

SURAH 42 (ASH-SHURA)

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

OVERVIEW

Surah 42, titled 'Ash-Shura' (The Consultation), presents a comprehensive theological argument for the continuity of God's message through all prophets, including Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. The text emphasizes that division in religion is a result of human jealousy, not divine intent. A central theme is the absolute sovereignty of God (Allah), who controls the heavens, the earth, and the specific destiny of individuals—guiding whom He wills and leaving astray whom He wills. The text outlines a soteriology based on a combination of faith and 'leading a righteous life,' specifically mentioning the observance of Contact Prayers (Salat), charity, and consultation among believers. It presents a strict monotheism that rejects any 'partners' or 'other lords' beside God. Notably, this specific translation by Rashad Khalifa contains a parenthetical insertion in verse 24 ('Rashad'), reflecting the translator's specific claim to messengership, distinct from mainstream Islamic tradition. The text concludes by defining the method of revelation—inspiration or behind a barrier—and asserting that the Quran is a beacon of light for those God chooses to guide.

KEY FIGURES

GOD (Allah), Muhammad (The recipient of the revelation), Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Rashad (Inserted by translator in v. 24)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONTINUITY OF PROPHETIC RELIGION

Assertion: God decreed the same religion for Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad; division is human error.

"He decreed for you the same religion decreed for Noah... and what we decreed for Abraham, Moses, and Jesus: 'You shall uphold this one religion, and do not divide it.' (42:13)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text asserts a uniform 'religion' (Din) across history, implying that Jesus preached the exact same message of law and submission as Moses and Muhammad. Evangelical theology teaches progressive revelation culminating in the unique New Covenant in Christ's blood (Luke 22:20, Hebrews 8:6-13). While Evangelicals acknowledge the continuity of God's plan, they reject the idea that Jesus was merely a law-bringer like Moses; He is the fulfillment of the Law (Matthew 5:17) and the Mediator of a better covenant.

2. RETRIBUTIVE CAUSALITY OF SUFFERING

Assertion: Any misfortune or suffering experienced by a person is a direct result of their own sins.

"Anything bad that happens to you is a consequence of your own deeds, and He overlooks many. (42:30)"

Evangelical Comparison: This doctrine places a heavy burden of causality on the believer. If one suffers, they have sinned. Evangelicalism, while acknowledging discipline for sin (Hebrews 12:6), explicitly refutes the idea that all suffering is punitive. Jesus corrected this view in John 9:1-3 regarding the man born blind, stating 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' and in Luke 13:1-5 regarding the Tower of Siloam. The biblical view allows for innocent suffering (Job, Jesus) and suffering for the sake of righteousness (1 Peter 3:14).

3. SOVEREIGN DETERMINISM

Assertion: God actively leads people astray or guides them based on His will; humans have no advocate if God sends them astray.

"Whomever GOD sends astray will never find any other lord... Whomever GOD sends astray can never be guided. (42:44, 46)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text presents a God who 'redeems into His mercy whomever He wills' (42:8) but also actively sends people astray with no hope of redemption (42:44). While Calvinist streams of Evangelicalism hold to predestination, the key difference lies in the Mediator. In this text, 'you are not their advocate' (42:6) and there is 'no advocate' (42:47). In the Gospel, Jesus Christ is the Advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1) and the propitiation for sins, offering a bridge that this text explicitly denies.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the nature of God and the means of salvation. This text presents a Unitarian God (Tawhid) who demands submission and righteous works for potential mercy, explicitly rejecting 'other lords' (which includes the Christian understanding of Jesus as Lord). Evangelicalism posits a Trinitarian God who provides salvation as a free gift through the finished work of Christ. The text's insistence that Jesus is merely one of a line of prophets (42:13) destroys the core of the Gospel: the Incarnation and Atonement.

Shared Values:

Monotheism (One Creator); Sovereignty of God; Reality of Judgment Day/Hell; Importance of Charity and Prayer; Forgiveness is a virtue

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Salvation is contingent on 'believing AND leading a righteous life' (42:26) and avoiding gross sins.
2. [Critical] Christology (Uniqueness of Christ) – Jesus is listed as a peer to Noah, Abraham, and Moses (42:13), denying His divinity and unique Sonship.
3. [Critical] Theology Proper (Trinity) – Strict monotheism that views associating others with God as the ultimate sin (42:6, 9).
4. [Major] Sola Gratia (Grace Alone) – Suffering is a penalty for sin (42:30), and mercy is dispensed arbitrarily by will (42:8), not guaranteed by covenant promise in Christ.

Semantic Warnings:

"Believer"

In Text: One who accepts the Quran, submits to Allah, and performs righteous works.

Evangelical: One who trusts solely in the finished work of Christ for salvation (Acts 16:31).

Example: *In 42:26, 'those who believe' are paired with 'lead a righteous life' as a condition for response from God.*

"Inspiration"

In Text: Direct dictation or communication from behind a barrier (42:51).

Evangelical: God-breathed scripture through human authors using their personalities (2 Timothy 3:16).

Example: *The text claims 'We thus reveal to you an Arabic Quran' (42:7), implying direct verbal descent.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Entry into the 'gardens of Paradise' (42:22) and avoidance of the 'painful retribution' (42:21).

How Attained: By God's will (42:8) combined with belief and leading a righteous life (42:26).

Basis of Assurance: There is no absolute assurance; one trusts in God but knows that God 'guides to Himself only those who totally submit' (42:13).

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly opposes Sola Fide. Verse 42:26 explicitly links God's response to 'those who believe and lead a righteous life.' Romans 4:5 states 'to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.'

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Uphold the one religion and do not divide it (42:13)
2. Proclaim belief in all scriptures sent down by God (42:15)
3. Judge equitably among people (42:15)
4. Take care of one's own relatives (42:23)
5. Observe the Contact Prayers (Salat) (42:38)
6. Give to charity from provisions (42:38)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept suffering as a consequence of personal sin (42:30)
2. Consult with the community on affairs (Shura) (42:38)
3. Stand up for rights when injustice befalls (42:39)
4. Forgive when angered (42:37)

Ritual Requirements:

1. Contact Prayers (Salat) (42:38)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 30, it says anything bad that happens is a consequence of my own deeds. How do you process that when you see innocent children suffering or when you face tragedy?
2. Verse 13 says Jesus and Moses had the same religion. Since the Torah requires animal sacrifice and Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice, how does the Quran explain the end of sacrifices?
3. Verse 47 says there is no advocate for us on the Day of Judgment. How does that make you feel about facing a holy God with your specific record of deeds?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Advocate (Negative) – The text highlights the terrifying absence of an advocate. The Gospel answers this specific fear by providing Jesus as the Advocate. [1 John 2:1 'We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.']}
2. Rain after Despair – Just as God sends physical rain when all hope is lost, He sent the Living Water (Jesus) when we were dead in trespasses. [John 7:37-38 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.']}

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The believer must constantly 'lead a righteous life' to ensure God's response (42:26). There is no rest in a finished work.
2. Isolation [Severe] – The text removes any mediator or advocate (42:6, 47). The believer stands alone before the Almighty.
3. Shame/Guilt [Moderate] – Verse 30 attributes all misfortune to personal sin. This creates a cycle of shame where any sickness or failure is interpreted as divine punishment for hidden faults.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Divine Revelation (The Quran) and Natural Theology (Signs in creation).

Verification Method: Observation of the natural world (ships, rain) as 'proofs' (42:29, 32) and the internal consistency of the message.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the historical resurrection of Christ and the witness of the Holy Spirit through the closed canon of Scripture (1 Corinthians 15, 2 Timothy 3:16). This text relies on the self-referential claim of the Quran's inspiration.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 1978 (Translation date); Original Arabic text approx. 600-632 AD.

Authorship: Traditional: Muhammad (via Gabriel). Critical: Rashad Khalifa (Translator/Redactor of this specific version).

Textual Issues: Verse 42:24 in this version contains the interpolation '(Rashad)', which is absent in the Arabic text and all standard translations. This is a sectarian modification to legitimize Khalifa's claim to prophethood.