

SURAH 71 (NUH)

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

OVERVIEW

Surah 71, titled 'Nuh' (Noah), is a Meccan surah dedicated entirely to the narrative of the Prophet Noah. In this translation by Rashad Khalifa, the text portrays Noah as a tireless 'manifest warner' who preaches to his people publicly and privately, day and night. The central argument is that submission to God and obedience to His messenger are the sole means to escape 'painful retribution.' Uniquely, this text explicitly links spiritual repentance ('Implore your Lord for forgiveness') with temporal, material rewards, promising rain, money, children, and orchards to those who turn back to God. The narrative highlights the obstinacy of the elite, who cover their ears and refuse to abandon their specific idols (Wadd, Suwaa, etc.). The text concludes with Noah's realization that the disbelievers are irredeemable—capable only of breeding more wickedness—leading him to pray for their complete destruction while asking for forgiveness for himself and the believing community. This serves as a typological warning to the contemporaries of Muhammad regarding the consequences of rejecting a messenger.

KEY FIGURES

God (The One to be worshipped and revered), Noah (The manifest warner and messenger), The Chiefs/People of Noah (The arrogant rejectors), Wadd (Idol), Suwaa (Idol), Yaghouth (Idol), Ya'ooq (Idol), Nasr (Idol)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. PROPHETIC OBEDIENCE AS SOTERIOLOGICAL NECESSITY

Assertion: Salvation from retribution is contingent not just on worshipping God, but explicitly on obeying the messenger.

"'To alert you that you shall worship GOD, reverence Him, and obey me.' (71:3)"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, Noah asserts a tripartite requirement for deliverance: worship God, reverence God, and 'obey me' (Noah). This establishes a pattern in Islamic theology where the messenger is the functional mediator of God's will. In Evangelical theology, while prophets are respected as mouthpieces of God, they are never the object of a salvation-contingent command to 'obey me' in the same parallel structure as worshipping God. The Evangelical stance is Solus Christus—Christ alone is the mediator (1 Timothy 2:5). The demand to obey a human prophet as a condition for divine forgiveness creates a structural friction with the biblical concept of direct access to God through the finished work of Jesus.

2. TRANSACTIONAL MATERIAL BLESSINGS

Assertion: Spiritual repentance (seeking forgiveness) is the direct cause of material prosperity (rain, money, children).

"'I said, 'Implore your Lord for forgiveness... He will then shower you generously with rain. And provide you with money and children...' (71:10-12)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text explicitly links 'Istighfar' (seeking forgiveness) with the provision of 'money and children.' While the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 28) links obedience to land blessings, the New Testament shifts the focus to spiritual inheritance and suffering for the sake of righteousness (Matthew 5:10-12). Evangelical theology generally rejects the 'Prosperity Gospel' idea that piety guarantees financial wealth. This Quranic passage suggests a direct cause-and-effect relationship between repentance and worldly success, which can lead to a crisis of faith if a believer remains poor despite their piety.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental theological gap lies in the mechanism of salvation and the character of the messenger. In this text, salvation is a contract: obey the messenger and ask forgiveness, and God will withhold punishment and grant wealth. There is no concept of substitutionary atonement; forgiveness is a fiat act of God's will conditioned on human submission. Furthermore, the Christological implications are significant. In the Bible, God desires that all should reach repentance (2 Peter 3:9). Here, Noah, the 'warner,' eventually prays

for the total cessation of the unbelievers' lineage (71:26-27), arguing they are genetically or socially irredeemable. This contrasts sharply with the intercessory heart of Christ, who prayed for His executioners (Luke 23:34), and the evangelical understanding of grace extending to the 'chief of sinners' (1 Timothy 1:15).

Shared Values:

Monotheism; Reality of Divine Judgment; Creation as evidence of God; Noah as a historical figure

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Salvation is contingent on the work of obeying the messenger (v3) and the act of imploring (v10).
2. [Major] Sola Gratia (Grace Alone) – Blessings are transactional rewards for repentance rather than unmerited favor.
3. [Major] Theology of the Cross – Promotes a theology of glory/prosperity where piety results in money and children.

Semantic Warnings:

"Believer (Mu'min)"

In Text: One who accepts the specific authority of Noah and enters his home/community (71:28).

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

Example: *In this text, a 'believer' is defined by adherence to the messenger's warning; in Evangelicalism, a believer is defined by union with Christ.*

"Forgiveness"

In Text: Remission of temporal punishment and granting of material favors (rain/money) upon request.

Evangelical: Cleansing from sin based on the shed blood of Christ (Hebrews 9:22).

Example: *Noah promises forgiveness leads to 'money and children' (71:12); the Bible promises forgiveness leads to peace with God (Romans 5:1).*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Escape from 'painful retribution' (v1) and 'hellfire' (v25), and reception of temporal respite (v4).

How Attained: By worshipping God, reverencing Him, and obeying the messenger (v3).

Basis of Assurance: There is no explicit assurance of eternal security; assurance is tied to the visible evidence of rain and provision (v11-12) and the hope of God's mercy.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly contradicts Sola Fide by adding the work of obedience to a human messenger as a prerequisite for divine favor. See Galatians 1:8-9 regarding other gospels.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Worship GOD
2. Reverence GOD
3. Obey the Messenger (Noah)
4. Implore the Lord for forgiveness

Implicit Obligations:

1. Abandon ancestral idols (Wadd, Suwaa, etc.)
2. Listen to the public and private warnings of the messenger
3. Recognize the signs of creation (moon, sun, earth)

Ritual Requirements:

1. Imploring for forgiveness (Istighfar)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 28, Noah prays for the annihilation of the disbelievers. How does this compare to Jesus' prayer on the cross, 'Father, forgive them'?
2. Verses 10-12 suggest that asking for forgiveness brings money and children. How do you interpret this when you see righteous people suffering in poverty?
3. The text says to 'obey me' (Noah) in verse 3. Do you believe we need a human mediator to be right with God, or can we go directly to Him?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Predetermined Period (Respite) – God delays judgment not because He is slack, but because He is patient, giving us a window of time to repent before the final day. [2 Peter 3:9, Romans 2:4]
2. The Failure of Idols – False gods (money, power, idols) always fail to save in the end. Only Christ is the solid rock. [Acts 4:12]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Fear of Failure/Performance [Severe] – The believer must constantly worry if their obedience to the messenger is sufficient to avert the 'painful retribution.' There is no 'finished work' to rest in.
2. Prosperity Anxiety [Moderate] – By linking forgiveness to money and children (v12), the text creates a psychological burden where personal poverty or infertility may be interpreted as a sign of God's displeasure or one's own lack of true repentance.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Wahy) and Natural Theology (Signs in creation).

Verification Method: Observation of the natural world (71:15-17) and the fulfillment of the threat of punishment.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the self-attesting Word of God and the witness of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:13-14). This text relies on the authority of the messenger's warning and the threat of impending doom as the primary verification.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Meccan Period (Early Islamic history, approx. 610-622 AD).

Authorship: Attributed to Muhammad as the recipient of revelation; Khalifa translation (1978).

Textual Issues: Khalifa's translation uses 'universes' for 'samawat' (traditionally 'heavens') and 'money' for 'amwal' (wealth/property), reflecting his modernizing/scientific hermeneutic.