

SURAH 52 (AT-TUR)

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

OVERVIEW

Surah 52 (At-Tur), in Rashad Khalifa's translation, opens with a series of divine oaths sworn by Mt. Sinai, the scripture, and the 'frequented Shrine' (Kaaba), establishing the certainty of a coming Judgment that cannot be averted. The text presents a stark dichotomy between the fate of disbelievers, who are 'herded into Gehenna' as a 'just requital' for their disbelief, and the righteous, who enjoy a paradise of physical delights including food, drink, and spouses. A distinct theological feature of this text is the explicit linkage of salvation to human effort: 'Eat and drink happily, in return for your works' (52:19). The latter half of the Surah shifts to a polemical defense of the Messenger. It challenges opponents with rhetorical questions regarding the origins of the universe ('Were they created from nothing?'), the nature of God (refuting the idea that God has daughters), and the source of the Messenger's authority. Notably, Khalifa's translation of verse 34 challenges opponents to produce a 'Hadith' like the Quran, a specific choice reflecting Khalifa's 'Quran Alone' theology which rejects traditional Islamic Hadith literature. The text concludes with commands to the Messenger to persevere and glorify God.

KEY FIGURES

God (The Lord), The Messenger (Addressed as 'You'), The Disbelievers (The opponents/critics), The Righteous (The believers), Servants (described as protected pearls)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. RETRIBUTIVE SOTERIOLOGY (SALVATION BY WORKS)

Assertion: Entry into paradise and enjoyment of its delights are a direct payment or return for good works performed.

"Eat and drink happily, in return for your works." (52:19); "Every person is paid for what he did." (52:21)"

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelical Christianity teaches that salvation is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9), this text explicitly frames salvation as a transaction: the believer works, and God pays ('requital', 'return', 'paid'). In the biblical framework, works are the fruit of salvation, not the root; here, they are the purchasing currency for 'gardens and bliss.'

2. TAHADDI (THE CHALLENGE OF INIMITABILITY)

Assertion: The divine origin of the text is proven by the inability of humans to produce a similar discourse.

"Let them produce a Hadith like this, if they are truthful." (52:34)"

Evangelical Comparison: The Bible does not claim its authority stems from a unique literary style that cannot be replicated. Instead, Jesus points to the sign of Jonah (Resurrection) as the ultimate proof (Matthew 12:39-40). This text relies on an aesthetic/literary epistemology where the inability to write a similar chapter proves the text's divinity.

3. STRICT UNITARIAN MONOTHEISM (TAWHID)

Assertion: God is absolutely one and far above having any partners or offspring.

"Do they have another god beside GOD? GOD be glorified, far above having partners." (52:43)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text's rhetorical question regarding 'partners' is a polemic against Polytheism, but in Islamic theology, it is also applied to the Christian Trinity. Evangelicalism holds that the Father, Son, and Spirit are one God (Matthew 28:19), whereas this text views any association with God as a violation of His glory.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mechanism of salvation and the nature of God. Surah 52 posits a 'just requital' system where heaven is a wage paid for works (52:19), whereas Evangelicalism posits a grace-based system where heaven is an inheritance given to adopted children through Christ (Galatians 4:4-7). Furthermore, the text's polemic against 'partners' (52:43) establishes a barrier to the Trinitarian understanding of God, rendering the Incarnation and Atonement impossible within its framework.

Shared Values:

Monotheism; Reality of Judgment Day; Existence of Heaven and Hell; Creation by God; Rejection of Atheism

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide / Sola Gratia – Salvation is explicitly described as a payment/return for works (52:19, 21).
2. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Claims authority as a new revelation superseding the Bible.
3. [Critical] Theology Proper (Trinity) – Denies God has partners, implicitly rejecting the Sonship of Christ.

Semantic Warnings:

"Hadith"

In Text: In this specific translation (Khalifa), 'Hadith' in verse 34 refers to the Quran itself as the only valid discourse/statement.

Evangelical: N/A (Islamic term). However, functionally similar to 'Scripture' or 'Tradition'.

Example: *Khalifa translates 52:34 as 'Let them produce a Hadith like this,' subtly arguing against the Islamic tradition of Hadith collections, implying the Quran is the only necessary 'Hadith'.*

"Righteous"

In Text: Those who performed specific works and avoided disbelief.

Evangelical: Those declared righteous (justified) by faith in Christ (Romans 3:21-22).

Example: *In 52:17, the righteous are those who earned their spot; in Romans, the righteous are those who received a gift.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Escape from the Fire (Gehenna) and entry into Gardens with physical pleasures.

How Attained: By works ('in return for your works') and belief.

Basis of Assurance: Based on the 'just requital' of God—if you do the work, God is obligated to pay.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Diametrically opposed. Surah 52:19 says 'in return for your works'; Ephesians 2:8 says 'not of works'.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Suffer the burning (addressed to disbelievers) (52:16)
2. Remind the people (52:29)
3. Say, 'Go on waiting; I will wait along with you' (52:31)
4. Disregard them until they meet the day (52:45)
5. Steadfastly persevere in carrying out your Lord's command (52:48)
6. Glorify and praise your Lord when you get up (52:48)
7. Glorify Him during the night and at dawn (52:49)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Believe in the divine origin of the scripture
2. Perform good works to earn paradise
3. Reject the idea that God has daughters or partners
4. Accept the Messenger as sane and truthful

Ritual Requirements:

1. Glorification/Prayer at specific times (Night, Dawn, Upon rising)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 19, it says paradise is 'in return for your works.' If salvation is a payment, how can you ever be sure you have 'earned' enough to afford the price of heaven?
2. Verse 21 says 'Every person is paid for what he did.' Does this worry you, considering that even our best deeds are often flawed?
3. The text asks in verse 35, 'Were they created from nothing?' This is a powerful argument for a Creator. Who do you believe that Creator is, and how can we know Him personally?
4. Verse 38 mentions a 'ladder' to listen to heaven. In the Bible, Jesus describes Himself as that ladder (John 1:51). Have you ever considered that the 'ladder' is a person, not a method?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Ladder (Access to Heaven) – The text mocks the idea of humans climbing up to God's secrets. The Gospel agrees: we cannot climb up. So God came down. Jesus is the Ladder (Jacob's Ladder) connecting earth and heaven. [John 1:51]
2. The Frequented Shrine – Humans have a longing for a holy meeting place (Shrine/Temple). Jesus identified His own body as the true Temple where God meets man, replacing physical shrines. [John 2:19-21]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety / Legalism [Severe] – The text emphasizes 'just requital' and payment for works. This creates a burden where the believer must constantly perform to ensure their 'account' has enough credit to purchase paradise. There is no concept of atonement covering failures.
2. Distance from God [Moderate] – God is depicted as the 'Exalted' judge who pays wages. The intimacy of Fatherhood is absent, replaced by the relationship of Master/Servant and Employer/Employee.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation (The Scripture) supported by Rational Deduction (Cosmological arguments).

Verification Method: Adherents are asked to observe the natural world (creation) and the literary quality of the text to verify its truth.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the testimony of the Spirit and the historical reality of the Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:14), rather than logical puzzles about creation ex nihilo or literary challenges.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Meccan Period (Early to Middle).

Authorship: Traditionally Muhammad (via Gabriel); Critical scholars view it as part of the early Quranic corpus.

Textual Issues: Khalifa's translation of 'Hadith' in verse 34 is a sectarian choice to support Quran-Only Islam, differing from standard translations like Yusuf Ali which use 'speech' or 'statement'.