

SURAH 76 (AL-INSAN / THE HUMAN)

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

OVERVIEW

Surah 76, titled 'Al-Insan' (The Human) or 'Ad-Dahr' (Time), presents a comprehensive Islamic anthropology and eschatology. It begins by asserting the humble origins of humanity—created from a 'liquid mixture'—specifically for the purpose of testing (probation). The text bifurcates humanity into two categories: the appreciative (believers) and the unappreciative (disbelievers). The bulk of the text (verses 5-22) is a vivid, sensory description of the rewards awaiting the 'virtuous' (Al-Abrar). These rewards are explicitly transactional; the text describes gardens, silk, silver vessels, and specific drinks (camphor and ginger) as recompense for their earthly works, such as feeding the poor and fulfilling vows. Crucially, verse 22 summarizes the soteriology: 'This is the reward that awaits you, for your efforts have been appreciated.' The concluding section shifts to the authority of the revelation and the sovereignty of God. It commands the recipient (prophet/believer) to be patient and worship through the night. It ends with a strong deterministic statement regarding human agency: while humans are told to choose the path, the text asserts that they cannot will anything unless God wills it first, establishing a tension between human responsibility and divine pre-determination.

KEY FIGURES

GOD (Allah), The Human (Al-Insan), The Virtuous (Al-Abrar), The Disbelievers (Al-Kafirun), The Messenger (implied recipient of revelation)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. PROBATIONARY CREATION

Assertion: Humans were created from fluids specifically to be tested/tried.

"We created the human from a liquid mixture... in order to test him." (Surah 76:2)"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, the teleology of man is probation. God creates man to evaluate his performance ('test him'). In Evangelical theology, while testing occurs, the primary purpose of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him (Westminster Shorter Catechism). The biblical narrative focuses on the Fall and Redemption (Romans 5), whereas the Quranic narrative here focuses on the Test and Recompense. The relationship is forensic (Judge/Defendant) rather than familial (Father/Child).

2. RETRIBUTIVE SOTERIOLOGY

Assertion: Paradise is a payment/reward for human effort and steadfastness.

"He rewards them for their steadfastness... This is the reward that awaits you, for your efforts have been appreciated." (Surah 76:12, 22)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text explicitly links the attainment of Paradise to human merit. Verse 22 uses the phrase 'your efforts have been appreciated' (sa'yukum mashkuran). This establishes a 'wage' system of salvation. Evangelicalism posits that salvation is a gift (charisma) given to the ungodly (Romans 4:5) based on Christ's finished work, not a reward for the believer's endurance. In the Gospel, the reward is Christ's inheritance shared with the believer; here, the reward is payment for the believer's work.

3. DIVINE DETERMINISM

Assertion: Human free will exists but is entirely superseded by God's will.

"Whatever you will is in accordance with GOD's will." (Surah 76:30)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text presents a tension: Verse 29 says 'whoever wills shall choose,' but Verse 30 immediately qualifies that by stating human will is contingent on God's will. In Islamic theology (Ash'ari/Maturidi), this often leans toward occasionalism or strict determinism. While Evangelicalism (particularly Reformed traditions) holds to sovereignty, it is balanced by the character of God as Father and the assurance of the Cross. Here, the sovereignty is absolute and potentially arbitrary ('He admits whomever He wills into His mercy' v31), creating uncertainty for the adherent.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mechanism of justification. Surah 76:22 explicitly states that Paradise is a reward for 'efforts.' This is the definition of works-righteousness. The Evangelical baseline (Sola Fide) asserts that human effort is insufficient to satisfy divine justice (Isaiah 64:6) and that righteousness must be imputed by Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). Furthermore, the nature of the reward differs. The Quranic Paradise described here is deeply sensual (silver, silk, drinks, servants), focusing on physical pleasure as the ultimate good. The Biblical New Jerusalem focuses on the restoration of the relationship between God and man ('God himself will be with them', Rev 21:3). The Quranic text emphasizes the 'things' given by God; the Bible emphasizes God Himself as the reward.

Shared Values:

Care for the poor, orphans, and captives; Sovereignty of God; Reality of Judgment Day; Rejection of materialism ('fleeting life')

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Fide – Salvation is explicitly tied to human effort and steadfastness (v22).
- 2. [Major] Theology Proper / Anthropology – Man is created to be tested by a Master, not created for communion with a Father.

Semantic Warnings:

"Virtuous (Al-Abrar)"

In Text: Those who perform specific acts of charity and ritual to earn reward.
Evangelical: Those declared righteous through faith in Christ (Romans 4).
Example: *In Surah 76, a virtuous man is one who feeds the poor to avoid a miserable day. In the Bible, a righteous man is one who lives by faith (Habakkuk 2:4).*

"Servants (of God)"

In Text: Slaves/worshippers ('Ibad) subject to testing and judgment.
Evangelical: Believers are sons and heirs, not merely servants (Galatians 4:7).
Example: *The text refers to 'GOD's servants' drinking from the spring. The Bible refers to 'Children of God' inheriting the kingdom.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Protection from the 'evil of that day' (Judgment) and entry into a garden of physical luxury.
How Attained: By fulfilling pledges, feeding the poor, fearing the Lord, and steadfastness (Sabr).
Basis of Assurance: None guaranteed; dependent on 'If God wills' (v30-31) and the sufficiency of one's own efforts.
Comparison to Sola Fide: Diametrically opposed. Surah 76:22 ('efforts appreciated') vs. Titus 3:5 ('Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us').

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Fulfill pledges (v7)
- 2. Feed the poor, orphan, and captive (v8)
- 3. Steadfastly carry out Lord's commandments (v24)
- 4. Do not obey sinful disbelievers (v24)
- 5. Commemorate the name of the Lord day and night (v25)
- 6. Prostrate before Him at night (v26)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Fear the Day of Judgment (v10)
2. Reject the 'fleeting life' of this world (v27)
3. Accept the Quran as a special revelation (v23)

Ritual Requirements:

1. Night prayer/prostration (Tahajjud implied in v26)
2. Dhikr (Remembrance/Commemoration) (v25)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 10, it says the righteous feed the poor because they 'fear a day full of misery.' Do you feel that fear is your primary motivation for doing good?
2. Verse 22 says your reward is because 'your efforts have been appreciated.' How can you be sure your efforts are ever enough to satisfy a perfect God?
3. Verse 30 says you cannot will anything unless God wills it. How do you find peace knowing your choice is ultimately out of your hands?
4. The text describes Paradise with silver, silk, and drinks. Is the greatest reward in Paradise the things God gives, or God Himself?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Cup of Mixture – In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus drank the 'cup' of God's wrath so that we could drink the cup of blessing and salvation. He took the bitter cup (judgment) described in v4 so we could have the cup of life. [Matthew 26:39, Psalm 116:13]
2. Feeding the Captive – Humanity was held captive by sin and death. Jesus didn't just feed the captives; He became a captive and paid the ransom to set us free. [Mark 10:45, Luke 4:18]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Fear of Judgment [Severe] – The believer is driven by the terror of a 'day that is extremely difficult' (v7) and 'full of misery' (v10). This creates a relationship with God based on trauma-avoidance rather than love.
2. Performance Pressure [Severe] – The explicit statement that reward is for 'efforts' (v22) places the entire burden of salvation on the believer's shoulders. There is no mediator mentioned to carry the load.
3. Theological Determinism [Moderate] – Verse 30 removes the autonomy of the believer ('Whatever you will is in accordance with GOD's will'), potentially leading to fatalism or despair regarding one's ability to choose righteousness.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation (Tanzil) interpreted through the lens of submission.

Verification Method: No external verification offered in text; the detailed description of the unseen (Paradise) serves as self-authenticating rhetoric.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on historical witness to God's acts (1 John 1:1-3) and the internal witness of the Spirit regarding the Son (Romans 8:16). This text demands acceptance of eschatological details based solely on the assertion of the speaker ('We').

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Meccan or Medinan (Disputed). Generally considered Meccan (early period) due to style, but some scholars argue v8-10 are Medinan.

Authorship: Attributed to Muhammad via Gabrielic revelation.

Textual Issues: Khalifa's translation uses 'GOD' (all caps) reflecting his 'Quran Alone' theology and numerological theories, though the Arabic 'Allah' is standard.