

# SURAH 99:1-8

FAITH: Islam | TEXT: Surah 99 (Al-Zalzalah) | VOLUME: The Meaning of the Holy Quran | AUTHOR: Rashad Khalifa (Translator)

## OVERVIEW

Surah 99, titled 'The Earthquake' (Al-Zalzalah), presents a vivid eschatological narrative central to Islamic theology. It opens with the cataclysmic final shaking of the earth, a standard motif in apocalyptic literature, where the earth 'ejects its loads'—interpreted as the resurrection of the dead and the revealing of secrets. The text personifies the earth as a witness that testifies against humanity under the direct command of God. The climax of the text is the assertion of perfect, granular accountability: humanity issues forth to see their works, and judgment is rendered based on the 'atom's weight' of good or evil. This establishes a theology of strict retributive justice where salvation is contingent upon the accumulation of merit and the avoidance of sin, down to the smallest particle. In the Khalifa translation, the language emphasizes the scientific precision ('atom's weight') of this judgment.

## KEY FIGURES

The Lord (God/Allah), The Earth (Personified Witness), The Human (The subject of judgment)

## DOCTRINES ANALYZED

### 1. GRANULAR ACCOUNTABILITY (MIZAN)

**Assertion:** Every single deed, no matter how microscopic ('atom's weight'), is recorded, revealed, and factored into the final judgment.

"Whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it. And whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it. (99:7-8)"

**Evangelical Comparison:** This doctrine establishes a forensic system where the individual bears the full weight of their history. In Evangelical theology, while works are evidenced at the Bema Seat (2 Cor 5:10), the believer's standing for salvation is secured by Christ's imputed righteousness (Romans 4:5-8). The 'atom's weight' doctrine implies that no sin is covered or washed away in the absolute sense required for salvation; rather, it is weighed against good deeds. This creates a 'ledger theology' opposed to the 'covenant theology' of grace found in the New Testament (Hebrews 8:12: 'For I will be merciful... and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more').

### 2. PERSONIFICATION OF CREATION

**Assertion:** The physical earth possesses consciousness and memory, acting as a witness for God on Judgment Day.

"On that day, it will tell its news. That your Lord has commanded it. (99:4-5)"

**Evangelical Comparison:** The Bible uses personification of nature (Luke 19:40, Romans 8:22), but usually as a metaphor for creation's groaning or testimony to God's glory. In this text, the earth serves a prosecutorial role, revealing the secrets ('loads') of humanity. This heightens the sense of inescapable surveillance; the very ground the believer stands on is recording their actions for future testimony.

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

**Divergence Status:** Yes

**Theological Gap:** The fundamental gap lies in the mechanism of justification. Surah 99 presents a terrifyingly precise meritocracy: 'Whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it.' There is no mention of mercy, atonement, or intercession in this specific text. It is a closed system of act-and-consequence. Evangelicalism posits that if judgment were based on an 'atom's weight' of evil, no human could stand (Psalm 130:3). Therefore, the Gospel introduces the alien righteousness of Christ (Philippians 3:9) as the only sufficient covering for the judgment described in this Surah.

### Shared Values:

Belief in a literal Day of Judgment; Bodily Resurrection; God as the Sovereign Judge; Human accountability for actions

### Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – The text implies salvation is the result of the sum of one's atomic-level deeds, contradicting justification by faith apart from works.
2. [Critical] Christology (Sufficiency of Christ) – The text assumes the individual stands alone before God to see their works, denying the role of Christ as Advocate and Mediator (1 John 2:1).

### Semantic Warnings:

#### "Works (Good/Evil)"

**In Text:** The currency of salvation; the raw material weighed to determine eternal destiny.

**Evangelical:** The fruit of salvation; evidence of a regenerate heart, but not the meritorious basis for acceptance by God (Ephesians 2:8-10).

**Example:** *In Surah 99, seeing one's works is the basis of the verdict. In Revelation 20:12, works are judged, but the 'Book of Life' determines the destination.*

## SOTERIOLOGY

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**Salvation Defined:** Implicitly, surviving the terror of the Quake and having one's good deeds recognized.

**How Attained:** By doing good deeds (atoms of good) and avoiding evil.

**Basis of Assurance:** None provided in the text; assurance is impossible until the deeds are actually shown.

**Comparison to Sola Fide:** Directly opposes Sola Fide. The text offers 'Sola Actus' (Deeds Alone) as the criterion for the verdict.

## MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

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### Implicit Obligations:

1. Perform good deeds, even microscopic ones
2. Avoid evil deeds, even microscopic ones
3. Live in awareness of the coming Judgment Day

## EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

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### Discovery Questions:

1. This Surah says we will see even an 'atom's weight' of evil we have done. How do you deal with the millions of 'atoms' of sin you may have committed but forgotten?
2. If the earth records everything and God exposes everything, is there any place in your faith where sins are not just outweighed, but actually washed away and forgotten?
3. How much 'good' is required to offset a single 'atom' of disobedience against an infinite God?

### Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Inescapable Record – Just as the Surah describes an inescapable record of our lives, the Bible agrees that our sins are recorded. However, the Gospel offers a way for that record to be expunged. Colossians 2:14 describes Jesus 'canceling the record of debt' by nailing it to the cross. [Colossians 2:13-14]

### Spiritual Weight:

1. Hyper-Vigilance / Anxiety [Severe] – The believer must be constantly vigilant about 'atom's weight' actions. This creates a psychological burden where no action is too small to potentially condemn, leading to scrupulosity and fear of the unknown tally.
2. Isolation in Judgment [Moderate] – The text depicts the human issuing forth to see \*their\* works. There is a profound sense of aloneness; no family, no mediator, just the individual and their exposed history.

## EPISTEMOLOGY

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**Knowledge Source:** Prophetic Revelation (Wahi)

**Verification Method:** Future verification (Eschatological verification)—the truth will be known only when the event occurs.

**Evangelical Contrast:** Biblical epistemology relies on the historical resurrection of Jesus as the guarantee of future judgment (Acts 17:31), whereas this text relies on the authority of the Quranic recitation itself.

## TEXTUAL CRITICISM

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**Dating:** Meccan Period (Early Islamic revelation)

**Authorship:** Attributed to Muhammad via Gabriel; Khalifa translation (1978) is a modern submissionist interpretation.

**Textual Issues:** Khalifa's translation uses 'atom's weight' which aligns with traditional translations (mithqala dharratin), though Khalifa often sought mathematical codes in the text. The core meaning remains consistent with standard Islamic theology.