

| Jews in the Qur'ān: An Evaluation of the Naming and the Content | |
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| Author | Salime Leyla Gürkan - PhD (Lancaster University) |
| Names for Jews | <p>Banū Isrā'īl, al-Yahūd, Yahūdī, Hūd, alladhīna hādū, ahl al-kitāb, ahl al-dhikr, alladhīna ūtū al-kitāb</p> <p>لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا الَّذِي آمَنَتْ بِهِ بَنُو إِسْرَائِيلَ وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ مَا كَانَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ يَهُودِيًّا وَقَالُوا كُونُوا هُودًا مِّنَ الَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَدَّ كَثِيرٌ مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ فَاسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ لَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ</p> <p>The Qur'anic 'Banū Isrā'īl' is used mostly in relation to the period between the times of the Prophets Moses and Jesus</p> <p>The Qur'anic 'al-yahud' is used almost entirely with reference to the period of Islam</p> |
| Emphasizing commonalities | <p>Despite the existence of some hostile groups or individuals among the people of the book, a positive tone is preserved by emphasizing common points between them and Muslims</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; Our God and your God is one; and it is to Him we surrender" <p>وَقُولُوا آمَنَّا بِالَّذِي أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَأُنزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَإِلَهُنَا وَإِلَهُكُمْ وَاحِدٌ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ</p> |
| Not all bad | <p>The Qur'an highlights that among them are good and bad</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Not all of them are alike: of the People of the Book are a group that stand ... they enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and they hasten in good works" <p>لَيْسُوا سَوَاءً مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ أُمَّةٌ قَائِمَةٌ</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "There is from among them a party on the right course but many of them follow a course that is evil" <p>مِنْهُمْ أُمَّةٌ مُّقْتَصِدَةٌ وَكَثِيرٌ مِنْهُمْ سَاءَ مَا يَعْمَلُونَ</p> |
| Categories of good | <p>The well-behaved among the people of the book, those who believe in the Prophet in secret, and those who believe in the Prophet openly</p> <p>If the verses praising the ahl al-kitāb only referred to those among them who became Muslim, it would beg the question why they continued to be called ahl al-kitāb and not simply Muslims</p> |
| The bad apples | <p>Verses critical of the ahl al-kitāb are mainly directed at the better educated, especially among the Jews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "And when there comes to them a Book from Allah, confirming what is with them, although before they had prayed for victory" |

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| | <p>against those who disbelieve, when there comes to them that which they [should] have recognized, they refuse to believe in it”</p> <p>وَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ كِتَابٌ مِّنْ عِندِ اللَّهِ مُصَدِّقٌ لِّمَا مَعَهُمْ وَكَانُوا مِن قَبْلُ يَسْتَفْهِحُونَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ مَّا عَرَفُوا كَفَرُوا بِهِ</p> |
| Banū Isrāʾīl in the Qurʾan | <p>In the Meccan verses, the term is used as a reference to the historical people and the main themes are the encounter of Prophet Moses with Pharaoh and the saving of the people of Israel under the leadership of Moses from their slavery in Egypt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The people of Israel are mentioned as a people living a persecuted life due to their faith <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Early Muslims are reminded that the people of Israel were eventually rescued and elevated by God - “And We made a people, considered weak [and of no account], inheritors of lands in both east and west, lands whereon We sent down Our blessings” <p>وَأَوْرَثْنَا الْقَوْمَ الَّذِينَ كَانُوا يُسْتَضْعَفُونَ مَشَارِقَ الْأَرْضِ وَمَغَارِبَهَا الَّتِي بَارَكْنَا فِيهَا</p> <p>In the Medinan passages, the emphasis is on the covenant made between God and the people of Israel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - God took their word and showed His favor to them by giving them the book and sending them prophets - In these later passages, a comparison is implied between the insincerity and hostility of the Jews toward Muslims and the opposition of the people of Israel against their prophets and their repeated breaking of the covenant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “We took the covenant of the Children of Israel and sent them messengers. Every time there came to them a messenger with what they themselves desired not, some they called impostors, and some they slay” <p>لَقَدْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ وَارْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهِمْ رَسُولًا كُلَّمَا جَاءَهُمْ رَسُولٌ بِمَا لَا تَهْوَىٰ أَنفُسُهُمْ فَرِيقًا كَذَّبُوا وَفَرِيقًا يَقْتُلُونَ</p> |
| Jewish scholars and laymen in the Qurʾan | <p>The Qurʾan recognizes that there are those who “judged the Jews by God’s Scripture,” on the other hand, there are those who “distort the Scripture with their tongues”</p> <p>إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا التَّوْرَةَ فِيهَا هُدًى وَنُورٌ □ يَحْكُمُ بِهَا النَّبِيُّونَ الَّذِينَ أَسْلَمُوا لِلَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالرَّبَّانِيُّونَ وَالْأَحْبَارُ بِمَا اسْتُحْفِظُوا مِن كِتَابِ اللَّهِ وَكَانُوا عَلَيْهِ شُهَدَاءَ وَإِنَّ مِنْهُمْ لَفَرِيقًا يَلُودُونَ أَلْسِنَتَهُم بِالْكِتَابِ لِتَحْسَبُوهُ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَمَا هُوَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ</p> <p>Ordinary Jews are criticized for “taking their rabbis to be their lords” and “not knowing their Scripture”</p> <p>اتَّخَذُوا أَحْبَارَهُمْ وَرُهَبَانَهُمْ أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَمِنْهُمْ أُمِّيُونَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا أَمَانِيٍّ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَا يَظُنُّونَ</p> |
| Main criticism | <p>Jews’ resistance to the message of the Qurʾan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “And when it is said to them, ‘Believe in what Allah has revealed,’ they say, ‘We believe [only] in what was revealed to us.’ And they disbelieve in what came after it, while it is the |

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| | <p>truth confirming that which is with them”</p> <p>وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ آمِنُوا بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا تَأْمِنُوا بِمَا نُنَزِّلُ عَلَيْنَا وَيَكْفُرُونَ بِمَا وَرَاءَهُ وَهُوَ الْحَقُّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا مَعَهُمْ</p> |
| Criticism in the Bible and Torah | <p>Jewish religious leaders are mentioned as acting against Jesus and his followers and being responsible for his killing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Matthew 26:59: “The chief priests and the elders and the entire Sanhedrin searched for false witness against Jesus to put Him to death” <p>The Torah mentions the people of Israel frequently acting in a disobedient way despite the covenant they made</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Numbers 14:23: “Because all those men seeing My glory and My signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted Me now these ten times, and have not listened to My voice” <p>Both the Qur’an and the Bible testify to the wrongdoings of the people of Israel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Judges 2:11-12: “The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. They abandoned the Lord God of their fathers, who brought them out of the land of Egypt. They followed after other gods, the gods of the peoples around them. They worshiped them and provoked the Lord to anger” |
| Comparison to the Qur’an | <p>The critical tone of the Qur’an toward Jews is not as harsh as the criticism expressed in the Hebrew Bible and in the New Testament</p> |
| Salvation | <p>Belief in the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is a necessary condition for salvation</p> |
| Ibn ‘Āshūr | <p>“If the People of the Book had believed and feared Allah, We would have written off their evil deeds and would have surely admitted them to the Gardens of Bliss”</p> <p>وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ آمَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَكَفَرْنَا عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ وَلَادْخَلْنَا لَهُمْ جَنَّاتِ النَّعِيمِ</p> <p>- والمراد بقوله {آمَنُوا} الإيمان بمحمد ﷺ</p> |
| Ibn Kathīr | <p>“Say, ‘O people of the Book, you have nothing to stand on, unless you uphold the Torah and the Injīl and what has been sent down to you from your Lord”</p> <p>قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لَسْتُمْ عَلَى شَيْءٍ حَتَّى تُقِيمُوا التَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ وَمَا أَنزَلَ إِلَيْكُم مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ</p> <p>- أي حتى تؤمنوا بجميع ما بأيديكم من الكتب المنزلة من الله على الأنبياء ، وتعملوا بما فيها ومما فيها الأمر باتباع محمد ﷺ والإيمان بمبعثه</p> |
| Ibn ‘Āshūr | <p>“So if they believe as you believe, they are indeed on the right path”</p> <p>فَإِنْ آمَنُوا بِمِثْلِ مَا آمَنْتُمْ بِهِ فَقَدْ اهْتَدَوْا</p> <p>- وليسوا قبل ذلك على هدى خلافاً لزعمهم أنهم عليه من قولهم : {كونوا هوداً أو نصارى تهتدوا} فدل مفهوم الشرط على أنهم ليسوا على هدى ما داموا غير مؤمنين بالإسلام</p> <p>“O you People of the Book! Believe in what We have [now] revealed,</p> |

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| Baghawī | <p>confirming what was [already] with you, before We rub off faces and turn them shaped like their backs, or lay a curse upon them”</p> <p>يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ آمِنُوا بِمَا نَزَّلْنَا مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا مَعَكُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ نَطْمِسَ وُجُوهًا فَنَرُدَّهَا عَلَى أَدْبَارِهَا أَوْ تَلْعَنَهُمْ</p> <p>- (آمِنُوا بِمَا نَزَّلْنَا) يعني القرآن ، (مصدقًا لما معكم) يعني التوراة</p> |
| Change in tone | <p>There is a gradual change in style of the verses on the people of the book</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The seemingly harsh verses must be understood within the context of the relations between the Prophet and the Jews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Jews of Medina acted against the Muslim community in the most critical times, despite their being in a covenant relationship with them <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Those with whom you have entered into a treaty, then they break their treaty each time, and they do not fear Allah” <p>الَّذِينَ عَاهَدْتَ مِنْهُمْ ثُمَّ يَنْقُضُونَ عَهْدَهُمْ فِي كُلِّ مَرَّةٍ وَهُمْ لَا يَتَّقُونَ</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - وهم بنو قريظة ، نقضوا العهد الذي كان بينهم وبين رسول الله ﷺ ، وأعانوا المشركين بالسلاح على قتال النبي ﷺ وأصحابه ، ثم قالوا : نسينا وأخطأنا فعاهدناهم الثانية ، فنقضوا العهد ومالوا الكفار على رسول الله ﷺ يوم الخندق - The Medinan verses, similarly, emphasize the betrayal of the people of Israel of their covenant with God |
| Friendship | <p>Verses such as “take not the Jews and Christians for friends/protectors” are in reference to times of war and do not preclude having civil relations in times of peace</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had commercial relations with the Jews - The Prophet ﷺ purchased food grains from a Jew on credit and mortgaged his iron armor to him <p>أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ ﷺ اشْتَرَى طَعَامًا مِنْ يَهُودِيٍّ إِلَى أَجَلٍ، وَرَهْنَهُ دِرْعًا مِنْ حَدِيدٍ</p> |