

SURAH 7 (AL-A'RAF)

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

OVERVIEW

Surah Al-A'raf (The Heights) is a Meccan surah that provides a comprehensive narrative of salvation history from an Islamic perspective. It begins by establishing the authority of the revelation given to Muhammad, warning humanity against idolatry. The text details the creation of Adam, the refusal of Iblees (Satan) to prostrate, and the subsequent deception of Adam and Eve, framing the human condition as a battle against Satanic influence. A significant portion of the text recounts the narratives of previous prophets—Noah, Hood, Saaleh, Lot, Shu'aib, and Moses—emphasizing a recurring pattern: a messenger brings monotheism, the arrogant leaders reject him, and God destroys the community while saving the believers. The text culminates in a description of the Day of Judgment, where salvation is determined by the 'scales' of deeds. Uniquely, it mentions the 'Gentile Prophet' (Muhammad) allegedly prophesied in the Torah and Gospel, and describes the 'Heights' (A'raf), a barrier between Heaven and Hell. The theology is strictly monotheistic, predestinarian, and works-oriented.

KEY FIGURES

God (Allah), Iblees (Satan), Adam, Moses, Pharaoh, The Gentile Prophet (Muhammad), Noah, Hood, Saaleh, Lot, Shu'aib

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. SOTERIOLOGY OF THE SCALES

Assertion: Salvation is determined by the weight of good deeds versus bad deeds on the Day of Judgment.

"The scales will be set on that day, equitably. Those whose weights are heavy will be the winners. As for those whose weights are light, they will be the ones who lost their souls (7:8-9)."

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, justification is a forensic declaration of righteousness based on Christ's finished work (Romans 3:21-26). Surah 7 presents a forensic evaluation of the individual's own work. The 'heavy scales' imply that human merit, empowered by guidance, is the deciding factor. There is no concept of imputed righteousness here; the believer must generate their own righteousness to tip the scales, creating a fundamental anxiety regarding the sufficiency of one's tally.

2. DOUBLE PREDESTINATION

Assertion: God actively guides some and actively commits others to straying, creating them specifically for Hell.

"We have committed to Hell multitudes of jinns and humans... Whomever GOD commits to straying, there is no way for anyone to guide him (7:179, 7:186)."

Evangelical Comparison: The text asserts that God created multitudes specifically for Hell (7:179) and that He 'seals' hearts so they cannot believe (7:100-101). While Romans 9 discusses vessels of wrath, the Evangelical baseline emphasizes God's desire that all be saved (1 Timothy 2:4) and the genuine offer of the Gospel. The Quranic view here presents God as the active agent in the deception of the unbeliever ('I will even encourage them; My scheming is formidable' 7:183), which contrasts with the biblical view of God as light in whom there is no darkness (1 John 1:5).

3. BIBLICAL CONFIRMATION OF MUHAMMAD

Assertion: The Torah and Gospel contain prophecies regarding the 'Gentile Prophet' (Muhammad).

"...the gentile prophet (Muhammad), whom they find written in their Torah and Gospel (7:157)."

Evangelical Comparison: This is a critical apologetic claim in Islam. The text asserts that the Jewish and Christian scriptures explicitly mention Muhammad. Evangelicals interpret messianic prophecies as fulfilled exclusively in Jesus Christ (Luke 24:27). This doctrine implies that the current Bible is either corrupted (tahrif) because it lacks these references, or that Christians are willfully hiding the truth, creating a hostile hermeneutic toward biblical texts.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the solution to the human problem. Surah 7 diagnoses the problem as forgetfulness, arrogance, and Satanic deception, for which the cure is guidance, law (Sharia), and remembrance (Dhikr). Evangelicalism diagnoses the problem as spiritual death and inability to please God (Ephesians 2:1), for which the cure is regeneration and atonement. Furthermore, Surah 7:157 redefines the biblical narrative to center on Muhammad, relegating Jesus to a precursor role and denying the sufficiency of the biblical canon.

Shared Values:

Monotheism (existence of one Creator); Reality of Satan and the Fall; History of Prophets (Noah, Moses, Lot); Judgment Day and Resurrection; Moral accountability

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide – Salvation is by 'heavy scales' (works/merit) plus belief, not faith alone.
2. [Critical] Christology – Jesus is absent from the primary soteriological mechanism; salvation is accessible through Moses (in his time) and Muhammad (now), ignoring the 'Once for All' sacrifice.
3. [Major] Theology Proper (God's Nature) – God is depicted as a schemer (7:183) and the author of spiritual blindness (7:178), contradicting the character of God in 1 John.
4. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Claims the Bible is incomplete/corrupted and requires the Quran for correction/completion.

Semantic Warnings:

"Believer (Mu'min)"

In Text: One who accepts the Quran, the Gentile Prophet, and performs righteous works.

Evangelical: One who trusts in Christ alone for salvation.

Example: *In 7:157, a 'believer' is specifically defined as one who follows the Gentile Prophet (Muhammad).*

"Repentance (Tawbah)"

In Text: Turning back to God to earn mercy; a work that contributes to the heavy scales.

Evangelical: A change of mind agreeing with God about sin, leading to faith in Christ.

Example: *In 7:153, repentance is a prerequisite for mercy, implying a transactional restoration.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Escaping Hell and entering Paradise (The Garden) by having heavy scales of good deeds.

How Attained: By believing in God, following the Gentile Prophet (7:158), and doing good works to tip the scales (7:8-9).

Basis of Assurance: There is no absolute assurance; one hopes for mercy but fears the scales. Even the Prophet says, 'I have no power to benefit myself... except what God wills' (7:188).

Comparison to Sola Fide: Explicitly rejected. 7:43 states 'You have inherited it, in return for your works,' whereas Titus 3:5 states 'Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.'

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Follow what is revealed (7:3)
2. Do not follow idols (7:3)
3. Dress nicely for the masjid (7:31)
4. Eat and drink moderately (7:31)
5. Worship God publicly and privately (7:55)
6. Listen to the Quran when recited (7:204)

7. Seek refuge in God from Satan (7:200)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Muhammad as the Gentile Prophet found in previous scriptures
2. Reject the Trinity (implied by strict monotheism)
3. Recognize the continuity of all previous prophets as Muslims
4. Fear the sudden onset of God's retribution

Ritual Requirements:

1. Prostration (Sujud) implied by 7:206
2. Zakat (Obligatory Charity) mentioned in 7:156
3. Contact Prayers (Salat) mentioned in 7:170

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 7:8, it says salvation depends on heavy scales. How do you know if your scales are heavy enough today?
2. Verse 7:157 mentions a prophet written in the Torah and Gospel. Have you ever looked for him in the Bible yourself?
3. In 7:23, Adam and Eve ask for forgiveness. In the Bible, God answers by making them garments of skin (requiring a sacrifice). In the Quran, does God require a sacrifice to cover sin?
4. Verse 7:188 says the Prophet has no power to benefit himself. If he cannot ensure his own benefit, how can he ensure yours?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Nakedness of Adam – Just as Adam needed physical covering for his shame, we need spiritual covering. Leaves (human effort) are insufficient. [Genesis 3:21 (God provides skins/sacrifice) -> Isaiah 61:10 (Garments of Salvation) -> Galatians 3:27 (Clothed with Christ).]
2. The Heights (Al-A'raf) – The people on the heights are stuck, hoping for mercy. This illustrates the uncertainty of works. We need a Mediator who can cross the barrier. [1 Timothy 2:5 (One Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus).]
3. The Covenant of Descendants – This acknowledges that humanity has an innate knowledge of God but suppresses it. [Romans 1:19-20 (What may be known about God is plain to them).]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The believer lives under the constant threat of the 'Scales' (7:8-9). Every action is weighed, and there is no guarantee that good deeds will outweigh bad ones, leading to a life of spiritual calculation rather than relational rest.
2. Uncertainty of Salvation [Severe] – Since God 'leads astray whom He wills' (7:178) and plots/schemes (7:183), the believer cannot trust in a consistent, saving character of God. One's eternal destiny feels arbitrary.
3. Fear of Deception [Moderate] – The text emphasizes Satan's ability to attack from all four sides (7:17) and God's sealing of hearts. This creates a worldview where spiritual deception is inevitable for the majority, fostering suspicion and fear.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation via the Messenger, confirmed by signs in nature and history.

Verification Method: Observation of the ruins of past nations (7:137, 7:103) and the 'signs' in nature (7:57).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology centers on the historical resurrection of Christ and the witness of the Holy Spirit through the closed canon of Scripture (1 Corinthians 15, 2 Timothy 3:16). This text relies on the self-referential claim of the Quran and the threat of historical destruction.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 7th Century AD (Traditional: Meccan Period)

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

Textual Issues: Khalifa's translation is unique; he translates 'Ummiy' in 7:157 as 'Gentile' rather than the traditional 'Unlettered/Illiterate.' This impacts the apologetic claim regarding Muhammad's literacy.