

SURAH 66 (AT-TAHRIM)

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

OVERVIEW

Surah 66, 'At-Tahrim' (The Prohibition), is a Medinan chapter that primarily addresses a specific incident in the domestic life of the Prophet Muhammad involving his wives (traditionally identified as Hafsa and Aisha). The text begins by reprimanding the Prophet for prohibiting something lawful to himself in order to please his wives, establishing that God alone sets the boundaries of the lawful and prohibited. It proceeds to expose a secret divulged by one of his wives, using this incident to demonstrate God's direct communication with Muhammad and the divine protection afforded to him by Allah, Gabriel, and the angels. The text issues a stern warning to the wives to repent or face replacement by 'better' women. The scope then widens to command all believers to protect themselves and their families from a Hell fueled by 'people and rocks.' The chapter concludes with a typological comparison of women: the wives of Noah and Lot are cited as examples of those who, despite proximity to prophets, were condemned for their disbelief, while the wife of Pharaoh and Mary (the daughter of Amram) are exalted as models of faith and chastity. Theologically, it emphasizes individual responsibility before God, the severity of judgment, and the necessity of 'firm repentance.'

KEY FIGURES

God (Allah), The Prophet (Muhammad), The Two Wives (implied Hafsa and Aisha), Gabriel, Wife of Noah, Wife of Lot, Wife of Pharaoh (Asiya), Mary (Maryam)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. INDIVIDUAL RETRIBUTION

Assertion: Salvation is based on individual submission and works; familial relation to a prophet offers no protection against judgment.

"They were married to two of our righteous servants, but they betrayed them and, consequently, they could not help them at all against GOD. (Surah 66:10)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text explicitly teaches that proximity to holiness (even being the wife of a prophet like Noah or Lot) provides no soteriological benefit. This aligns with the Evangelical rejection of salvation by heritage (Matthew 3:9), but it sharply contrasts with the Evangelical doctrine of Federal Headship or Vicarious Atonement. In Islam, as presented here, every individual stands alone based on their own 'betrayal' or 'submission.' There is no concept of a mediator who absorbs the penalty for the sinner; the prophets 'could not help them at all against GOD.'

2. CONDITIONAL FORGIVENESS VIA REPENTANCE

Assertion: Forgiveness and admission to Paradise are contingent upon 'firm repentance' (Taubah Nasuh).

"O you who believe, you shall repent to GOD a firm repentance. Your Lord will then remit your sins... (Surah 66:8)"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, the remission of sins is a future possibility ('Your Lord will then...') contingent upon the quality of the human action ('firm repentance'). This creates a transaction: if the repentance is sufficient, God remits. In Evangelical theology, forgiveness is a present possession for those in Christ (Ephesians 1:7), granted by grace through faith. The 'firmness' of the repentance in Islam becomes the functional savior, whereas in Christianity, the perfection of Christ's sacrifice is the savior.

3. PROPHETIC IMMUNITY AND AUTHORITY

Assertion: The Prophet is protected by God, Gabriel, and angels against domestic dissent; his decisions are divinely backed.

"If you band together against him, then GOD is his ally, and so is Gabriel and the righteous believers. (Surah 66:4)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text conflates the Prophet's domestic comfort with Divine Will. A dispute with wives triggers intervention from the highest cosmic authorities (God, Gabriel, angels). In Evangelicalism, while Scripture is inspired, the human authors and leaders are not personally infallible or immune from criticism in

their personal lives (e.g., Paul rebuking Peter in Galatians 2). This doctrine creates an authoritarian structure where the leader's personal grievances become theological mandates.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mechanism of salvation and the nature of the mediator. Surah 66 presents a legalistic framework where God's favor is earned through 'firm repentance' and strict obedience, with the threat of replacement for those who fail. The Prophet is a protected lawgiver, not a sacrificial redeemer. Evangelicalism posits that the law was fulfilled by Christ, and salvation is a gift of grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). Furthermore, the text's Christology is implicitly adoptionist or creationist (God 'blew into her from our spirit'), denying the eternal pre-existence of the Son.

Shared Values:

Reality of Hell and Judgment; Importance of family spiritual leadership; Virtue of chastity (Mary); Sovereignty of God

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Claims authority superseding the Bible and introduces new, post-apostolic revelation.
2. [Critical] Sola Gratia – Salvation is a reward for works ('requited only for what you did' v7) rather than a gift of grace.
3. [Critical] Christology (Sufficiency of Christ) – Replaces Christ's mediation with the Prophet's authority and individual repentance.

Semantic Warnings:

"Believer (Mu'min)"

In Text: One who accepts the message of Muhammad and submits to the laws of the Quran.

Evangelical: One who trusts solely in the finished work of Jesus Christ for salvation.

Example: In Surah 66:8, 'believers' are still required to perform 'firm repentance' to hope for remission of sins; in Acts 16:31, believing results in salvation.

"Spirit (Ruh)"

In Text: A created force or angel (Gabriel) sent by God, or the life-force blown into Mary.

Evangelical: The Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity, fully God.

Example: Verse 12 says 'we blew into her from our spirit,' implying an action of creation/empowerment, not the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Remission of sins, entry into gardens with flowing streams, and having 'light' on Judgment Day.

How Attained: Through belief, submission, and 'firm repentance' (Taubah Nasuh).

Basis of Assurance: None guaranteed; dependent on God's acceptance of the repentance.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly contradicts Sola Fide. Verse 7 states, 'You are being requited only for what you did.' Romans 3:28 states, 'For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.'

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Do not prohibit what God has made lawful (v1)
2. Repent to God (v4, v8)
3. Protect yourselves and families from Hellfire (v6)
4. Struggle (Jihad) against disbelievers and hypocrites (v9)

5. Be stern with disbelievers (v9)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Maintain absolute loyalty to the Prophet
2. Keep secrets entrusted by leadership
3. Strive for the virtues listed in verse 5 (submission, belief, obedience, fasting/worship)

Ritual Requirements:

1. Oaths and their expiation (v2)
2. Repentance (Taubah) (v8)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 8, it mentions 'firm repentance' is needed for God to remit sins. How do you know when your repentance is 'firm' enough to be accepted?
2. Verse 6 describes a fire whose fuel is people and rocks. How does that make you feel about your own safety and your family's safety?
3. The text mentions Mary in verse 12. Why do you think the Quran highlights her chastity and belief specifically?
4. Verse 8 speaks of believers having a 'light' in front of them on Judgment Day. Where does that light come from, and how can one be sure they possess it?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Need for Light – The text acknowledges the darkness of Judgment Day and the desperate need for light to navigate it. Jesus claims to be that Light. [John 8:12 - 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.']}
2. The Desire for a Home with God – Asiya's prayer reflects a longing for dwelling with God, which Jesus explicitly promises to prepare for His followers. [John 14:2-3 - 'In my Father's house are many rooms... I go to prepare a place for you.']}

Spiritual Weight:

1. Fear of Judgment [Severe] – The graphic description of Hell fueled by 'people and rocks' creates a visceral fear. The believer is tasked with the impossible burden of saving not just themselves but their entire family from this fate through their own efforts.
2. Uncertainty of Acceptance [Moderate] – The qualification of repentance as 'firm' (Nasuh) leaves the believer constantly questioning the quality of their sorrow. Did I regret enough? Was I sincere enough? There is no finished work to rest in.
3. Performance Pressure [Moderate] – Verse 5 lists a string of required attributes (submitters, believers, obedient, repentant, worshipers). The threat is that God can replace the current followers with 'better' ones, fostering a competitive and insecure spiritual environment.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Wahi)

Verification Method: Submission to the Prophet's claim of what God told him.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the public, historical resurrection of Christ and the written Word (1 Corinthians 15, 2 Timothy 3:16). This text relies on the private, unverifiable claim of the Prophet regarding secret conversations.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Medinan period (approx. 628-630 AD).

Authorship: Attributed to Muhammad (Divine Revelation); Khalifa translation by Rashad Khalifa (1978).

Textual Issues: Khalifa's translation often renders 'Muslims' as 'Submitters' to fit his 'Quran Alone' theology. Verse 12 contains the 'Mary daughter of Imran' historical difficulty.