.