

SURAH 93 (AL-DUHA - THE FORENOON)

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

OVERVIEW

Surah 93, Al-Duha (The Forenoon), is a Meccan surah traditionally understood to have been revealed after a period of silence (fatrah) where Muhammad received no revelations and feared he had been abandoned by God. The text opens with cosmic oaths by the morning light and the darkening night to assert that God has neither forsaken nor forgotten His messenger. It offers a three-fold structure of reassurance: first, an eschatological promise that the future (or Hereafter) will be better than the present; second, a historical review of God's providence in Muhammad's life—citing his transition from orphanhood to shelter, from being 'astray' to guided, and from poverty to sufficiency. Finally, the text pivots to ethical imperatives, grounding the obligation to care for orphans and beggars in the gratitude owed to God for His previous deliverance. For the adherent, it serves as a source of comfort during spiritual dryness and a command to manifest gratitude through social justice.

KEY FIGURES

Allah (The Lord), The Recipient (Muhammad), The Orphan, The Beggar

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. DIVINE SUSTENANCE AND PROTECTION

Assertion: God actively intervenes in the life of His chosen servant to provide shelter, guidance, and wealth.

"Did He not find you orphaned and He gave you a home? He found you astray, and guided you." (93:6-7)

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicalism affirms God's providential care (Matthew 6:26), but this text utilizes providence to validate Muhammad's prophetic office. The specific claim that God found him 'astray' and guided him is theologically significant. In Evangelical theology, being 'astray' (Isaiah 53:6) implies a need for atonement, whereas here it implies a need for informational guidance or prophetic instruction. The text presents God as the Sustainer who demands gratitude, paralleling biblical teaching, but lacks the covenantal framework of Fatherhood found in the New Testament.

2. THE PRIORITY OF THE HEREAFTER

Assertion: The life to come is qualitatively superior to the present earthly life.

"The Hereafter is far better for you than this first (life)." (93:4)

Evangelical Comparison: Both traditions agree that the current world is temporary and the future state is superior. However, the Evangelical focus is on being 'with Christ' (Philippians 1:23) as the defining joy of the afterlife. In this text, the promise is vague ('better for you') but implies vindication and reward. The assurance is given specifically to Muhammad, whereas biblical assurance is given to all believers in Christ.

3. RETRIBUTIVE ETHICS

Assertion: Moral behavior toward the weak is a required response to God's past favor.

"Therefore, you shall not forsake the orphan." (93:9)

Evangelical Comparison: The logic of the text is: God helped you when you were weak; therefore, you must help the weak. This is ethically identical to Old Testament law (Deuteronomy 15:15). Evangelicalism affirms this ethic (James 1:27) but grounds the ability to perform it in the indwelling Holy Spirit and the regeneration of the believer, rather than as a condition of maintaining favor or simple duty.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the nature of the 'guidance' mentioned in verse 7. The text claims God found Muhammad 'astray' and guided him. In Islamic theology, this is often interpreted as being unguided

regarding the details of monotheism before revelation, but protected from sin (Ismah). In Evangelical theology, all humans are 'astray' due to original sin and require redemption, not just instruction. Furthermore, the text centers the assurance of salvation on God's direct dealing with Muhammad, bypassing the necessity of the Incarnation and Atonement. The comfort offered is theistic but not Christocentric.

Shared Values:

Compassion for orphans and the poor; Gratitude to God; Trust in God during difficult times; Belief in an afterlife

Friction Points:

1. [Major] Christology / Anthropology – Implicitly denies the universal need for atonement by suggesting 'guidance' is the solution to being 'astray'.
2. [Moderate] Sola Fide – Links the reception of God's favor to the fulfillment of law (caring for orphans) without a mediator.

Semantic Warnings:

"Astray (Dallan)"

In Text: Unaware of scripture/law, seeking truth but not yet possessing specific revelation (often interpreted softly to protect prophetic sinlessness).

Evangelical: Spiritually lost, separated from God by sin, sheep gone astray needing a Shepherd to die for them (Isaiah 53:6).

Example: *In this text, being 'astray' is cured by revelation/guidance. In the Bible, being 'astray' is cured by the Shepherd bearing the iniquity of the sheep.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Guidance from error, provision in poverty, and ultimate satisfaction in the Hereafter.

How Attained: Initiated by God's choice (finding the recipient) and maintained through gratitude and obedience to social laws.

Basis of Assurance: God's past track record of provision.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text does not mention faith in a redeemer. It focuses on the direct action of God upon the individual and the individual's moral response. It lacks the forensic justification found in Romans 3-5.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Do not forsake/oppress the orphan (v9)
2. Do not reprimand/drive away the beggar (v10)
3. Proclaim the blessings of the Lord (v11)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Maintain hope during periods of spiritual silence
2. Remember past blessings to endure present trials
3. Acknowledge one's former state of need (poverty/lostness)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The Surah says God found the Prophet 'astray' and guided him. What do you think it means to be 'astray' in God's eyes?
2. This passage offers great comfort by looking at past blessings. How do you find assurance when you don't see immediate blessings or when God feels silent?
3. The text commands us not to forsake the orphan. In the Injil (Gospel), Jesus says He will not leave us as orphans (John 14:18). How does that promise compare to the command here?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Orphan – Humanity is spiritually orphaned, separated from the Father. God doesn't just give us a home (structure); He adopts us as sons and daughters. [John 14:18 ('I will not leave you as orphans'), Romans 8:15 ('Spirit of adoption')]
2. The Silence of God – Jesus experienced the ultimate silence and abandonment of God on the cross so that we would never have to be truly abandoned. [Matthew 27:46 ('My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?')]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty of Status [Moderate] – The text implies that God's silence caused fear of abandonment. The believer must constantly look for signs of favor to know they are not hated/forsaken.
2. Performance/Gratitude Debt [Mild] – The imperative 'Therefore' (v9) links past grace to future performance. The believer carries the weight of needing to 'pay back' God's kindness through perfect social behavior to avoid ingratitude.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Wahy)

Verification Method: Self-referential assertion of the text and the subjective experience of the recipient (Muhammad) recognizing the truth of his own biography in the verses.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on historical verification of the Resurrection and the internal witness of the Spirit through the written Word (1 Corinthians 15:3-8, 2 Timothy 3:16). This text relies on the authority of the speaker (Allah) validating the experience of the prophet, without external witnesses to the revelation event.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Early Meccan Period (approx. 610-614 AD).

Authorship: Attributed to Allah via the Angel Gabriel to Muhammad; Critical scholars view it as Muhammad's composition reflecting his internal psychological state.

Textual Issues: The translation of 'Dallan' (v7) is a point of theological contention. Khalifa translates it as 'astray,' while some apologetic translations render it 'unaware' or 'seeking' to avoid implying the Prophet was ever in error.