

SURAH 43

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

OVERVIEW

Surah 43 (Az-Zukhruf) presents a vigorous polemic against the idolatrous practices of the Meccans—specifically the attribution of angels as 'daughters' of God—and the Christian claim of Jesus's divinity. The text asserts the Quran's authority as an Arabic revelation derived from a 'master record' with God. It employs a cyclical narrative structure, citing the rejection of previous prophets (Moses by Pharaoh, Jesus by his people) to comfort the contemporary messenger and warn the audience of inevitable retribution. Central to the text is the redefinition of Jesus (the Son of Mary) not as a divine figure, but as a 'servant' and a 'marker for the end of the world,' explicitly stripping him of the divine attributes claimed by Christianity. The text concludes with a strong soteriological claim that Paradise is inherited through human works, standing in direct contrast to the evangelical doctrine of grace.

KEY FIGURES

The Most Gracious (God), Abraham, Moses, Pharaoh, Jesus (Son of Mary), Maalek (Guardian of Hell)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. STRICT UNITARIAN MONOTHEISM (TAWHID)

Assertion: God has no partners, children, or distinct persons; attributing such is a lie against the Most Gracious.

"Has He chosen from among His creations daughters for Himself... They even assigned for Him a share from His own creation! (43:15-16)"

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelicalism affirms one God, it holds that God exists eternally in three persons (Trinity). This text explicitly attacks the concept of God having 'offspring' or 'shares' (parts/persons) derived from creation. It frames the Sonship of Christ not as an eternal relational reality, but as a biological impossibility or a pagan attribution of 'daughters' and 'sons' to the Creator.

2. ISA (JESUS) AS SERVANT-PROPHET

Assertion: Jesus was a created human servant, a sign for Israel, and a preacher of strict monotheism, not God.

"He was no more than a servant whom we blessed... (43:59); GOD is my Lord and your Lord, you shall worship Him alone. (43:64)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical Christology centers on Jesus as the God-Man (Hypostatic Union). This text explicitly demotes Jesus to 'no more than a servant' (43:59). While it acknowledges his miracles and role as a 'marker' (43:61), it strips Him of His salvific office and divine nature, presenting His message as identical to Moses's law rather than the inauguration of the New Covenant.

3. SALVATION BY WORKS

Assertion: Entrance into Paradise is a payment or inheritance earned specifically by human actions.

"Such is the Paradise that you inherit, in return for your works. (43:72)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text explicitly links final salvation to human effort: 'in return for your works' (43:72). Evangelical theology teaches that works are the fruit of salvation, not the root or payment for it (Romans 4:4-5). This doctrine places the burden of attaining eternal life on the adherent's performance rather than Christ's finished work.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental incompatibility lies in the identity of God and the method of salvation. Surah 43 explicitly denies the possibility of God having a son (v81) and frames Jesus's mission as identical to Moses's—a call to servitude and law-keeping (v63-64). Evangelicalism posits that the specific mission of Jesus

was to be the ransom for many (Mark 10:45), a concept absent here. Furthermore, the text establishes a 'works-righteousness' economy (v72) that the New Testament explicitly labels as insufficient for justification (Galatians 2:16).

Shared Values:

Monotheism (existence of one Creator); Rejection of idolatry; Reality of Satan/Devil; Certainty of Judgment Day; Existence of Heaven and Hell; Reverence for Jesus (as a prophet)

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Theology Proper (Trinity) – Explicit denial of God having a son or partners; God is unipersonal.
2. [Critical] Christology – Jesus is defined as a created servant (43:59), not the Creator/Sustainer.
3. [Critical] Sola Fide – Salvation is explicitly 'in return for your works' (43:72).

Semantic Warnings:

"Son of God"

In Text: A biological offspring or a partner assigned to God (viewed as blasphemy).

Evangelical: Ontological title denoting the same essence as the Father, not biological procreation.

Example: *Quran 43:81 frames 'son' as something God *could* have but doesn't; John 1:18 reveals the Son as the eternal revealer of the Father.*

"Righteous"

In Text: Those who submit to the message and perform good works.

Evangelical: Those declared righteous (justified) through faith in Christ (Romans 3:22).

Example: *In 43:69-72, righteousness is the prerequisite for reward; in Romans 4:5, God justifies the ungodly who believe.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Inheriting Paradise, avoiding the eternal retribution of Gehenna.

How Attained: By believing in revelations, submitting (being Muslim), and performing works (43:69-72).

Basis of Assurance: There is no guaranteed assurance mentioned other than the promise that God will not wrong them; assurance is tied to the quality of one's submission.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly contradicts Sola Fide. Verse 72 ('in return for your works') establishes a transactional model of salvation, whereas Ephesians 2:8-9 establishes a grace-based model.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Steadfastly preach what is revealed (43:43)
2. Say 'Glory be to the One who subdued this for us' when riding transport (43:13)
3. Disregard the disbelievers and say 'Peace' (43:89)
4. Worship God alone (43:64)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Reject ancestral traditions if they contradict the Quran (43:22-24)
2. Recognize Jesus only as a servant and marker of the hour (43:59-61)
3. Fear the sudden onset of the Day of Judgment (43:66)

Ritual Requirements:

1. Specific prayer of gratitude during travel/transport (43:13-14)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 61, Jesus is called a 'marker for knowing the end of the world.' Why is Jesus given this special cosmic role distinct from other prophets like Moses or Abraham?
2. Verse 72 says Paradise is inherited 'in return for your works.' How do you know when your works are sufficient to purchase such a great inheritance?
3. Verse 4 says the Quran is from the 'original master' record. If the Torah and Gospel also came from God, why would the 'master record' contradict itself regarding Jesus's death and deity?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Master Record (Umm al-Kitab) – The Quran speaks of an eternal Word/Book with God. The Bible identifies this eternal Word not as a book, but as a Person—Jesus. [John 1:1, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.']
2. Intercession by Truth – The text allows for intercession if it aligns with 'the truth.' Jesus said 'I am the Truth' and lives to intercede. [Hebrews 7:25, John 14:6]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety / Works-Righteousness [Severe] – The believer is told Paradise is a payment for works (43:72). This creates a perpetual burden to perform enough to 'earn' the inheritance, with no concept of rest in a finished work.
2. Fear of Deception [Moderate] – Verse 36-37 warns that God appoints devils as companions to those who disregard the message, and these devils 'make them believe that they are guided.' This creates a psychological fear: 'Am I truly guided, or am I being deceived by a devil appointed by God?'

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct Revelation (Wah'y) confirmed by signs in nature (rain, creation).

Verification Method: Observation of the natural world (43:10-12) and historical patterns of retribution against rejectors (43:8, 43:25).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the historical, falsifiable testimony of the Resurrection and the prophetic witness of Scripture (1 Corinthians 15:3-8), whereas this text relies on the self-referential authority of the Quran and general natural theology.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

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

Authorship: Attributed to Muhammad (via Gabriel); Khalifa translation (1978).

Textual Issues: Khalifa's translation is known for its 'Quran Alone' bias. In v61, he translates 'marker for knowing the end,' while other translations suggest 'knowledge of the hour.'