

SURAH 79

FAITH: Islam | TEXT: Surah 79 (Al-Nazi'at) | VOLUME: The Meaning of the Holy Quran | AUTHOR: Rashad Khalifa

OVERVIEW

Surah 79, titled 'Al-Nazi'at' (The Snatchers), opens with a series of powerful oaths sworn by angels who extract souls at death—violently for disbelievers and gently for believers. The text moves immediately into a vivid eschatological description of the 'Quake' (Resurrection), directly countering the skepticism of the Meccan disbelievers who mocked the idea of physical restoration from 'rotten bones.' To substantiate the threat of judgment, the text invokes the narrative of Moses and Pharaoh, presenting Pharaoh's rejection of God's sign and claim to divinity as the archetype of transgression that leads to destruction in both this life and the Hereafter. The argument then shifts to teleological evidence, pointing to the complexity of the heavens, the night and day, and the earth's formation as proof of God's power to resurrect. Uniquely in Rashad Khalifa's translation, verse 30 is rendered to claim the earth was made 'egg-shaped,' a modernist apologetic interpretation. The Surah concludes with a clear soteriological bifurcation: Hell is for those who preferred the worldly life, while Paradise is the reward for those who 'enjoined the self from sinful lusts.' The text ends by affirming that the timing of the End is known only to God, and Muhammad's role is strictly that of a warner.

KEY FIGURES

God (Allah), The Angels (Snatchers/Pluckers), Moses, Pharaoh, Muhammad, The Disbelievers (Skeptics of Resurrection)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. SOTERIOLOGY OF SELF-RESTRAINT

Assertion: Entrance to Paradise is contingent upon the individual's ability to restrain their own soul from sinful lusts.

"As for the one who reverenced the majesty of his Lord, and enjoined the self from sinful lusts. Paradise will be the abode." (Surah 79:40-41)"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, the mechanism for obtaining Paradise is explicitly anthropocentric: the believer must 'enjoin the self' (restrain/forbid) from lusts. This posits that the human will is capable of sufficient moral self-correction to merit eternal reward. Evangelical Christianity teaches that the human will is in bondage to sin (Romans 3:10-12) and that salvation is a gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). While Christians also believe in mortifying the flesh, this is a fruit of salvation, not the prerequisite cause of it.

2. BODILY RESURRECTION

Assertion: God will physically recreate human beings from 'rotten bones' for judgment.

"They will say, 'We have been recreated from the grave!' ... All it takes is one nudge." (Surah 79:10, 13)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text asserts resurrection based on the argument of creation: if God created the heavens (which are harder to create), He can easily recreate man (Surah 79:27). Evangelical theology agrees on the fact of resurrection but grounds the believer's hope specifically in the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:20-22). In Islam, resurrection is a display of power for judgment; in Christianity, it is also a union with Christ's victory over death.

3. SCIENTIFIC CONCORDISM (KHALIFA)

Assertion: The Quran contains scientific facts unknown at the time of revelation, specifically the shape of the earth.

"He made the earth egg-shaped." (Surah 79:30)"

Evangelical Comparison: Rashad Khalifa translates the Arabic root 'd-h-a' as 'egg-shaped' to argue for the Quran's divine origin via scientific foreknowledge. Standard translations render this 'spread out.' Evangelicalism affirms God as Creator but generally relies on historical and prophetic validation rather than retrofitting modern scientific terminology into ancient texts as the primary proof of authority.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the solution to human sin. Surah 79 acknowledges sin (transgression, lusts) and its consequence (Hell). However, the remedy provided is entirely internal to the human agent: 'enjoin the self from sinful lusts.' There is no mediator, no sacrifice, and no imputed righteousness. In Evangelical theology, the demand of the Law (perfection) cannot be met by the sinner (Romans 3:20); therefore, Christ fulfills the Law on their behalf. Surah 79 leaves the burden of fulfilling the moral law squarely on the shoulders of the individual.

Shared Values:

Monotheism; Reality of Judgment Day; Bodily Resurrection; Historicity of Moses; Creation by Divine Design

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide – Salvation is explicitly conditional on the work of self-restraint ('enjoined the self from sinful lusts').
2. [Critical] Christology (Atonement) – The text assumes man can deal with his own sin problem without a substitute or sacrifice.
3. [Major] Sola Scriptura – The text claims to be a superior revelation clarifying the history of Moses and the nature of creation, superseding biblical accounts.

Semantic Warnings:

"Reverence (Khashiya)"

In Text: A fear/awe of God that drives one to earn salvation through self-restraint.

Evangelical: A response of worship to God's holiness, often resulting from the gratitude of salvation already received.

Example: *In Surah 79:40, reverence is a condition for entering Paradise. In Hebrews 12:28, reverence is how we serve God because we have already received a kingdom.*

"Sign/Miracle"

In Text: A display of power (Moses' staff/hand) intended to compel submission.

Evangelical: A 'semeion' (sign) pointing to the identity of the Messiah and the nature of God's Kingdom.

Example: *Pharaoh rejects the 'great miracle' (v. 20) and is destroyed. In John's Gospel, signs invite faith in Jesus as the Son of God.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Escape from Hell and entrance into Paradise (the abode).

How Attained: By reverencing the majesty of the Lord and restraining the self from sinful lusts (Works/Merit).

Basis of Assurance: There is no assurance of salvation in the text; it is a future verdict based on the sufficiency of one's self-restraint.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly contradicts Sola Fide. Surah 79:40-41 establishes a 'If [work], Then [reward]' structure. Romans 4:5 establishes that God justifies the ungodly who have faith, apart from works.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Go to Pharaoh (specific to Moses)
2. Warn those who expect the Hour (specific to Muhammad)
3. Reverence the majesty of the Lord
4. Enjoin the self from sinful lusts

Implicit Obligations:

1. Believe in the bodily resurrection
2. Reject the worldview of the disbelievers

3. Observe creation as evidence of God's power

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text says Paradise is for those who 'enjoined the self from sinful lusts.' How successful have you been in completely restraining your lusts?
2. Verse 35 says we will 'remember everything' we did. If God judges you based on that full memory, and you haven't perfectly restrained your lusts, what is your hope?
3. In the story of Moses, how did the Israelites escape the final plague? Was it by their own righteousness, or was there a specific protection provided?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Snatching (Death) – Death is the great equalizer and the king of terrors. Jesus came to destroy the one who has the power of death and deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery. [Hebrews 2:14-15]
2. The Memory of Deeds – A perfect memory of our deeds would condemn us. The Gospel offers a blotting out of transgressions, where God remembers our sins no more. [Isaiah 43:25, Hebrews 8:12]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The believer is burdened with the task of perfectly restraining 'sinful lusts' to secure Paradise. Since lusts are internal and often involuntary, this creates a cycle of constant failure and guilt.
2. Fear of Judgment [Moderate] – The graphic description of the 'snatching' of souls and the 'quake' creates a relationship with God based on terror and the threat of 'retribution' (v. 25) rather than familial love.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation (for history and eschatology) and Empirical Observation (for creation arguments).

Verification Method: Adherents are asked to look at the 'history of Moses' and the construction of the heavens/earth to verify God's power.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the testimony of the prophets and apostles centered on the person of Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2). This text relies on the self-referential authority of the Quranic voice and natural theology.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Meccan Period (Early Islamic revelation). Translation: 1978 (Khalifa).

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

Textual Issues: Verse 30: Khalifa translates 'dahaha' as 'made the earth egg-shaped.' Standard translations (Pickthall, Yusuf Ali, Sahih International) translate this as 'spread out' or 'extended.' Khalifa's translation is a modern reinterpretation to fit scientific knowledge of the earth's geoid shape.