

SURAH 5 (AL-MA'IDAH)

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

OVERVIEW

Surah 5, Al-Ma'idadh (The Table), is traditionally considered one of the last chapters revealed, serving as a concluding legislative and theological statement. It focuses heavily on the concept of 'covenants' between God and humanity, specifically addressing the failures of the Children of Israel and the Christians to uphold their respective agreements. The text outlines specific dietary laws (halal), rules for ablution (wudu), and penalties for crimes like theft and rebellion. Theologically, it presents a rigorous defense of Unitarian Monotheism (Tawhid), explicitly condemning the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus as 'paganism' and blasphemy. It reinterprets the narrative of Jesus, presenting him as a mortal messenger who disavows worship of himself and his mother. The text asserts the Quran's authority to supersede and correct the Torah and the Gospel, declaring the religion of 'Submission' (Islam) as completed and perfected.

KEY FIGURES

GOD (Allah), The Messenger (Muhammad), Jesus, son of Mary (Isa), Moses (Musa), Mary (Maryam), The Disciples of Jesus, Adam's two sons (Cain and Abel)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. STRICT UNITARIANISM (TAWHID)

Assertion: God is one, indivisible, and has no partners; the Trinity is a blasphemous fabrication.

"Pagans indeed are those who say that GOD is a third of a trinity. There is no god except the one god. (5:73)"

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelicalism holds to Deuteronomy 6:4 ('The Lord is One'), it interprets this unity within a Trinitarian framework (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) as revealed in the New Testament (Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14). Surah 5 explicitly rejects this, framing the Trinity not as monotheistic complexity but as polytheistic 'association' (shirk). The text misidentifies the Trinity as God, Jesus, and Mary (5:116), creating a strawman argument against a heresy (Mariolatry) rather than orthodox Trinitarianism, yet the rejection of Christ's deity is absolute.

2. CHRISTOLOGICAL SUBORDINATION

Assertion: Jesus is a created human messenger, not God; he ate food and was subject to God's will.

"The Messiah, son of Mary, is no more than a messenger... Both of them used to eat the food. (5:75)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical Christology asserts that Jesus is the eternal Word made flesh (John 1:1, 1:14), fully divine and fully human. Surah 5 argues that Jesus's biological needs (eating food) prove he cannot be God. The text strips Jesus of his atoning role, presenting him as a miracle-working prophet who points away from himself, contrasting sharply with Jesus's self-identification as the 'I AM' and the only way to the Father in the Gospels.

3. SUPERSESSION OF SCRIPTURE

Assertion: The Quran confirms truths in previous scriptures but supersedes them as the final authority.

"Then we revealed to you this scripture... confirming previous scriptures, and superseding them. (5:48)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicalism views the Bible (66 books) as the closed, sufficient canon of God's revelation (Revelation 22:18-19). Surah 5 acknowledges the Torah and Gospel contained 'guidance and light' (5:44, 5:46) but claims they have been corrupted or disregarded. The Quran claims the role of 'guardian' or 'corrector' over biblical texts, implying that where the Bible differs from the Quran, the Bible is corrupt.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The theological gap is unbridgeable without abandoning the core tenets of one faith. Surah 5 explicitly anathematizes the central Christian claim: that God became man to save sinners. By labeling the Trinity as 'paganism' (5:72-73) and denying the crucifixion's necessity (implied by the lack of atonement theology and 5:118's uncertainty), the text constructs a soteriology based on human effort and divine fiat rather than divine sacrifice. Evangelicalism posits that the Law reveals sin (Romans 3:20), while Surah 5 posits that the Law (Sharia) is the path to righteousness.

Shared Values:

Sanctity of life (5:32); Importance of justice and equity (5:8); Prohibition of idolatry; Charity to the poor; Reverence for God

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Theology Proper (Trinity) – Explicit denial of the Triune nature of God; labels Trinitarians as disbelievers/pagans.
2. [Critical] Christology (Deity of Christ) – Denies Jesus' divinity, claiming he is a created being who could be annihilated by God (5:17).
3. [Major] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Salvation is contingent on faith plus works (diet, ablution, charity) and God's arbitrary will.
4. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Asserts the Quran supersedes and corrects the Bible.

Semantic Warnings:

"Messiah (Al-Masih)"

In Text: A title for Jesus, meaning a purified messenger/prophet, explicitly NOT divine.

Evangelical: The Anointed One, the Son of the Living God, King of Kings, fully divine Savior.

Example: In 5:75, 'The Messiah' is defined as 'no more than a messenger,' whereas in Matthew 16:16, Peter identifies the Messiah as 'the Son of the living God.'

"Believers"

In Text: Those who accept the Quran, perform Salat, and reject the Trinity.

Evangelical: Those who trust in the finished work of Christ alone for salvation.

Example: 5:57 warns against befriending those who mock the religion, distinguishing 'believers' from People of the Book.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Forgiveness of sins and admission into 'gardens with flowing streams' (Paradise).

How Attained: By believing, leading a righteous life, observing commandments, and God's will (5:9, 5:69).

Basis of Assurance: There is no absolute assurance; it depends on God's will ('He forgives whomever He wills' 5:18, 5:40).

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly opposes Sola Fide. 5:9 links forgiveness to 'believe AND lead a righteous life.' 5:69 lists criteria including works. Evangelicalism teaches justification is a gift received by faith apart from works (Eph 2:8-9).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Fulfill covenants (5:1)
2. Observe strict dietary laws (no pork, blood, carrion) (5:3)
3. Perform ablution (washing face, arms, head, feet) before prayer (5:6)
4. Cut off the hands of thieves (5:38)
5. Do not take Jews and Christians as allies (5:51)
6. Fulfill oaths or pay atonement (feeding poor/fasting) (5:89)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept the Quran as the final judgment over Torah and Gospel

2. Reject the divinity of Christ to avoid Hell
3. Maintain ritual purity to approach God

Ritual Requirements:

1. Contact Prayers (Salat) (5:6, 5:12)
2. Obligatory Charity (Zakat) (5:12)
3. Hajj Pilgrimage restrictions (5:1-2)
4. Dry ablution (Tayammum) when water is scarce (5:6)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In 5:118, Jesus says to God, 'If You punish them, they are Your constituents.' Does this mean Jesus cannot intercede for his followers? How do you find peace knowing your specific judgment is uncertain?
2. Surah 5:47 commands Christians to judge by the Gospel. If the Gospel teaches Jesus is the Son of God, how can I obey this command without contradicting the Quran?
3. The text mentions in 5:27 that God accepts offerings only from the righteous. Since we all sin, how can we be sure our offerings are accepted?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Table (Al-Ma'idah) – The disciples asked for a sign/provision. Jesus provides the true bread from heaven. This points to the Last Supper/Eucharist where Jesus offers the New Covenant. [John 6:35 ('I am the bread of life'), Luke 22:20]
2. The Unblemished Sacrifice – Cain's offering was rejected; Abel's accepted. We are like Cain in our sin. We need a truly Righteous One to offer a sacrifice on our behalf. [Hebrews 11:4, 1 John 3:12, 2 Corinthians 5:21]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty of Salvation [Severe] – The believer is under the weight of 5:118 and 5:40. God punishes whom He wills and forgives whom He wills. There is no 'promise' of salvation based on a finished work, only a hope based on performance and divine prerogative.
2. Cognitive Dissonance [Moderate] – The text commands Christians to judge by the Gospel (5:47) but then contradicts the Gospel's core message. An inquirer reading the Gospel to obey 5:47 will find the Trinity and Atonement, creating a conflict with the Quran.
3. Ritual Legalism [Moderate] – The detailed requirements for washing (5:6) and diet (5:3) create a framework where spiritual standing is constantly threatened by biological functions (bathroom usage, touching women) or accidental dietary infractions.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation (The Quran) interpreted through the Messenger.

Verification Method: Adherents are told that the Quran explains things clearly and that previous scriptures confirm the coming of this message (though the text claims those scriptures are now concealed/distorted).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the historical resurrection of Christ and the consistent witness of the Prophetic/Apostolic writings (1 Cor 15, 2 Peter 1:19). Surah 5 relies on the self-attesting authority of the Quranic text and the assertion that previous scriptures were corrupted.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Medinan period (approx. 624-632 AD), towards the end of Muhammad's life.

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

Textual Issues: Khalifa's translation is unique; he translates 'Muslims' as 'Submitters' and 'Salat' as 'Contact Prayers.' He was a proponent of the 'Code 19' theory and rejected Hadith, which influences his translation choices to be more modern/rationalist.