

SURAH 92 (AL-LAIL)

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

OVERVIEW

Surah 92, Al-Lail (The Night), presents a sharp dichotomy of human existence and eternal destiny. Opening with cosmic oaths by the night, day, and the creation of gender, the text asserts that human efforts are diverse and consequential. It outlines a mechanistic spiritual economy: those who give charity, maintain righteousness, and uphold the scripture are divinely facilitated toward 'happiness' (or ease). Conversely, those who are stingy, self-sufficient, and disbelieve are facilitated toward 'misery' and the blazing Hellfire. The text emphasizes the futility of wealth in the face of death ('when he falls') while simultaneously positing that the righteous use wealth to purify themselves. It concludes with a promise of salvation and satisfaction for those who give solely to seek the countenance of the Lord, devoid of transactional expectations from other humans. In the context of Rashad Khalifa's translation, the emphasis on 'upholding the scripture' reinforces a Quran-centric theology.

KEY FIGURES

God (The Creator, The Most High), The Righteous Giver (Traditionally associated with Abu Bakr, though unnamed), The Wicked Miser (The archetype of disbelief)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. SOTERIOLOGICAL MERITOCRACY

Assertion: Salvation and avoidance of Hellfire are attained through the specific works of giving charity, maintaining righteousness, and purifying one's intent.

"Avoiding it [Hellfire] will be the righteous. Who gives from his money to charity... He will certainly attain salvation. (92:17-18, 21)"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, the mechanism for escaping judgment is intrinsic to the human agent's performance. The text explicitly states that the one who 'gives from his money' is the one who avoids the fire. Evangelical theology posits that no amount of charity can atone for sin. In Biblical terms, works are the *fruit* of salvation, not the *root* (Ephesians 2:10). Surah 92 presents works (specifically charity) as the prerequisite for the divine outcome of salvation.

2. DIVINE FACILITATION (TAYSIR)

Assertion: God responds to human initiative; if a human chooses charity/belief, God makes the path to happiness easy. If they choose stinginess, God makes misery easy.

"As for him who gives... We will direct him towards happiness. But he who is stingy... We will direct him towards misery. (92:5-10)"

Evangelical Comparison: This doctrine implies that God's guidance is reactive to human disposition. The text says 'We will direct him' *after* the conditions of giving and believing are met. Evangelical theology emphasizes Prevenient Grace and Monergism in regeneration—that God moves first to dead sinners (Romans 5:8) who are incapable of choosing righteousness without prior divine intervention.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the solution to the human predicament. Surah 92 acknowledges the predicament (the risk of Hellfire/Misery) but offers a human-centered solution: financial sacrifice and moral effort. The text implies that a human being is capable of 'maintaining righteousness' (v. 5) sufficient to satisfy God. Evangelicalism teaches that 'there is no one righteous, not even one' (Romans 3:10) and that salvation requires the alien righteousness of Christ imputed to the believer. Surah 92 has no mediator; the transaction is directly between the giver's wealth/intent and God's reward.

Shared Values:

God as Creator; Reality of Judgment/Hell; Importance of Charity; Condemnation of Greed; Sovereignty of God

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Salvation is explicitly linked to the act of giving money (v. 18) and personal righteousness.
2. [Critical] Christology (Sufficiency of Christ) – Christ is absent. The text assumes the human agent can save themselves from the 'blazing Hellfire' through their own resources (wealth/will).
3. [Major] Sola Gratia (Grace Alone) – Divine help is conditional upon human effort ('As for him who gives... We will direct him').

Semantic Warnings:

"Salvation"

In Text: Attainment of divine pleasure and avoidance of fire through purification of self via charity.

Evangelical: Deliverance from the penalty and power of sin solely through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Example: *In Surah 92:21, 'He will certainly attain salvation' is the result of giving money. In Acts 4:12, salvation is found in no one else but Jesus.*

"Righteousness"

In Text: Active moral behavior and almsgiving (Taqwa/Sadaqa).

Evangelical: A legal standing granted by God through faith (Justification).

Example: *Surah 92:5 speaks of one who 'maintains righteousness' as a prerequisite for blessing.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Avoidance of Hellfire (v. 17) and attaining a state of satisfaction/pleasure (v. 21).

How Attained: By giving to charity, maintaining righteousness, and upholding scripture.

Basis of Assurance: Subjective assurance based on the purity of one's own intent ('Seeking only his Lord').

Comparison to Sola Fide: Surah 92:18 ('Who gives from his money... [to] attain salvation') stands in direct opposition to Romans 4:4-5 ('to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness').

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Give to charity (v. 5, 18)
2. Maintain righteousness (v. 5)
3. Uphold the scripture (v. 6)
4. Seek only the Lord (v. 20)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Purify intentions from seeking human reciprocity
2. Avoid stinginess and reliance on wealth
3. Acknowledge God's ownership of the Hereafter

Ritual Requirements:

1. Zakat/Sadaqa (implied by 'gives to charity')

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. Verse 20 mentions seeking the Lord with absolutely no desire for anything in return. Do you feel your heart is capable of 100% pure motives, or do you struggle with mixed intentions?

2. Verse 11 says money cannot help when we fall (die), but verse 18 says giving money helps us avoid the fire. How do you reconcile the inability of wealth to save with the command to use wealth to be saved?
3. If God directs us to happiness *after* we give and are righteous (v. 5-7), who helps us when we are too weak or sinful to start that process?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Desire for Ease/Happiness – The text acknowledges the human longing for the 'easy path' or 'happiness.' Jesus answers this longing not by demanding payment, but by offering His yoke. [Matthew 11:28-30 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.']
2. The Night and Day – Just as day reveals what night hides, the Gospel reveals the true state of the heart which works cannot cover. [John 3:19-21 'Light has come into the world... whoever lives by the truth comes into the light.']

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The believer is placed on a treadmill where their eternal destiny depends on the consistency of their charity and righteousness. There is no 'finished work' to rest in.
2. Introspective Uncertainty [Moderate] – Verse 20 demands 'Seeking only his Lord.' This requires perfect purity of motive. A sensitive conscience will always doubt if their charity was truly 100% for God or if vanity crept in, threatening their salvation.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct Revelation/Prophetic Warning

Verification Method: Observational confirmation (Night/Day) linked to moral intuition.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the finished canon of Scripture (Hebrews 1:1-2). This text claims new binding revelation that redefines the criteria for righteousness.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Early Meccan Period (Traditional Islamic dating).

Authorship: Attributed to Muhammad via Gabrielic revelation; Khalifa translation (1978) imposes 'Quranist' interpretive choices.

Textual Issues: Khalifa translates verse 6 as 'upholds the scripture.' Standard translations (Pickthall, Yusuf Ali) render this 'testifies to the best' (Kalima/Truth). Khalifa's rendering narrows the meaning to textual adherence.