

SURAH 45 (AL-JATHIYAH)

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

OVERVIEW

Surah 45, titled 'The Kneeling' (Al-Jathiyah), presents a rigorous argument for monotheism based on two primary witnesses: the 'Book of Nature' (creation, biological life, weather patterns) and the 'Book of Revelation' (the Quran). The text opens by challenging the reader to observe the empirical proofs of God's existence in the heavens and earth. It moves quickly to a polemic against those who mock these signs or persist in arrogance. A distinctive feature of Rashad Khalifa's translation is found in verse 6, where he translates the Arabic word for 'narrative' or 'speech' specifically as 'Hadith,' utilizing this verse to support his theological rejection of extra-Quranic traditions (Sunnah). The text outlines a strict soteriology of 'earnings,' where every soul is paid exactly what it has worked for, without injustice. It concludes with a terrifying depiction of the Day of Judgment, where every community kneels before its record, and those who forgot God in this life are forgotten by Him in the next. The central argument is that the universe has a moral purpose, and human beings are accountable agents whose eternal fate is determined by their response to God's signs and their accumulation of righteous deeds.

KEY FIGURES

GOD (Allah), The Messenger (addressed as 'you'), The Children of Israel, The Materialists/Atheists (Dahriyyah), The Believers

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. SOTERIOLOGY OF EARNINGS

Assertion: Salvation and judgment are strictly based on what a soul has 'earned' through works, whether good or evil.

"GOD created the heavens and the earth... in order to pay each soul for whatever it earned, without the least injustice. (Quran 45:22)"

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelicalism teaches that the 'wages' of sin is death but the 'gift' of God is eternal life (Romans 6:23), this text asserts that God pays each soul exactly what it earned. In the Gospel, Christ earns righteousness which is imputed to the believer; in this text, the believer must earn their own standing. The concept of 'payment' (v. 22) implies a transactional relationship with the Divine, whereas the Gospel presents a covenantal relationship based on the finished work of a substitute.

2. EXCLUSIVE SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY (QURANISM)

Assertion: The Quran is the only valid source of religious guidance, explicitly rejecting other 'Hadith'.

"In which Hadith other than GOD and His revelations do they believe? (Quran 45:6)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicalism holds to Sola Scriptura, believing the 66 books of the Bible are the final authority. Khalifa's translation emphasizes a parallel 'Sola Quran' position, rejecting Islamic traditions (Hadith) and previous scriptures (which are viewed as superseded or corrupted). While the structure of authority is similar (a single book), the rejection of the Biblical witness creates a fundamental epistemological gap.

3. GENERAL REVELATION

Assertion: The natural world provides sufficient, objective proof of God's existence and power.

"The heavens and the earth are full of proofs for the believers. (Quran 45:3)"

Evangelical Comparison: Both traditions affirm that creation testifies to the Creator. Romans 1:20 states that God's invisible qualities are clearly seen from what has been made. Surah 45:3-5 echoes this precisely, citing biological life, weather, and astronomy as 'proofs.' The divergence occurs in the conclusion: the Bible says this knowledge condemns man for suppressing truth, while the Quran implies this knowledge should lead man to successful submission (Islam).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mechanism of salvation. Surah 45:22 explicitly states God pays each soul for what it 'earned.' This is the antithesis of the Gospel, where salvation is a gift (Ephesians 2:8-9) precisely because human earnings are insufficient (Isaiah 64:6). Furthermore, the text's Christology is non-existent; Jesus is not mentioned, and the role of Savior is replaced by the role of the Lawgiver and Judge. The text assumes humanity has the capacity to obey and earn mercy, denying the doctrine of Original Sin/Total Depravity.

Shared Values:

Monotheism; Intelligent Design/Creationism; Reality of Judgment Day; Existence of Hell; Moral accountability

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Fide – Salvation is contingent on 'earnings' and 'working righteousness' (v. 22, 30).
- 2. [Critical] Christology (Atonement) – The text implies each person bears their own burden and is paid for their own deeds, negating substitutionary atonement.
- 3. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Claims the Quran is the final, corrective revelation, superseding the Bible.

Semantic Warnings:

"Mercy"

In Text: A reward granted to those who believe and work righteousness (v. 30).
Evangelical: God not giving us the punishment we deserve, often granted to the ungodly who believe (Romans 4:5).
Example: *In v. 30, mercy is the result of righteousness. In Titus 3:5, mercy is the cause of salvation, 'not by works of righteousness which we have done.'*

"Hadith"

In Text: In Khalifa's translation (v. 6), this refers to any religious narrative outside the Quran, used negatively.
Evangelical: N/A (Islamic term), but functionally comparable to 'Tradition of the Elders' (Mark 7) which Jesus critiqued.
Example: *Khalifa uses 'Hadith' to invalidate Islamic oral tradition; Evangelicals might misinterpret this as a rejection of all history, but it is a specific sectarian polemic.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Admission into God's mercy (v. 30) and avoidance of the 'shameful retribution' (v. 9).
How Attained: By believing in the revelations and 'working righteousness' (earning it).
Basis of Assurance: None provided; assurance is contingent on the final reading of the record.
Comparison to Sola Fide: Diametrically opposed. Surah 45:22 ('pay each soul for whatever it earned') vs. Romans 4:4 ('Now to the one who works, his wage is not counted as a gift but as his due').

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Follow the revelations/laws given to the messenger (v. 18)
- 2. Forgive those who do not expect the days of God (v. 14)
- 3. Do not follow the wishes of those who do not know (v. 18)

Implicit Obligations:

- 1. Observe nature to find proofs of God (v. 3-5)
- 2. Avoid arrogance regarding scripture (v. 8)
- 3. Prepare for the Day of Judgment by earning righteousness (v. 22)

Ritual Requirements:

- 1. Recitation of revelations (implied in v. 6, 8)

2. Kneeling (implied by the Surah title and v. 28 as a posture of judgment/submission)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. Verse 22 says God pays each soul for exactly what it earned. If God demands perfection, how confident are you that your 'earnings' are sufficient?
2. Verse 29 mentions a record that 'utters the truth about you.' If that record contains every secret thought and deed, would you be comfortable having it read aloud?
3. Verse 14 commands forgiveness. How do you reconcile your command to forgive with the description of God in verse 34, who says 'Today we forget you' to those who failed?
4. In verse 6, the text asks 'In which Hadith other than God... do they believe?' Do you believe we need more than just the Quran to understand God's will?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Record of Deeds – The Bible also speaks of books being opened (Rev 20:12). The Gospel provides a way to have our debt in that record 'cancelled' and nailed to the cross. [Colossians 2:14 ('having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness... nailing it to the cross')]
2. The Kneeling – The Bible affirms that every knee will bow. The difference is bowing in terror at judgment vs. bowing in worship of the Savior. [Philippians 2:10-11 ('at the name of Jesus every knee should bow')]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety / Works-Righteousness [Severe] – The believer is under the constant pressure that their eternal fate depends on their 'earnings' (v. 22). There is no concept of 'it is finished'; the work is never done until death.
2. Fear of Abandonment [Moderate] – Verse 34 states God will 'forget' people on Judgment Day. This creates a theological framework where God's love is conditional and revocable, leading to deep insecurity.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Empirical Observation (Signs in nature) combined with Special Revelation (The Book).

Verification Method: Rational reflection on the natural world (v. 5 'people who understand') and the internal consistency of the revelation.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the testimony of the Holy Spirit and the historical resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15). This text relies on the self-evident nature of creation and the text's own assertion of truth, rejecting the historical testimony of the Cross.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 1978 (Translation date). Original Arabic text approx. 610-632 AD.

Authorship: Rashad Khalifa (Translator). Traditional attribution: Muhammad.

Textual Issues: Khalifa's translation of verse 6 is highly interpretive. The Arabic word 'hadith' means 'speech' or 'narrative.' By capitalizing it and framing it as a negative term, Khalifa imposes his 'Quran Only' theology onto the text, attacking the traditional Islamic corpus of Hadith.