

Is the Quran Anti-Semitic?

(part 1 of 2): The Semites, a Chosen People



There is a huge cry these days by certain groups claiming that the Quran is anti-Semitic, even leading to certain of its translations being banned in various school districts in the United States of America.^[1] We read about the definition of anti-Semitism in the Jewish Encyclopedia:

“The term ‘Anti-Semitism’ has its origin in the ethnological theory that the Jews, as Semites, are entirely different from the Aryan, or Indo-European, populations and can never be amalgamated with them. The word implies that the Jews are not opposed on account of their religion, but on account of their racial characteristics.”^[2]

One will immediately realize from this statement that the Quran is not at all anti-Semitic, and that the verses which do reprimand the Jews are specific to certain transgressions they made in regards to their religion, and not in regard to their racial origin.

Who are the Semites?

Biblically, the most general designation of the Semites are all the descendants of Shem, one of the three sons of Noah, either the first or the last in conflicting opinions of biblical scholars, but always the first mentioned.^[3] It was in the house of Shem were the *Shekinah*^[4] was to dwell, and he is singled out with much other praise and blessings in the Bible. “...it is clear that,

according to the Biblical classification, the Arabs, Babylonians, Assyrians, Arameans, and Hebrews were regarded as Semites, or the descendants of Shem.”^[5] Modern scholars, placing greater emphasis on language derivation, include Abyssinians, Phenicians, Canaanites, Hebrews, Moabites, and Edomites to those mentioned before.

In whichever context we discuss the subjects, the Arabs, like the Hebrews (and thus Jews), are clearly Semites as well. Thus to say that the Quran is anti-Semitic is to say that the Quran makes the entire Semitic race inferior others, and that would include Arabs as well, something improbable as God favored both these nations with Prophets.

In rabbinical texts of the Jews, the priesthood of Shem is transferred to Abraham, and it is from this transference of priesthood that the Jews take themselves to be the chosen people and claim ownership of the lands of Canaan, in which lies present day Palestine. As they claim the *Shekinah* to have transferred to Abraham and his progeny, specifically Isaac, and thus the Semitic preference of God is specific to them, and more specifically the Israelites, the progeny of Israel, also known as Isaac, son of Abraham.

The Semites, “A Chosen People”

Rather than rendering the Israelites as being an inferior race, the Quran affirms their favorable position amongst humanity. This is due to the immense sacrifices of Abraham and his invocations to God to make prophets from his progeny that God had chosen his children as the receptacles of Prophecy. Abraham called to his Lord:

“And We bestowed upon him (Abraham) Isaac and Jacob, each of them We guided, and before him, We guided Noah, and among his progeny David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, and Aaron. Thus do We reward the good doers. And Zachariah, and John and Jesus and Elias, each one of them was of the righteous. And Ishmael and Elisha, and Jonah and Lot, and each one of them We preferred above all the worlds. And also some of their fathers and their progeny and their brethren, We chose them, and We guided them to a Straight Path. This is the Guidance of God with which He guides whomsoever He will of His slaves. But if they had joined in worship others with God, all that they used to do would have been of no benefit to them. They are those whom We gave the Book, the Understanding, and Prophethood...” (Quran 6:83-87)

The Israelites are a chosen people, because God chose to raise prophets amongst them. The Quran in numerous places recognizes this favor and reminds the Israelites of it.

“O Children of Israel (the Israelites), remember and mention the favor which I bestowed upon you, and that I favored you amongst all the worlds.” (Quran 2:47, 2:122)

“And indeed We gave the Children of Israel (the Israelites) the Scripture, and the understanding of the Scripture and its laws, and the Prophethood; and provided them with good things, and preferred them above all the worlds.” (Quran 45:16)

God favored them with numerous blessings in addition to the Prophets, such as providing them heavenly food, called *manna* and *salwaa*.^[6]

“O Children of Israel (the Israelites)! We delivered you from your enemy, and We made a covenant with you on the right side of the Mount, and We sent down to you Manna and quails (salwaa).” (Quran 20:80)

God saved them from the savagery of Pharaoh by sending to them Moses, who led them across the Red Sea to inhabit the “Blessed Land” of Canaan.

“And We made the people who were considered weak to inherit the eastern parts of the land and the western parts thereof which We have blessed. And the fair Word of your Lord was fulfilled for the Children of Israel (the Israelites), because of their endurance. And We destroyed completely all the great works and buildings which Pharaoh and his people erected.” (Quran 7:137)

This preference given to the Israelites was not on account of their racial superiority, as mentioned earlier, but rather due to the great sacrifices of Abraham and his supplications which God answered, and this preference was given to the Israelites as long as they kept to their covenant which God made with them.

“Indeed God took the covenant from the Children of Israel (Jews), and We appointed twelve leaders among them. And God said: “I am with you if you establish the prayer and offer the Zakat (compulsory charity) and believe in My Messengers; honor and assist them, and lend to God a good loan. Verily, I will remit your sins and admit you to Gardens under which rivers flow (in Paradise). But if any of you after this, disbelieved, he has indeed gone astray from the Straight Path.” (Quran 5:12)

[1] *CAIR distributes Quran banned as anti-Semitic*. By Art Moore © 2005 WorldNetDaily.com. (http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=44543).

[2] Anti-Semitism. Gotthard Deutsch. The Jewish Encyclopedia(http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view_friendly.jsp?artid=1603&letter=A).

[3] *Shem*. Emil G. Hirsch, Ira Maurice Price, Wilhelm Bacher, M. Seligsohn. The Jewish Encyclopedia (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=592&letter=S>).

[4] A word denoting the “presence of God”, about which Biblical scholars have differed much over its exact reality. *Shekinah*. Kaufmann Kohler, Ludwig Blau. The Jewish Encyclopedia (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=588&letter=S>).

[5] *Anti-Semitism*. Gotthard Deutsch. The Jewish Encyclopedia (http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view_friendly.jsp?artid=1603&letter=A)

[6] Also in Exodus 16.

(part 2 of 2): Abiding by the Covenant

God's Favor is in keeping to the Commandments

As mentioned earlier, the favor of God towards the Israelites was with them as long as they kept to the Covenant which God made with them. This fact is also stated by Jews themselves: “Because of our acceptance of Torah, Jews have a special status in the eyes of G-d, but we lose that special status when we abandon Torah.”^[1]

Thus we understand that the favor of God is not a racial aspect, nor is it binding till eternity. Rather, His favor is upon those that fulfill the commandments. An Israelite who does not keep to the commandments is not included in this favor.

The Jews broke the Covenant of God

God mentions in numerous places in the Quran that the Jews broke the covenant God made with them, through various transgressions they committed in their religion. These transgressions, varied from falling in to error and worshipping others besides God, an act which broke the first of the ten commandments^[2], to changing and interpolating the Torah to their befitting^[3]. Out of the Mercy of God, He continued to send prophets to them for their rectification. Instead of following the Prophets which God sent to them, if they brought something which the Rabbis did not like, they would reject the Prophets and even kill them. This certainly amounted to disbelief in God, and, due to this, the favor which God had for the Jews was lifted. God says in the Quran:

“Indignity is put over them (the Jews) wherever they may be, except when under a covenant (of protection) from God, and from men; they have drawn on themselves the Wrath of God, and destruction is put over them. This is

because they disbelieved in the Signs of God and killed the Prophets without right. This is because they disobeyed (God) and used to transgress beyond bounds (in God's disobedience, crimes and sins).” (Quran 3:112)

The Bible too speaks this fact of the Jews killing the prophets of God in 1 Thessalonians 2:15, and repeated in Acts 7:52. We also read in Romans 11:3 that the Prophet Elijah appealed against the Israelites:

“Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me.”

One of the most serious of these offenses was the rejection of Jesus, a clear sign and miracle sent to the Jews. It was through this Prophet that the favor of God towards the Jews as a nation was replaced by His Anger and Wrath. The only Jews who remained “chosen” were those who followed Jesus: the Nazarene Christians^[4].

Are Christians the Chosen People of God?

A fact that Christians and Muslims both agree to, contrary to the Jews, is that the Love of God is not limited or specific to a chosen race, but rather, to those who keep to his covenants. Although Jesus was sent specifically to the Jews^[5], Christianity has seen itself throughout history to be a religion for all people. Thus, according to Christians, anyone who accepts the teachings of Jesus earns the Love of God and His Grace and Favor, and anyone who rejects it is doomed to Hell.

This is a point which Muslims also agree to, but the fact remains that the Christians do not actually follow the teachings of Jesus, as He ordered his followers to keep to the commandment of the Jews, the greatest of which is that God alone deserves worship. It is the Christians’ worship of Jesus and ascribing divinity to him that is one of the reasons why they have also earned the anger and not the favor of God.

Reprimanding of Other Peoples

When we analyze the verses which reprimand the Jews in the Quran, we see, as mentioned previously, that they revolve around certain commandments which they broke, and certain punishments which were meted out to them. This criticism is not limited to the Jews, but it is clearly extended in the Quran and Sunnah to all those who disobey the commandments of God throughout history until this day, even the Muslims. God says about a Muslim who kills another Muslim intentionally:

“And whoever kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell to abide therein, and the Wrath and the Curse of God are upon him, and a great punishment is prepared for him.” (Quran 4:93)

We see from this that these severe verses found in the Quran are addressed to all those who break the commandments of God, and not to specific races or peoples. Likewise, the only people who are chosen and favored by God are the pious from every nation, and not a specific race or people. Jews, Christians, and all others who were true to their religion and original teachings will go to Paradise, as God himself says:

“Verily! Those who have believed (the Muslims) and those who were Jews and Christians, and Sabians, whoever correctly believed in God and the Last Day and do righteous good deeds, they shall have their reward with their Lord, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.” (Quran 2:62)

Those, however, who did not follow the commandments of their religion, and do not believe in Islam, are destined to Hell. This is because Islam is the only religion which is accepted by God after the revelation of his Final Message to Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him.

“Verily those who disbelieve from among the People of the Scripture and the polytheists will abide in the Fire of Hell. They are the worst of creatures.” (Quran 98:6)

Footnotes:

[1] (<http://www.jewfaq.org/gentiles.htm>)

[2] Exodus 32, Quran 7:148

[3] Quran 2:75

[4] Acts 24:5: Tertullus named Paul, “the ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes”, though the Nazorite Church was actually presided over by ‘James, the Just’, Bishop of Jerusalem.

[5] Matthew 15:24: “He answered, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.’”