

SURAH 65 (AL-TALAQ)

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

OVERVIEW

Surah 65, titled 'Al-Talaq' (The Divorce), is a Medinan chapter that serves primarily as a legal text regulating the dissolution of marriage. It provides specific procedural instructions for the 'iddah' (waiting period) required before a divorce is finalized, ensuring that women are not evicted or mistreated during this interim. The text addresses specific biological circumstances, such as pregnancy and menopause, to establish fair timelines. Beyond the legalities, the text is deeply theological; it asserts that strict adherence to these social laws is a manifestation of 'reverencing God' (Taqwa). It promises that God will provide an 'exit' from difficulties and unexpected provision for those who obey. The latter portion of the Surah shifts to a warning, citing historical communities that rebelled against God's laws and suffered severe retribution. It concludes with a soteriological claim that believing and working righteousness leads to paradise, and a cosmological assertion regarding God's creation of seven universes and earths.

KEY FIGURES

God (The Legislator and Provider), The Prophet (Addressed in v1), The Messenger (Reciter of revelations, v11), Divorcing Husbands, Divorced Women, Witnesses

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. SOTERIOLOGICAL LEGALISM

Assertion: Obedience to social/marital laws results in the remission of sins.

"Anyone who reverences GOD, He remits his sins, and rewards him generously. [065:005]"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the remission of sins is achieved solely through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, received by faith (Ephesians 1:7, Hebrews 9:22). This text, however, posits that 'reverencing God'—specifically in the context of obeying divorce statutes—causes God to remit sins. This establishes a transactional model of salvation where correct social behavior and legal adherence expiate spiritual debt, a concept alien to the biblical doctrine of justification by grace alone.

2. CONDITIONAL PROVISION

Assertion: Divine provision and relief from difficulty are contingent upon reverence and trust.

"Anyone who reverences GOD, He will create an exit for him. And will provide for him whence he never expected. [065:002-003]"

Evangelical Comparison: While the Bible teaches that God cares for His children (Matthew 6:31-33), this text frames provision as a direct result of 'reverencing God' within a legal framework. It implies a quid-pro-quo dynamic: if one executes the divorce procedure correctly (reverently), God guarantees an 'exit' and provision. Evangelicalism teaches that God's provision is rooted in His fatherly nature and covenant love, not merely as a reward for procedural obedience.

3. HEPTADIC COSMOLOGY

Assertion: God created seven universes and seven earths.

"GOD created seven universes and the same number of earths. [065:012]"

Evangelical Comparison: The Bible opens with 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth' (Genesis 1:1). While Paul mentions the 'third heaven' (2 Corinthians 12:2), there is no biblical teaching regarding 'seven universes' or 'seven earths.' This specific cosmological assertion is unique to Islamic theology (and some ANE cosmologies) and represents a divergence in the description of the created order.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mechanism of salvation and the nature of the law. In this text, the law is a ladder to righteousness; obeying divorce statutes 'remit sins' (v5). In Evangelicalism, the Law exposes sin (Romans 3:20) but cannot remove it. Furthermore, the text permits and regulates divorce as a standard social occurrence, whereas Jesus described divorce as a concession to 'hardness of heart' and not God's original design (Matthew 19:8). The text's claim of a new messenger to lead people 'from darkness to light' (v11) implicitly categorizes the pre-existing biblical revelation as 'darkness' or insufficient.

Shared Values:

Protection of the vulnerable (women/infants); God as Provider; God as Judge of sin; Importance of witnesses in legal matters

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide – Salvation/Remission of sins is contingent on 'reverencing God' (law-keeping) and 'working righteousness' (v5, v11).
2. [Critical] Christology – The text ignores the Atonement, replacing Christ's finished work with a system of legal obedience for sin remission.
3. [Major] Sola Gratia – God's provision and 'exit' from difficulty are rewards for obedience, not gifts of grace.
4. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Claims authority as 'God's command sent down' (v5) post-Bible.

Semantic Warnings:

"Messenger"

In Text: A post-biblical figure (Muhammad) sent to recite God's revelations.

Evangelical: Often refers to angels or prophets, but ultimately culminates in Christ. Evangelicals reject post-apostolic messengers bringing new scripture.

Example: Verse 11 mentions a messenger leading from darkness to light; Christians believe Jesus is the Light of the World (John 8:12) and no further light-bringer is needed.

"Reverence (Taqwa)"

In Text: Fear/consciousness of God expressed through strict adherence to legal statutes.

Evangelical: Awe and fear of the Lord, but in the New Testament, it is a response to grace, not a method to earn remission of sins.

Example: In v5, reverence causes the remission of sins. In Christianity, the blood of Christ causes remission; reverence is the fruit.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Remission of sins (v5), Exit from difficulty (v2), Admission to gardens with flowing streams (v11).

How Attained: By reverencing God (Taqwa), believing, and working righteousness (v11).

Basis of Assurance: Confidence is based on the precision of one's obedience to the law (measuring the interim, etc.).

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text explicitly states 'Anyone who believes... and leads a righteous life, He will admit him into gardens' (v11). This 'faith + works' formula opposes the 'faith apart from works' formula of Romans 3:28.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Ensure a divorce interim is fulfilled (v1)
2. Measure the interim precisely (v1)
3. Do not evict women from their homes during interim (v1)
4. Have two equitable witnesses witness the divorce (v2)
5. Spend on pregnant women until they give birth (v6)
6. Pay women for nursing services (v6)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Trust God for financial provision after divorce
2. Maintain amicable relations despite separation
3. Accept the 'fate' God has decreed

Ritual Requirements:

1. Reverence God (Taqwa) as a prerequisite for legal validity

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 5, it says obeying these laws leads to the remission of sins. Do you feel that following divorce procedures is enough to cleanse the heart of sin?
2. Verse 2 promises an 'exit' for those who reverence God. How do you determine if your reverence was sufficient if the difficulty remains?
3. The text mentions a messenger leading people from darkness to light (v11). What was the 'darkness' that existed before this message came?
4. Verse 1 commands you to 'measure the interim precisely.' Does the pressure to be precise in these rules ever cause you anxiety about your standing with God?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Exit (Makhraja) – Humanity is trapped in a situation (sin) with no way out. We cannot create our own exit. [1 Corinthians 10:13 (God provides a way of escape/exit); John 10:9 (Jesus is the Door/Exit).]
2. Darkness to Light – This is the exact mission of Jesus and the Gospel. [1 Peter 2:9 (Called out of darkness into His marvelous light); Colossians 1:13 (Delivered from the domain of darkness).]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The believer must 'measure precisely' and ensure their reverence is genuine to qualify for the remission of sins. There is no assurance of forgiveness apart from successful execution of the law.
2. Uncertainty in Suffering [Moderate] – If an 'exit' from difficulty does not appear (v2), the believer may internalize this as a lack of their own reverence or trust, leading to guilt during hardship.
3. Fear of Retribution [Moderate] – The text juxtaposes legal instructions with the threat of 'terrible requital' (v8) suffered by past communities, linking personal failure in divorce law to catastrophic divine judgment.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation via a Messenger

Verification Method: Observation of the natural world (universes/earths) and historical reflection on destroyed communities (v8).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the finished revelation of Christ recorded in Scripture (Hebrews 1:1-2). This text relies on a subsequent messenger reciting new revelations to 'lead out of darkness,' implying the previous light (Gospel) was insufficient or lost.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 7th Century CE (Traditional Islamic dating); Translation 1978.

Authorship: Attributed to God via Muhammad; Translated by Rashad Khalifa.

Textual Issues: Rashad Khalifa's translation is known for its 'Quranist' bias (rejecting Hadith) and sometimes idiosyncratic renderings to fit his 'Code 19' mathematical theory, though this specific passage is generally consistent with standard translations regarding divorce law.