

SURAH 57

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

OVERVIEW

Surah 57, titled 'Al-Hadid' (The Iron), presents a rigorous theological argument for the absolute sovereignty of God (Allah), utilizing attributes of omniscience and omnipotence to compel submission. The text opens with a doxology asserting God's control over life, death, and creation, notably employing the terms 'Alpha and Omega' in this translation to describe the Divine nature. A central theme is the inextricable link between faith and financial sacrifice; the text repeatedly frames salvation as a transaction where believers 'loan' God righteousness through charity to receive a multiplied recompense. The narrative moves to eschatology, depicting a scene on Judgment Day where believers are guided by their own light, while hypocrites are separated by a barrier, unable to borrow light from the faithful. The text concludes with a historical survey of prophethood, acknowledging Noah, Abraham, and Jesus. While affirming Jesus and the Gospel (Injeel), it explicitly critiques the development of Christian monasticism ('hermitism') as an innovation not decreed by God. The Surah ends by admonishing the 'followers of previous scripture' (Jews and Christians) that they do not possess a monopoly on God's grace, which He bestows upon whom He wills—specifically those who accept the new Messenger.

KEY FIGURES

GOD (Allah), The Messenger (Muhammad), Jesus the son of Mary, Noah, Abraham

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. TRANSACTIONAL SOTERIOLOGY

Assertion: Salvation and forgiveness are secured by 'loaning' God righteousness through spending and striving.

"Who would like to loan GOD a loan of righteousness, to have it multiplied for him manifold... (Surah 57:11)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the debt of sin is paid by Christ (Colossians 2:14), and the believer contributes nothing to their justification. Surah 57 reverses this dynamic, presenting God as the borrower and the human as the lender. The text implies that God is indebted to the human who performs righteous acts (specifically charity), and salvation is the repayment of that loan. This establishes a works-righteousness paradigm where assurance is based on the sufficiency of the believer's 'loan' rather than the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice.

2. ABSOLUTE PREDESTINATION (QADAR)

Assertion: All events, calamities, and fortunes are recorded in a master record before creation.

"Anything that happens on earth, or to you, has already been recorded, even before the creation. (Surah 57:22)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text uses the pre-recording of all events to instruct believers how to manage their emotions—prohibiting grief over loss and pride over gain. While Evangelicalism affirms God's sovereignty (Romans 8:28), it maintains a tension with human agency and the reality of grief (Jesus wept). The Quranic view here presents a more deterministic framework intended to neutralize emotional response to worldly circumstances.

3. PROPHETIC SUCCESSION AND CORRECTION

Assertion: Jesus was a messenger given the Gospel, but his followers corrupted the faith with invented practices.

"We sent Jesus the son of Mary... But they invented hermitism which we never decreed for them. (Surah 57:27)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text affirms the historical Jesus but redefines His mission and authority. By claiming Christians 'invented' practices not decreed by God, the text undermines the authority of the Church and the New Testament witness. It positions Islam as the corrective restoration of the true message, denying the Evangelical tenet that Christ is the final Word of God (Hebrews 1:1-2).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mechanism of redemption. Surah 57 posits that human beings save themselves by believing in the Messenger and 'loaning' righteousness to God. There is no concept of substitutionary atonement; the 'iron' is for strength, not sacrifice. Evangelicalism posits that man is dead in sin and cannot loan God anything (Romans 11:35). Furthermore, the text's Christology reduces Jesus to a messenger in a chain, explicitly denying His unique Sonship and the necessity of His finished work, replacing it with a system of ongoing moral performance.

Shared Values:

Monotheism; Sovereignty of God; Reality of Judgment Day; Importance of Charity; Rejection of Materialism

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide – Salvation is contingent on a 'loan of righteousness' (works/charity).
2. [Critical] Christology – Jesus is reduced to a messenger; His followers are accused of invention.
3. [Major] Theology Proper – God is the author of all events (fatalism) rather than the Redeemer within history.
4. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Asserts new revelation is necessary to correct the 'hardened hearts' of previous scripture followers.

Semantic Warnings:

"Alpha and Omega"

In Text: Attributes of Allah (Al-Awwal, Al-Akhir) signifying His eternal nature.

Evangelical: Title of Jesus Christ in Revelation 22:13, signifying His divinity and equality with the Father.

Example: When a Christian hears 'Alpha and Omega' in v. 3, they think of Jesus; the text applies this title to Allah to the exclusion of Jesus.

"Believer"

In Text: One who accepts Allah AND His Messenger (Muhammad).

Evangelical: One who trusts in the finished work of Christ alone.

Example: The text asks 'Why should you not believe?' implying that rejecting Muhammad is rejecting God.

"Injeel (Gospel)"

In Text: A specific book given to Jesus, distinct from the Torah and Quran.

Evangelical: The 'Good News' of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection; later recorded in the four canonical accounts.

Example: The text implies the Injeel was a scripture given TO Jesus, whereas Christians view the Gospels as testimony ABOUT Jesus.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Forgiveness from the Lord, a Paradise as wide as heavens and earth, and 'Light' on the Day of Judgment.

How Attained: By believing in God and the Messenger, and 'loaning' God a loan of righteousness (charity/spending).

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is tied to the magnitude of one's 'loan' and the promise that God will not break His word to repay it.

Comparison to Sola Fide: In Surah 57:10-11, salvation is a reward for those who 'spend and strive.' In Romans 4:4-5, 'to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.' The two are mutually exclusive.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Believe in God and His messenger (v. 7)
2. Spend/Give charity from what God bestowed (v. 7, 10)
3. Do not grieve over what is missed (v. 23)

4. Do not be proud of what is bestowed (v. 23)

5. Race towards forgiveness (v. 21)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Muhammad as the authoritative messenger alongside God

2. Reject Christian monasticism or excessive asceticism

3. Acknowledge the Quran as the clarifier of previous scriptures

Ritual Requirements:

1. Infaq (Spending in the cause of God)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 11, it speaks of loaning God a loan of righteousness. If God is All-Rich (v. 24), why does He need a loan from us?
2. Verse 13 describes a wall separating mercy and retribution. How can you be sure which side of the wall you will be on?
3. The text mentions Jesus and the Injeel (v. 27). Have you ever read the Injeel to see what Jesus said about Himself?
4. Verse 3 calls God the Alpha and the Omega. Did you know that in the Injeel (Revelation 22:13), Jesus calls Himself by these exact titles?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Need for Light – The text acknowledges that on Judgment Day, we need a light that is not our own (hypocrites try to borrow it). Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world' (John 8:12). We don't generate the light; we receive it from Him. [John 8:12, 1 John 1:5-7]
2. The Loan to God – The text suggests a transaction where man gives to God. The Gospel reverses this: God gave to man because man was bankrupt. We couldn't pay the debt, so Jesus paid it. [Colossians 2:13-14]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Financial/Performative Anxiety [Moderate] – The believer is under constant pressure to 'spend' to prove their faith. The text links salvation directly to this financial 'loan,' creating anxiety that one has not given enough to secure the 'generous recompense.'
2. Uncertainty of Salvation [Severe] – The imagery of the wall dropping between people on Judgment Day (v. 13) creates a fear of being found a 'hypocrite' at the last moment. There is no assurance of 'It is finished,' only the hope that one's light will hold out.
3. Fatalistic Resignation [Moderate] – The command not to grieve because everything was pre-recorded (v. 22-23) can lead to emotional suppression and a denial of the reality of suffering, rather than finding comfort in God's empathy.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation through the Messenger (Muhammad) and observation of the natural world.

Verification Method: Adherents are asked to observe the natural world (rain, iron, life/death) as proofs of God's power, and to accept the text's claims about history and the unseen based on the Messenger's authority.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the historical resurrection of Christ and the closed canon of Scripture (1 Corinthians 15:14, 2 Timothy 3:16). This text relies on the self-attesting authority of the Quranic revelation and the assertion that previous scriptures are corrupted or insufficient.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Medinan period (post-Hijra), likely around the time of the conquest of Mecca or shortly before (indicated by 'spending before the victory' in v. 10).

Authorship: Attributed to Muhammad as the recipient of divine revelation.

Textual Issues: Khalifa's translation uses 'Alpha and Omega' (v. 3), a distinct Christianization of the Arabic 'Al-Awwal' (The First) and 'Al-Aakhir' (The Last). This choice obscures the Islamic rejection of Jesus's divinity by appropriating His titles for Allah.