

SURAH 55:1-78

FAITH: Islam | TEXT: Surah 55 (Ar-Rahman) | VOLUME: The Meaning of the Holy Quran | AUTHOR: Rashad Khalifa (Translator)

OVERVIEW

Surah 55, titled 'Ar-Rahman' (The Most Gracious), is unique in its rhythmic structure and the refrain repeated 31 times: 'Which of your Lord's marvels can you deny?' The text opens by attributing the teaching of the Quran and the creation of humanity directly to God's graciousness. It proceeds to catalogue the order of the cosmos (sun, moon, balance) and the bounty of the earth (fruits, grains) as evidence of God's authority. The text establishes a strict legal framework, warning against transgressing the balance or law. It addresses both humans and 'jinns' (created from fire), challenging them to escape God's judgment if they can—which they cannot. The latter half of the text presents a vivid dichotomy of the afterlife: a terrifying, physical hell for the guilty and lush, sensual gardens adorned with fruits, springs, and virgin companions for the righteous. Theologically, it posits salvation as a direct 'reward of goodness' (v. 60), establishing a merit-based soteriology rooted in gratitude and obedience to the law.

KEY FIGURES

The Most Gracious (Allah), Humans, Jinns, The Guilty (Sinners), The Righteous (Reverent ones)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. MERIT-BASED RETRIBUTION

Assertion: Salvation is a direct payment or reward for good behavior.

"Is the reward of goodness anything but goodness?" (Quran 55:60)"

Evangelical Comparison: This doctrine represents the fundamental antithesis of the Evangelical understanding of grace. In this text, the rhetorical question 'Is the reward of goodness anything but goodness?' implies a transactional relationship with the Divine: Man inputs obedience, God outputs paradise. Evangelical theology asserts that human 'goodness' is insufficient (Isaiah 64:6) and that the reward for sin is death (Romans 6:23), making salvation a gift of grace, not a reward for works (Ephesians 2:8-9).

2. DUAL CREATION (JINN AND MANKIND)

Assertion: God created two distinct sentient species with moral accountability: humans from clay and jinns from fire.

"He created the human from aged clay... And created the jinns from blazing fire." (Quran 55:14-15)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text asserts the existence of Jinns as a separate order of beings created from fire who, like humans, are subject to judgment and can enter Paradise (v. 46, 56). Biblical theology recognizes angels and fallen angels (demons), but does not present a third category of semi-corporeal beings who procreate, die, and face a soteriological judgment parallel to humanity. The Bible focuses exclusively on the redemption of the Adamic race.

3. SENSUAL ESCHATOLOGY

Assertion: Paradise consists of physical luxury, including food, textiles, and sexual companions.

"While relaxing on furnishings lined with satin... In them are beautiful mates... No human ever touched them, nor a jinn." (Quran 55:54-56, 74)"

Evangelical Comparison: The Quranic depiction of heaven in Surah 55 is explicitly materialistic and sensual, focusing on 'wells to be pumped,' 'dates and pomegranates,' and virgin mates ('houris') reserved for the pleasure of the faithful. Evangelical eschatology, while affirming a physical resurrection, centers the joy of heaven on the beatific vision and communion with the Triune God (Revelation 21:3), explicitly rejecting the continuation of marriage or sexual exclusivity in the resurrection (Matthew 22:30).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mechanism of salvation and the nature of God's relationship to humanity. Surah 55 presents Allah as a benefactor and judge who demands repayment in the form of gratitude and obedience ('Is the reward of goodness anything but goodness?'). There is no mediator, no atonement, and no concept of original sin requiring a savior. Evangelicalism posits that the gap between God and man is unbridgeable by human 'goodness' and requires the finished work of Christ. Furthermore, the text's eschatology is hedonistic, whereas Biblical eschatology is Christocentric.

Shared Values:

Monotheism (One Creator); Intelligent Design of the Cosmos; Moral Accountability/Judgment Day; Existence of Heaven and Hell

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Fide – Explicitly links eternal reward to human 'goodness' (v. 60).
- 2. [Critical] Christology – Jesus is absent; the 'Teacher' is Allah, and salvation is through law/creation acknowledgment, rendering Christ's sacrifice unnecessary.
- 3. [Major] Theology Proper (Anthropology) – Introduction of Jinns as a parallel moral species contradicts the biblical narrative of redemption focused on the seed of Adam.
- 4. [Major] Theology Proper (Nature of God/Heaven) – Heaven is depicted as a place of carnal satisfaction rather than spiritual communion with a Holy God.

Semantic Warnings:

<p>"Grace (Ar-Rahman)"</p> <p>In Text: God's provision of creation, sustenance, and the Quranic law.</p> <p>Evangelical: Unmerited favor expressed primarily through the forgiveness of sins via Christ's sacrifice (Ephesians 1:7).</p> <p>Example: <i>In Surah 55, God is 'Gracious' because He gave fruits and sun; in the Bible, God is 'Gracious' because He gave His Son to die for enemies.</i></p>	<p>"Justice"</p> <p>In Text: Adherence to the balance/law established in creation.</p> <p>Evangelical: God's holy standard which demands punishment for sin, satisfied only by the cross (Romans 3:25-26).</p> <p>Example: <i>Justice in v. 9 is about not cheating the balance; Biblical justice involves the propitiation of divine wrath.</i></p>
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SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Escape from Gehenna (Hell) and entry into Gardens (Paradise) with physical delights.

How Attained: By not denying God's signs, establishing justice, and performing 'goodness' (v. 60).

Basis of Assurance: There is no assurance in the text; judgment is based on a future weighing of deeds/appearance (v. 41).

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text asks 'Is the reward of goodness anything but goodness?' (Works-Reward). The Bible says 'The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life' (Grace-Gift) - Romans 6:23.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. You shall not transgress the law (v. 8)
- 2. You shall establish justice (v. 9)
- 3. Do not violate the law (v. 9)
- 4. Do not deny the Lord's marvels (Refrain)

Implicit Obligations:

- 1. Acknowledge God's sovereignty in nature
- 2. Fear the judgment day
- 3. Maintain ritual purity (implied by the context of 'reverence')

Ritual Requirements:

1. Prostration (alluded to in v. 6 'The stars and the trees prostrate')

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text asks 31 times, 'Which of your Lord's marvels can you deny?' Do you feel you have ever denied God's marvels by ignoring Him or sinning?
2. Verse 60 asks, 'Is the reward of goodness anything but goodness?' If that is true, what is the reward for the badness we have all done?
3. In verse 41, it says the guilty are recognized by their looks. How can we be sure we won't look guilty on that day?
4. The text describes a barrier between two seas that don't mix. Do you feel there is a barrier between God's holiness and our imperfections?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Barrier (Barzakh) – Just as there is a barrier between fresh and salt water, there is a barrier between Holy God and sinful man (Isaiah 59:2). We cannot cross it. Jesus is the only one who crossed the barrier to bring us to God. [Ephesians 2:14 ('For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility')]
2. The Teacher – The text says God's first act of grace was teaching. The Bible says God's ultimate act of grace was becoming the Word (Logos) to dwell among us. Jesus is the ultimate Teacher and the Lesson itself. [John 1:14, Hebrews 1:1-2]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety / Debt [Severe] – The relentless repetition of 'Which of your Lord's marvels can you deny?' creates a psychological state of infinite indebtedness. The believer can never sufficiently repay God for the sun, moon, and breath, leading to a fear that their gratitude is insufficient to secure the 'reward of goodness.'
2. Fear of Exposure [Moderate] – Verse 41 states the guilty are 'recognized by their looks.' This implies that one's internal state is visibly exposed without defense or advocate. There is no 'clothed in righteousness' protection; one stands naked in their own merit.
3. Paranormal Fear [Mild] – The constant association with Jinns (made of fire) creates a worldview populated by unseen, powerful, and potentially malevolent entities, often leading to superstition and fear of the occult.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Natural Theology (Observation) and Direct Revelation.

Verification Method: Adherents are asked to observe the physical world (sun, moon, trees, seas) as irrefutable proof of the text's claims.

Evangelical Contrast: While the Bible affirms general revelation (Psalm 19, Romans 1), it insists that saving knowledge comes only through the specific revelation of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2), not merely through observing cosmic order.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 7th Century AD (Traditional); 1978 (This Translation).

Authorship: Attributed to Muhammad (recitation); Translated by Rashad Khalifa.

Textual Issues: Rashad Khalifa, the translator, later claimed to be a messenger of the Covenant and used computer analysis of the Quran (Code 19) to reject two verses of the Quran (9:128-129) as false injections. While Surah 55 is standard, the translator's bias toward 'mathematical' precision is evident in his translation of 'perfectly calculated' (v. 5).