

SURAH 77 (AL-MURSALAT - THE EMISSARIES)

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

OVERVIEW

Surah 77, titled 'Al-Mursalat' (The Emissaries/Winds), is a powerful early Meccan text characterized by its rhythmic, apocalyptic imagery and a haunting refrain repeated ten times: 'Woe on that day to the rejectors.' The text opens with a series of oaths sworn by natural forces (winds, clouds) and angels to assert that the promised Judgment is undeniable. It proceeds to dismantle human arrogance by reminding the reader of their humble biological origins ('lowly liquid') and the destruction of past civilizations that rejected their messengers. Theologically, the text presents a stark binary: the 'rejectors' (criminals) who face a terrifying, uncool shade and fire, and the 'righteous' who enjoy physical sensory pleasures. Crucially, in verse 43, the text explicitly ties salvation to human effort, stating reward is 'in return for your works.' The Surah concludes with a polemical challenge, particularly emphasized in Rashad Khalifa's translation, asking what 'Hadith' (narrative/source) one could believe if they reject this Quran. This specific translation choice reflects Khalifa's 'Quranist' theology, which rejects the traditional Islamic Hadith collections in favor of the Quran alone.

KEY FIGURES

God (Allah), The Rejectors (Al-Mukadhdhibin), The Righteous (Al-Muttaqin), The Messengers (implied/referenced collectively)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. SALVATION BY WORKS

Assertion: Entry into paradise and the enjoyment of its provisions are a direct payment or recompense for human deeds performed during life.

"Eat and drink happily in return for your works. We thus reward the virtuous." (Surah 77:43-44)"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, the causal mechanism for salvation is explicit: 'in return for your works' (bima kuntum ta'malun). This establishes a transactional soteriology where human merit purchases divine favor. Evangelical Christianity posits that salvation is a gift of grace received through faith, not a wage earned by works (Romans 4:4-5). While Christians believe works are the ***fruit*** of salvation (Ephesians 2:10), this text presents them as the ***root*** cause of the reward, creating a fundamental theological gap regarding human sufficiency and the necessity of Christ's imputed righteousness.

2. THE DAY OF DECISION (YAWM AL-FASL)

Assertion: A specific, terrifying future event where God will judge humanity, separating the righteous from the rejectors without the possibility of defense or apology.

"That is the Day of Decision. We have summoned you and the previous generations... That is the day they do not speak Nor are they given permission to apologize." (Surah 77:35-38)"

Evangelical Comparison: Both traditions affirm a linear history ending in judgment. However, the Quranic 'Day of Decision' depicted here is characterized by the silence of the accused and the lack of mediation. In Evangelical theology, while the judgment is real, the believer has an Advocate, Jesus Christ (1 John 2:1), who has already taken the 'Woe' upon Himself. This text presents a naked exposure of the soul before God without the covering of Atonement.

3. QURANIC EXCLUSIVISM (KHALIFA'S INTERPRETATION)

Assertion: The Quran is the only source of religious guidance (Hadith) required or permitted.

"Which Hadith, other than this, do they uphold?" (Surah 77:50)"

Evangelical Comparison: Rashad Khalifa translates the Arabic word 'hadith' (speech/narrative) literally in verse 50 to argue against the Islamic tradition of Sunnah (prophetic traditions). This creates a parallel to the Protestant 'Sola Scriptura' (Scripture Alone) by rejecting extra-quranic tradition. However, for the

Evangelical, this claim is rejected because the Quran itself is not recognized as inspired revelation, and it denies the biblical canon which closed centuries prior.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mechanism of justification. Surah 77:43 explicitly states that paradise is a wage paid for works ('in return for your works'). Evangelical Christianity holds that justification is a gift of grace received by faith alone (Sola Fide), apart from works (Romans 3:28). Furthermore, the God of Surah 77 is a solitary Judge who offers no atonement for the 'criminal,' only destruction. The Christian God, while Judge, is also the Redeemer who provides the sacrifice (Christ) to satisfy His own justice. The text's repeated 'Woe' stands in direct contrast to the 'Tetelestai' (It is finished) of the Cross.

Shared Values:

Belief in a Sovereign Creator; Reality of a final Judgment Day; Existence of Heaven and Hell; Moral accountability for human actions

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Salvation is explicitly 'in return for works' (v. 43).
2. [Critical] Christology (Sufficiency of Christ) – No Mediator is present; the sinner faces God alone. The 'Woe' falls on the sinner, not a Substitute.
3. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Claims to be the final 'Hadith' (revelation) superseding previous scriptures.

Semantic Warnings:

"Righteous (Al-Muttaqin)"

In Text: Those who avoid rejection of the message and perform good works to earn paradise.

Evangelical: Those declared righteous (justified) through the imputed righteousness of Christ, not their own merit (Philippians 3:9).

Example: In Surah 77, a righteous man is one who earns shade and fruit. In Romans, a righteous man is one whose faith is credited as righteousness.

"Hadith"

In Text: In this specific translation/context: The Quran itself as the only valid narrative/statement.

Evangelical: N/A (Islamic term). Conceptually similar to 'Tradition' or 'Scripture' depending on usage.

Example: Khalifa uses 'Hadith' in v. 50 to exclude Islamic tradition; Evangelicals would view this as a 'Sola Quran' argument.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Escape from the 'Woe' and the fire; entry into shade, springs, and enjoyment of fruits.

How Attained: By avoiding 'rejection' of the message and performing works (v. 43).

Basis of Assurance: There is no assurance of salvation in the text, only the assurance of judgment. The refrain 'Woe on that day' creates a climate of insecurity.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text is the antithesis of Sola Fide. It offers a 'wage' model (reward for works) rather than a 'gift' model (grace through faith). See Romans 6:23.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Bow down when told to bow (v. 48)
2. Eat and drink (as a reward in paradise) (v. 43)
3. Scheme if you can (rhetorical challenge) (v. 39)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept the message of the Quran as the only valid Hadith
2. Acknowledge God's design in biology and geology
3. Fear the Day of Decision
4. Perform virtuous works to earn reward

Ritual Requirements:

1. Prayer (Salah) - implied by the condemnation of those who do not 'bow down' (v. 48)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text repeats 'Woe on that day' ten times. How do you personally deal with the fear of that Woe?
2. Verse 43 says paradise is 'in return for your works.' How many works are enough to equal the value of paradise?
3. In verse 35, it says we cannot speak or apologize on that Day. If you have made mistakes, who will speak for you?
4. The text describes God as the 'best designer' of our bodies. Do you think He designed a way for us to be forgiven that doesn't depend on our own weak efforts?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Day of Decision (Yawm Al-Fasl) - We all desire a 'Day of Decision' where justice is served. However, if justice is served perfectly, we are all condemned. We need that Day to be a day where a Substitute is accepted in our place. [Romans 3:23-26 (God is both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus).]
2. The Lowly Liquid - The text reminds us of our humble, helpless origin. Just as we could not create ourselves, we cannot save ourselves. We need a power outside of us (Grace) to raise us up. [John 3:5-6 (Born of water and the Spirit).]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Fear of Judgment [Severe] - The relentless repetition of 'Woe on that day' (10 times) creates a psychological environment of dread and terror regarding the future, with no assurance of safety.
2. Performance Pressure [Moderate] - By linking eternal happiness directly to 'works' (v. 43), the adherent is placed on a treadmill of performance, never knowing if their account balance is sufficient to purchase paradise.
3. Isolation [Severe] - The text depicts the sinner standing alone, unable to speak or apologize (v. 36). This creates a spiritual isolation where the believer has no Intercessor to turn to.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation (The Quran) supported by Natural Theology (Observation of Creation).

Verification Method: Observation of the natural world (embryology, geology) and historical patterns (destruction of past nations) serves as verification of the text's truth.

Evangelical Contrast: While the Bible affirms natural revelation (Psalm 19, Romans 1), it teaches that nature is insufficient for salvation. This text implies that observing nature should lead one to submit to this specific revelation, whereas Biblical epistemology centers on the illumination of the Holy Spirit regarding the person of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:14).

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Early Meccan Period (approx. 615-618 AD).

Authorship: Attributed to Muhammad (Divine Revelation via Gabriel); Translation by Rashad Khalifa (1978).

Textual Issues: Rashad Khalifa's translation of verse 50 ('Which Hadith...') is a theological choice. Standard translations (Pickthall, Yusuf Ali) often render it 'statement' or 'message.' Khalifa uses the transliterated 'Hadith' to support his 'Quran Only' doctrine, rejecting the Sunnah.