

of Qandahar, the Chihil Sutun, and its wall paintings, *Muqarnas* 11 (1994), 125–42. For an interdisciplinary study of the Chihil Sutun and other Šafavid palaces, see Sussan Babaie, *Isfahan and its palaces. Statecraft, Shiʿism and the architecture of conviviality in early modern Iran*, Edinburgh 2008.

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## Children of Israel (Banū Isrāʾīl)

The term **“Children of Israel”** (**Banū Isrāʾīl**) is generally used in the Qurʾān—as it was earlier in the Bible, in its Hebrew form, *Benei Yisraʾel*—for the Israelites of the time of Moses.

### 1. THE QURʾĀNIC EVIDENCE

The Children of Israel are also referred to as Moses’s “people” (*qawm*, e.g., Q 2:54, 60, 67; 7:128, 142, 155). As in the Bible (Genesis 32:29), Jacob is called “Israel” (Ar., *Isrāʾīl*) in the Qurʾān (3:93). And, as in the Bible (e.g., Genesis 36:31), the Qurʾānic term “Children of Israel” is not confined to Moses’s own time but encompasses all those ensuing generations amongst whom the biblical prophets were active. Accordingly, the Qurʾān (Q 2:246) describes as Children of Israel the contemporaries of Saul (ʿĀlūt), David (Q 5:78), and Jesus (Q 5:72, 78, 110; 43:59; 61:6, 14). Muḥammad’s own Jewish contemporaries also are described already in the Meccan *sūras* (Q 17:101; 26:197; 46:10) as Children of Israel, assuring them that the Qurʾān instructs them about themselves (Q 27:76).

The major gift to the Children of Israel, as described in the Meccan *sūras*, is the “book” that God gave to Moses to guide them (Q 17:2; 23:49; 28:43; 40:53). God not only gave Moses the book as guidance for the Children of Israel, He also

appointed among them leaders (*imāms*), who guided and persevered (*ṣabarū*) and believed in God’s signs (Q 32:23–4). By bestowing on them these merits, God has “preferred them above all beings” (Q 45:16). The Meccan *sūras* concentrate on their piety and devotion while suffering under the pharaoh’s persecution in Egypt. On account of their oppression, they are referred to repeatedly as “those who were deemed weak in the land” (*alladhīna ʾstudʾifū fī l-ard*) (e.g., Q 28:5). Their suffering under the pharaoh is described using heroic verbs derived from the root *ṣ-b-r*, which denotes perseverance (e.g., Q 7:128), and God describes them, during their exodus from Egypt, as “my servants” (*ʾibādī*, Q 20:77; 26:52). As their reward, God promises them a land “that we have blessed” (Q 7:137; cf. 26:59). They are ordered to dwell in the land, and God promises them that “when the promise of the last (*al-ākhirā*) shall come to pass, we shall bring you gathered together” (Q 17:104). This obscure phrasing stands perhaps for a promise to gather the scattered tribes of Israel at the end of days.

The Meccan *sūras*, however, assert that the book that Moses brought to the Children of Israel was not well received and that discord and dissension broke out regarding it (Q 11:110; 41:45; 45:17; cf. Q 10:93; 27:76). The Qurʾānic image of the Children of Israel, as it appears already in the Meccan *sūras*, is thus that of pious believers who have lost their faith in God and have consequently fallen out of grace. The range of their sins as described in the Meccan *sūras* is wide. It is stated that they sinned twice and were punished accordingly by the repeated destruction of their “mosque” (Q 17:4–7)—an allusion to the destruction of the First and Second Temples of the Israelites—but most of their sins had already been committed in

Moses's time, the most egregious being the making of the golden calf. This transgression is described retrospectively in the Meccan *sūras*, following closely upon the statement about the holy land that has been given them as reward for their piety. The sin of making the calf is attributed to the "people of Moses" and is followed by the smashing of the tablets (Q 7:148–53; see also Q 20:85–98). It reveals how the Children of Israel turned from being a righteous people to transgressors. Another aspect of their idolatrous deviation is their request of Moses to fashion them a god like the one worshipped by people whom they came upon after having crossed the sea (Q 7:138).

Another sin of the Children of Israel is their failure to say *ḥiṭṭa* (see Rubin, *Between Bible and Qurʾān*) when they are ordered to dwell in the abode that God has allotted them. Therefore God punishes them with wrath from heaven (7:160–8). The term *ḥiṭṭa* is usually explained as "repentance," but, because *ḥiṭṭa* in Hebrew means "wheat," one might see the origin of the story in the biblical account of the Israelite tribe who were commanded to say the Hebrew word *shibboleth* (meaning "ear [of grain]") in order to be permitted to cross the Jordan but pronounced it incorrectly (as *sibboleth*) and were therefore slain (Judges 12:5–6; for details see Rubin, *Between Bible and Qurʾān*, 83–9).

After the affair of *ḥiṭṭa*, the Qurʾānic passage relates the story of the people of a city by the sea who desecrated the Sabbath and were turned into despised apes as punishment (Q 7:163–6). Then God states that he will send against them, until the day of resurrection, people who will torture and chastise them. He has already scattered their tribes (*umam*) in the land, some of them righteous and some of them

not (Q 7:167–8). The Children of Israel are condemned more generally for being ungrateful to God, who has bestowed his benevolence upon them, delivered them from the pharaoh, and provided them with good things during their exodus (Q 14:6–8; 20:80–1).

The sins of the Children of Israel play a more prominent role in the Medinan *sūras*. The account of the making of the calf is reiterated (Q 2:54, 93), and in one instance (Q 4:153) it is imputed to the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*), a term usually applied to Muḥammad's Jewish and Christian contemporaries. The imputation of the sin of the calf to them implies that they are considered heirs to the sin of their Israelite forefathers.

The Israelite ingratitude towards God (Q 2:211) is emphasised through constant addresses to them, which open with the reproachful imperative "remember!" (*udhkurū*). These addresses remind them of the favours that God has done them (Q 2:40, 47–51, 92, 122; 5:20); those addressed seem to represent all the generations of the Children of Israel, including Muḥammad's contemporaries, that is, the Jews of Medina. This is intended to show that their ungrateful disbelief is hereditary. Likewise in Q 5:12–3, the Children of Israel are accused of distorting the book that has been revealed to them, thus violating the compact that God has made with them, according to which they undertook to pray and give alms and believe in God's messengers. Implicit here is the idea that Muḥammad's Jewish contemporaries refused to accept him as a true prophet, thus ignoring and distorting the message of their own Torah. In other Medinan passages those responsible for this misbehaviour are explicitly described as "Jews" (e.g., Q 4:46; 5:41). Muḥammad's Jewish contemporaries are

referred to also in Q 5:70–1, in which the Children of Israel are accused of violating God's covenant by rejecting or even killing the prophets who have been sent to them (cf. Jeremiah 2:30).

As for the ancient Children of Israel, the Medinan *sūras* repeat the account of the affair of *ḥiṭṭa* (Q 2:58–9) and describe additional sins at the time of Moses, which are not found in the Meccan *sūras*. They are not satisfied with the one food (manna) that was given them during the exodus (Q 2:61; cf. Numbers 11:4f.); they hurt Moses, by speaking against him (Q 61:5; 33:69; cf. Numbers 12:1f.); they refuse to enter the promised land and to wage war on its mighty inhabitants (Q 5:21–6; cf. Numbers 13–14); they are reluctant to obey God's instructions concerning the cow (Q 2:67–71); they request to see God openly (Q 2:55; 4:115; cf. Exodus 19:21).

Later generations of the Children of Israel are said to have been cursed by David and Jesus (Q 5:78). This Qur'ānic passage, at least according to Muslim exegetes, may refer to a statement made earlier in the same *sūra* (Q 5:60), concerning those whom God has cursed and turned into apes and swine (see also Q 2:65; 4:47).

The Medinan *sūras* denounce the Children of Israel of the time of Jesus for having disbelieved in the signs Jesus brought them (Q 5:110), but when those who hold that God is the son of Mary are denounced (Q 5:72), it is Muḥammad's Christian contemporaries to whom the Qur'ān refers.

The Children of Israel as a whole are condemned also for having violated the prohibition on homicide that was prescribed to them in their book (Q 5:32). More generally, they are rebuked for having violated and turned away from the compact that God made with them (Q 2:63–4), the same compact that,

according to Q 2:83, required that they serve none but God; be good to parents, other close relatives, orphans, and the needy; speak fairly to people; pray; and give alms. This seems to reflect the biblical ten commandments (Exodus 20:2–13; Deuteronomy 5:6–17). In violating their compact, the Children of Israel did not heed the message of their prophets and killed them instead (Q 5:70–1). Among those blamed are the Jews of Muḥammad's own time, whom God condemns for killing or expelling their own brethren, thus violating the compact he made with them (Q 2:84–6). The compact is mentioned again in connection with the People of the Book, who are said to have ignored it and concealed the book that was revealed to them (Q 3:187). In violating the compact they also desecrated the Sabbath and killed their prophets (Q 4:154–5).

But not all the Children of Israel sinned, reverted to disbelief, and fell from grace: some remained believers. In the Meccan *sūras* they are a tribe (*umma*) of believers among the people (*qaum*) of Moses, who “guide by the truth and, by it, act with justice” (Q 7:159). This seems to reflect Deuteronomy 33:10, in which Levi, the tribe of Moses, is praised: “They shall teach Jacob your ordinances and Israel your law.” In post-biblical Jewish Midrashim, the tribe of Levi is described as the children of Moses (*benei Moshe*), who live in moral and religious righteousness beyond the river Sambatyon (cf. Rubin, *Between Bible and Qur'ān*, 26–8). The Qur'ān seems to allude to them again in Q 10:83, where they are called the “offspring” (*durriyya*) of Moses who believe in Moses and do not fear the pharaoh. In the story of Korah (Qārūn)—the rich man who is said to have been of the “people of Moses” (Q 28:76–84)—the righteous among his people denounce his insolence and implore him to repent and do good.

Later generations of the Children of Israel also have righteous groups among them, who are referred to in Medinan *sūras*. In Saul's days they are those few (*qalīl*) who do not refuse to fight in God's cause (Q 2:246), and in Jesus's days they are a party (*ṭāʾifa*) that believes in Him (Q 61:14). There is also a minority of believers among the Children of Israel of Muḥammad's own time, and they too appear in Medinan *sūras*. In Q 5:13 they are those few who have not broken God's compact and are not treacherous, and in Q 2:83 again they are those few who have not turned away from the values of God's compact with the Children of Israel. Also mentioned is a righteous group among the People of the Book (Q 3:113–4, 199; cf. 5:66). One may assume that they are those Jews and Christians who maintained friendly relations with Muḥammad and did not reject his prophetic message.

## 2. THE EVIDENCE OF POST-QUR'ĀNIC SOURCES

The various aspects of the Qur'ānic image of the Children of Israel were adjusted to the dogmatic and political aims of elements of Islamic society during the first Islamic era. The Shīʿīs adopted the model of the image of the pious Israelites persecuted under the pharaoh. They identified the pharaoh with 'Alī's adversaries (especially Abū Bakr and 'Umar), who had deprived 'Alī of his rights as Muḥammad's lawful heir. Shīʿī tradition also turned the sinful Israelites—who made the calf, acted against Moses, refused to wage war on the inhabitants of the promised land, desecrated the Sabbath, were divided into parties, and killed their own prophets—into prototypes of 'Alī's adversaries (Rubin, *Between Bible and Qur'ān*, 76–82, 141–3). Orthodox Muslims have identified the sinful Israelites—especially those who were

turned into apes—with various heretical groups, such as the Qadarīs, Kharijīs, and Shīʿīs, who were blamed for spreading dissension among the Muslims and for desecrating the Qur'ān and the *sunna*. The discord they caused was compared to that among the Children of Israel and was condemned in traditions circulated on the authority of Muḥammad, in which he predicted that Islamic sectarianism would develop in a way similar to that of the Israelites (Rubin, *Between Bible and Qur'ān*, 117–232). In historiography, the Israelite exodus from Egypt became a literary model for the description of the Islamic conquest of the Holy Land (Rubin, *Between Bible and Qur'ān*, 11–35) and of Muḥammad's own military campaigns within Arabia (Rubin, *Between Bible and Qur'ān*, 36–52). The messianic hope of the Jews for the return of the lost Israelite tribes was embedded in the Islamic hope for the fall of Constantinople. This is evinced in an Islamic tradition that two tribes (*sibtān*) of the Children of Israel will take part in the “great war” (*al-malḥama al-ʿuzmā*) and “assist the Muslims” (Rubin, *Between Bible and Qur'ān*, 24). On the intercultural level, the great Qur'ānic reliance on the biblical stories about the Children of Israel did not prevent heated discussions in early Islam regarding the legality of recourse to traditions labeled as *Isrāʿīlyyyāt*. In order to legitimise them, these traditions were circulated on the authority of the Prophet, to the effect that, because of their didactic message, there was nothing wrong in telling those stories (See Kister, *Haddithū ʿan Banī Isrāʿīl*).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### SOURCES

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## Chirāgh ʿAlī Khān, Maulvī

**Maulvī Chirāgh ʿAlī Khān** (1844–95), also known by his honorary title of Aʿzam Yār Jang, was an Indian modernist author who served in the government of the Muslim-ruled state of Hyderabad from 1877 to 1895. He was born in India’s North-Western Provinces to a

family of Kashmiri origin serving the East India Company. Following his father’s death, when Chirāgh ʿAlī was twelve, his mother and paternal grandmother guided his instruction in Persian and Urdu. Self-taught otherwise, including in English, Chirāgh ʿAlī had a voracious appetite for study; he was rated later in life among the Indian Muslims best read in European religious and historical literature. He had no formal Islamic higher education, but entry into government service in the early 1860s brought him into informal contact with learned Muslims during postings in Gorakhpur, Lucknow, and Sitapur. Here his writing career began. A life-changing contact in the early 1870s was with Sayyid Aḥmad Khān (d. 1898), the leading figure of the modernist Muslim reformists and the founder of the Muhammedan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh, which later became the Aligarh Muslim University. Sayyid Aḥmad Khān first invited his assistance at Aligarh, then recommended him to the Hyderabad government. Serving there efficiently as Revenue Secretary and later as Financial Secretary, Chirāgh ʿAlī gained honorary titles and much respect.

Chirāgh ʿAlī’s scholarly associations remained with the group of “modernist” Muslims inspired by Sayyid Aḥmad, but some of his stances on Islamic sources and on reform agendas were distinctive and controversial. A distinction he drew between the Qurʾān’s revealed laws as immutable and the “Mohammadan Common Law” (synonymous for him with *sharīʿa* and *fiqh*) as a product only of its own time provided the grounds for rejecting most *ḥadīth* and later juristical rulings as unreliable or contingent. He then urged reform measures he considered true to the spirit of the Qurʾān but reflective of changes in time and place. The consequences