

SURAH 81:1-29

FAITH: Islam | TEXT: Surah 81 (At-Takwir) | VOLUME: The Meaning of the Holy Quran | AUTHOR: Rashad Khalifa (Translator/Interpreter)

OVERVIEW

Surah 81, titled 'At-Takwir' (The Rolling/The Overthrowing), is a Meccan surah primarily focused on Islamic eschatology. The text opens with a dramatic series of cosmic cataclysms—the sun being rolled up, stars crashing, and mountains vanishing—signaling the end of the current order. It emphasizes the absolute exposure of human deeds, stating that 'every soul will know everything it brought' (v. 14) and 'the records are made known' (v. 10). A specific historical and ethical critique is leveled against the pre-Islamic practice of female infanticide (v. 8-9). The latter half of the Surah shifts to an apologetic defense of the revelation itself. It asserts that the message is conveyed by an honorable angelic messenger (Gabriel) to a human recipient. Uniquely to this specific translation/version, Rashad Khalifa inserts his own name in verse 22 ('Your friend (Rashad) is not crazy'), thereby appropriating the text to validate his own claim to messengership as the 'Messenger of the Covenant,' a central tenet of his 'United Submitters International' movement. The text concludes by affirming the universality of the message and the absolute sovereignty of God's will over human volition.

KEY FIGURES

GOD (Allah), The Honorable Messenger (Gabriel), Rashad (Khalifa's interpolation of 'Your Friend/Companion'), The Girl Buried Alive (Symbol of injustice)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. WORKS-BASED JUDGMENT

Assertion: Judgment is based on what a soul has 'brought' (prepared/done) in this life.

"Every soul will know everything it brought." (Surah 81:14)

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, the confidence of the believer—or the terror of the unbeliever—rests entirely on the content of their own life's record. Verse 14 states the soul knows what it 'brought.' In Evangelical theology, the believer brings nothing but sin to the cross and receives Christ's righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). The Quranic view here is a forensic weighing of personal deeds, whereas the Biblical view is a forensic declaration of justification based on the finished work of another (Jesus).

2. DIVINE DETERMINISM

Assertion: Human will is effective only insofar as it aligns with God's pre-existing will.

"Whatever you will is in accordance with the will of GOD, Lord of the universe." (Surah 81:29)

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelicalism affirms God's sovereignty, it balances this with human responsibility and the call to 'whosoever will' (Revelation 22:17). The Islamic concept here (Qadar) often leans toward a fatalism where God is the primary cause of all actions. The friction arises not in the existence of sovereignty, but in the nature of the God willing it—here, a monad who wills without the mediation of a Savior.

3. CONTINUED PROPHETIC OFFICE

Assertion: The text defends a contemporary messenger (interpreted by Khalifa as himself) as divinely authorized.

"Your friend (Rashad) is not crazy... He is not holding back any news." (Surah 81:22-24)

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicalism holds to Sola Scriptura and the closed canon, believing that God has spoken finally through His Son. Khalifa's translation explicitly inserts his own name to claim he is the prophesied messenger. This is a direct challenge to the sufficiency of Scripture and the unique role of the Apostles. It parallels Mormon claims of restoration but uses the Quran as the base text.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mechanism of salvation and the locus of authority. Surah 81 presents a terrifying judgment where safety depends on the soul's own record. Evangelicalism presents a judgment where safety depends on the blood of the Lamb. Furthermore, Khalifa's translation introduces a sectarian authority claim (himself as messenger) that requires the Christian to reject the finality of the New Testament. The text's Christology is non-existent; Jesus is replaced by the 'honorable messenger' (Gabriel) and the human recipient.

Shared Values:

Belief in a literal Day of Judgment; Condemnation of infanticide/defense of the innocent; Sovereignty of God; Existence of Angels and Demons

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Claims post-biblical revelation and authority for Rashad Khalifa.
2. [Critical] Sola Fide – Implies salvation is the result of 'going straight' and the deeds a soul brings.
3. [Major] Theology Proper (Nature of God) – Presents a monad God whose will overrides human agency without a mediatorial covenant of grace.

Semantic Warnings:

"Messenger (Rasul)"

In Text: An angelic or human agent conveying new revelation (here applied to Gabriel and Khalifa).

Evangelical: Often applies to the Apostles, but supreme messengership is fulfilled in Christ (Hebrews 3:1).

Example: *In this text, 'Messenger' implies one who brings a law/book to be obeyed. In the Bible, Jesus is the Message itself (The Word).*

"Word/Utterance"

In Text: The recited text of the Quran brought by Gabriel.

Evangelical: Jesus Christ Himself (John 1:1).

Example: *Verse 19 calls the Quran 'the utterance of an honorable messenger.' Christians believe the Word is a Person, not just a text.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Escaping the 'ignited Hell' and entering the 'presented Paradise' (v. 12-13).

How Attained: By 'going straight' (v. 28) and the deeds the soul brings (v. 14).

Basis of Assurance: None provided; dependent on the final weighing of records.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly opposes Sola Fide. The text asks 'Where will you go?' and answers with a command to 'go straight' (law-keeping), whereas the Gospel answers with 'Come to Me' (relationship/faith).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Go straight (v. 28)
2. Obey and trust the messenger (v. 21)
3. Recognize the divine source of the message (v. 19-25)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Prepare good deeds for the Day of Judgment
2. Accept Rashad Khalifa as the authorized messenger (specific to this translation)
3. Reject the idea that the message is demonic

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 14, it says every soul will know what it brought. If my record contains sin, how can I remove it before that day?
2. Verse 22 in this translation mentions 'Rashad.' Most other translations say 'your companion' referring to Muhammad. Why do you think the translator added his name there?
3. The text asks in verse 26, 'Where will you go?' As a Christian, I go to Jesus who paid for my sins. Where does this text tell you to go for forgiveness?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Innocent Victim – God cares deeply about the innocent victim. The ultimate innocent victim was Jesus, who was killed not for His own crime, but for ours. He answers the cry of the innocent by taking the judgment of the guilty. [1 Peter 3:18 - 'For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.']
2. The Open Record – We all fear our secret sins being exposed. In Christ, the record of our debt was nailed to the cross and cancelled, so we need not fear the books being opened. [Colossians 2:14 - 'having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.']

Spiritual Weight:

1. Fear of Exposure [Severe] – The text emphasizes that 'every soul will know everything it brought.' This creates a burden of anxiety regarding one's secret sins and the sufficiency of one's good deeds.
2. Allegiance to a Human Leader [Moderate] – By accepting Khalifa's translation of verse 22, the adherent is bound to accept Khalifa's authority as a divine messenger, isolating them from mainstream Islam and Christianity alike.
3. Fatalism [Moderate] – Verse 29 ('Whatever you will is in accordance with the will of GOD') can lead to a sense of helplessness, believing that one's ability to even choose the right path is entirely pre-determined by God without assurance of election.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct Revelation (Wahy) transmitted visually ('He saw him at the high horizon').

Verification Method: Trust in the integrity of the messenger ('He shall be obeyed and trusted').

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the witness of the Spirit through the written Word (2 Timothy 3:16) and the historical resurrection of Christ, not the private vision of a single individual ('He saw him') which cannot be externally verified.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Original Arabic: 7th Century (Meccan). Khalifa Translation: 1978.

Authorship: Traditional: Muhammad. This version: Rashad Khalifa (Translator/Redactor).

Textual Issues: In verse 22, the Arabic word is 'Sahibukum' (Your companion), historically referring to Muhammad. Khalifa translates this as 'Your friend (Rashad)', inserting his own name parenthetically to claim the prophecy refers to him. This is a significant sectarian interpolation not found in standard Islamic translations.