

Antisemitism in Islam part one: The Qur'an

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In this series, Head of Public Policy Tim Dieppe uncovers the antisemitism found in authoritative Islamic teaching. In part one, Tim looks at antisemitic verses from the Qur'an.

In May 2024, I was invited to debate with Reza Aslan on the question '*Is Islam antisemitic?*'^[1]

I was surprised to be asked, since Reza is a professor at University of California, Riverside, and has written two books which have reached the New York Times bestseller list. After questioning whether I was really the right person, and praying about it and discussing with others, I agreed to the debate. The organisers had clearly seen my earlier article *Is Islam antisemitic?*,^[2] and were impressed with my engagement with the texts.

In this series I will demonstrate that Islam, as defined by its texts, is antisemitic. We will look at antisemitism in the Qur'an, in the hadith, in the Sirah (or biographies of Muhammad), amongst Islamic scholars, and in Islamic history. We will also examine some texts that are cited as examples of apparently philosemitic (or pro-Jewish) texts in Islam. I think that once we have considered all this evidence, you will be convinced that Islam is indeed antisemitic.

Antisemitism defined

Ahead of the debate, I asked that we agree to the ADL definition of 'antisemitism'. I didn't want to be arguing with Reza about what is and what isn't antisemitism. Reza agreed to the ADL definition which is clear and uncontroversial. This definition says that antisemitism is:

“The belief or behaviour hostile toward Jews just because they are Jewish. It may take the form of religious teachings that proclaim the inferiority of Jews, for instance, or political efforts to isolate, oppress, or otherwise injure them. It may also include prejudiced or stereotyped views about Jews.”[3]

As I clarified in my opening statement, the question is whether Islam is antisemitic. It is not about Muslims, and whether they are antisemitic. It is about Islam, and Islam is defined by its texts. These texts are: the Qur’an, the Hadith, and the Sirah (biographies of Muhammad).

Antisemitism in the Qur’an

There are actually many texts in the Qur’an that are clearly antisemitic. It is worth citing them so that you can see for yourself how antisemitic they are. I will offer very brief comments on each verse. These verses are cited in Qur’an order for ease of reference.

Q2:61

*And [recall] when you said, “O Moses, we can never endure one [kind of] food. So call upon your Lord to bring forth for us from the earth its green herbs and its cucumbers and its garlic and its lentils and its onions.” [Moses] said, “Would you exchange what is better for what is less? Go into [any] settlement and indeed, you will have what you have asked.” And they were covered with **humiliation and poverty and returned with anger from Allāh** [upon them]. That was because they [repeatedly] disbelieved in the signs of Allāh and killed the prophets without right. That was because they disobeyed and were [habitually] transgressing.*

The renowned and highly respected commentator from the middle ages, Ibn Kathir, commented on this verse this verse indicating this punishment of humiliation for the Jews “will never cease.”[4]

Q2:65

*And you had already known about those who transgressed among you concerning the sabbath, and We said to them, “**Be apes, despised.**”*

This is one of three verses in the Qur’an in which Muhammad curses the Jews as apes or pigs (see also Q5:60; Q7:166). Many Muslim commentators take this literally and claim that Jews were physically changed into apes and pigs.[5]

Q2:96

*And you will surely find them the **most greedy of people** for life – [even] more than those who associate others with Allāh. One of them wishes that he could be granted life a thousand years, but it would not remove him in the least from the [coming] punishment that he should be granted life. And Allāh is Seeing of what they do.*

Characterises Jews as greedy.

Q4:47

*O you who were given the Scripture, believe in what We have sent down [to Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ)], confirming that which is with you, before We **obliterate faces** and turn them toward their backs **or curse them** as We cursed the sabbath-breakers. And ever is the matter [i.e., decree] of Allāh accomplished.*

Another curse of the Jews.

Q4:51-52

*Have you not seen those who were given a portion of the Scripture, who believe in *jibt* [superstition] and *ṭāghūt* [false objects of worship] and say about the disbelievers, “These are better guided than the believers as to the way”?*

*Those are the **ones whom Allāh has cursed**; and he whom Allāh curses – never will you find for him a helper.*

Yet another curse of Jews.

Q5:13

*So for their breaking of the covenant **We cursed them** and made their hearts hardened. **They distort words** from their [proper] places [i.e., usages] and have forgotten a portion of that of which they were reminded. And you will still observe deceit among them, except a few of them. But pardon them and overlook [their misdeeds]. Indeed, Allāh loves the doers of good.*

A further curse of Jews, and an accusation of distorting their scriptures.

Q5:42

*[They are] **avid listeners to falsehood, devourers of [what is] unlawful**. So if they come to you, [O Muḥammad], judge between them or turn away from them. And if you turn away from them – never will they harm you at all. And if you judge, judge between them with justice. Indeed, Allāh loves those who act justly.*

Characterising Jews as listening to falsehoods and devouring what is unlawful.

Q5:51

*O ye who believe! **take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors**: They are but friends and protectors to each other. And he amongst you that turns to them (for friendship) is of them. Verily Allah guideth not a people unjust.*

A clear command in the Qur'an not to take Jews or Christians as friends.

Q5:60

Say, "Shall I inform you of [what is] worse than that as penalty from Allāh? [It is that of] those whom **Allāh has cursed** and with whom He became angry and made of **them apes and pigs and slaves of ṭāghūt [idols]** Those are worse in position and further **astray from the sound way.**"

Cursing of the Jews again.

Q5:64

And the Jews say, "The hand of Allāh is chained." Chained are their hands, and cursed are they for what they say. Rather, both His hands are extended; He spends however He wills. And that which has been revealed to you from your Lord will surely increase many of them in transgression and disbelief. And **We have cast among them animosity and hatred until the Day of Resurrection.** Every time they kindled the fire of war [against you], Allāh extinguished it. And they strive throughout the land [**causing**] **corruption**, and Allāh does not like **corrupters.**

Here the Jews saying 'Allah's hand is chained' refers to God being bound by his character, for example not to lie. Muslims, by contrast say that Allah is entirely free and bound by no laws.[6]

Note that the animosity and hatred lasts "until the day of resurrection." This means it is ongoing to this day.

The punishment for 'corruption' is in Q5:33 – crucifixion, or hands and feet cut off, or being expelled from the land. Linking those two verses provides justification for killing Jews.

Q5:82

You will surely find the **most intense of the people in animosity toward the believers [to be] the Jews** and those who associate others with Allāh; and you will find the nearest of them in affection to the believers those who say, "We are Christians." That is because among them are priests and monks and because they are not arrogant.

Note the future tense "will surely find", indicating that this is ongoing.

Q7:166-167 (context clearly Jews see Q7:160)

So when they were insolent about that which they had been forbidden, We said to them, **“Be apes, despised.”**

And [mention] when your Lord declared that He would surely [continue to] send upon them **until the Day of Resurrection** those who would afflict them with the worst torment. Indeed, your Lord is swift in penalty; but indeed, He is Forgiving and Merciful.

Note again that the Jews here will be afflicted “until the day of resurrection” which means it is ongoing to this day. Note also that this affliction is carried out by people, so this verse justifies afflicting Jews with the worst torment.

Q9:29

Fight against those who do not believe in Allāh or in the Last Day and who do not consider unlawful what Allāh and His Messenger have made unlawful and who do not adopt the religion of truth [i.e., Islām] from those who were given the Scripture – [fight] until they give the *jizyah*¹ willingly while they are humbled.

“Those who were given the scripture” is Jews and Christians. Muslims are taught that they should fight against Jews and Christians until they pay the *jizyah* tax – a subjugation tax for non-Muslims under Islamic rule. They should be “humbled”, or ‘subdued’ in other translations. Jews and Christians therefore have three options when living under Islamic rule: convert to Islam, be killed, or accept *dhimmi* status and pay the *jizyah* tax and forfeit legal rights.

Q17:4

And We conveyed to the Children of Israel in the Scripture that, “You will surely cause **corruption on the earth twice, and you will surely reach [a degree of] great haughtiness.**”

Remember the punishment for corruption from Q5:33 – crucifixion, cutting off hands and feet, or expulsion from the land. Again, in conjunction with 5:33 this justifies killing Jews.

Q60:4

There has already been for you an excellent pattern in Abraham and those with him, when they said to their people, “Indeed, we are disassociated from you and from whatever you worship other than Allāh. We have denied you, and there has appeared between us and you **animosity and hatred forever** until you believe in Allāh alone” – except for the saying of Abraham to his father, “I will surely ask forgiveness for you, but I have not [power to do] for you anything against Allāh. Our Lord, upon You we have relied, and to You we have returned, and to You is the destination.

Abraham's exhortation to hatred of those who don't believe in Allah is an "excellent example" while his asking for forgiveness is not a good example. Note that this 'animosity and hatred' is to last 'forever' – so it continues to this day.

Q62:6

*Say, "O you who are Jews, if you claim that you are allies of Allāh, excluding the [other] people, then **wish for death**, if you should be truthful."*

Jews should 'wish for death'.

I did not cite all these texts in the debate with Reza Alsan, however, Reza made no attempt to claim that the texts I did cite are not antisemitic. The antisemitism in these texts is clear.

Antisemitism in the Daily Prayers

As well as these, Q1:7 is prayed 17 times a day as part of *Salat* – or the daily prayers five times a day that devout Muslims observe. I chose not to cite Q1:7 in the debate because it is not self-evidently antisemitic from the text alone. However, the evidence that it does refer to Jews from the Hadith and later interpreters is overwhelming. Here's what it says:

Q1:6-7

*Guide us along the Straight Path, The path of those upon whom You have bestowed favour, not of **those who have earned [Your] anger** or of those who are astray.*

Muslim interpreters are virtually unanimous that "those who have earned your anger" are the Jews, and "those who are astray" are Christians.[7]

Firstly, there is a Hadith which explicitly states this:

Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said, "Say Amen when the Imam says 'Ghairi l-maghdubi `alaihima wala d-daalleen' (not the path of those who earn Your Anger (such as Jews) nor of those who go astray (such as Christians)); all the past sins of the person whose saying (of Amin) coincides with that of the angels, will be forgiven".

– Sahih Bukhari 1:12:749[8]

This settles the issue as far as many Muslims are concerned, since Bukhari's hadith are regarded as authentic and authoritative.

Here is another hadith:

"that the Prophet (PBUH) said: 'The Jews are those who Allah is wrath with, and the Christians have strayed.'"

– Tirmidhi 5:44:2954[9]

Ibn Abbas (d. 687), the ‘father of Qur’anic exegesis’ and a companion of Muhammad said:

“Not those against whom You have sent your wrath’: other than the religion of the Jews against whom You have been wrathful and have abandoned... ‘Nor those who are astray’: nor the religion of the Christians, who err away from Islam.’ ”[10]

Muqatil Ibn Sulayman (d. 767) commented:

“ ‘Not those against whom You have sent Your wrath’: that is, a religion other than the Jewish one, against which Allah was wrathful. Monkeys and pigs were made from them. ‘Nor those who are astray.’ Allah is saying: ‘And not the religion of the polytheists,’ that is, the Christians.”[11]

The Tafsir (commentary) of Al Qurtubi (d.1273) states:

“The majority say that ‘those with anger on them’ are the Jews and the ‘misguided’ are the Christians. That was explained by the Prophet, my Allah bless him and grant him peace, in the hadith of Adi ibn Hatim[12] and the story of how he became a Muslim transmitted by Abu Dawud and at-Timirdhi in his Collection [of hadith]. The explanation is also attested to by the Almighty [i.e., elsewhere in the Koran] who says about the Jews, ‘They brought down anger from Allah upon themselves’ ([Q] 2:61, 3:112) and He [Allah] says, ‘Allah is angry with them’ ([Q]48:6)” He says about the Christians that they ‘were misguided previously and have misguided many others, and are far from the right way.’ ([Q]5:77).[13]

The classic Tafsir of Ibn Kathir (d.1373) states:

“These two paths are the paths of the Christians and Jews, a fact that the believer should beware of so that he avoids them. ... the Jews abandoned practicing the religion, while the Christians lost the true knowledge. This is why ‘anger’ descended upon the Jews, while being described as ‘led astray’ is more appropriate of the Christians.”[14]

The Tafsir of al-Jaylalyayn (Tafsir of the two Jalals) completed in 1505 states:

“not the path of those against whom there is wrath namely the Jews and nor of those who are astray namely the Christians.”[15]

A modern encyclopaedia of the Qur’an explains:

Thus the phrase in the daily prescribed prayers ‘Guide us to the straight path, to the path of those you have blessed, not of those who incurred [Your] wrath, nor of the misguided’ (al-Fatiha, Q1:5-6-7.) The verses mention two groups of people but do not say precisely who they are. **The Prophet [Muhammad] interpreted [in a canonical hadith as above] those who incurred Allah’s wrath as the Jews and the misguided as the Christians.**

The Jews, we are told [i.e., in both the Qur’an, and the Hadith] killed many of their prophets [Q2:91; Q4:155], and through their character and materialistic [Q2:96] tendencies have contributed much to moral corruption, social upheaval and sedition in the world [Q5:33; Q5:64]...[T]hey were readily misled [9:30] and incurred both Allah’s wrath and ignominy Q[2:61; Q3:112].

As for the Christians...over time they succumbed to the influence of those who had already deviated from the chosen path. By the time Christianity came to be accepted as the official religion of the Roman Empire, many Christians had long gone astray and had been deprived of their original scripture...**By interpreting the phrase “not of those who incurred [Your] wrath, nor of the misguided” the Prophet identified them and clarified in what way and by what beliefs and deeds a man incurs God’s wrath.** This is a warning for the Muslims not to follow in the footsteps of the Jews and Christians.”[16]

Sheikh Yousef Al-Qarawadi was president of the European Council for Fatwa and Research and appointed a trustee of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. He stated in 2019:

“The second type are those who evoked [Allah’s] anger. They are those who recognized the truth and nevertheless did not take its path, and even stubbornly opposed it, and were hostile towards the Prophet [Muhammad] after the straight path became clear to them. [They did this] out of reliance on falsity, love of this world, following urges, blind fanaticism, arrogance, or jealousy... and thus they deserve Allah’s wrath. **These are the Jews**, for whom the explanation is presented in Surat Al-Maida [5:60, which states]: ‘Those whom Allah has cursed and with whom He became angry and **made of them apes and pigs** and slaves of Taghut – these are worse in position and further astray from the sound way’”

“On this matter, Sheikh Al-Islam ibn Taymiyya [d.1328] compiled his valuable book, *The Necessity of the Straight Path in Distinction from the People of Hell*. The straight path is a separate way [for the Muslims]; it is not the path of the Jews, who have evoked Allah’s anger, nor of the Christians, who have gone astray, and also not of those who recognize the truth but have not gone in its path... This is the separate path, the path of truth, the path of Allah, the path of the believers.”[17]

In a sermon at New, Connecticut Mosque in November 2023, the imam said that Muslims recite the first chapter of the Qur’an 17 times every day in order to be reminded of Allah’s anger towards the Jews.[18]

In a sermon in Fort Lauderdale, Florida in April 2024, the imam said: “[According to the Quran], who are those with whom Allah is upset or angry with? The Jews. Followed by whom? The ‘misguided ones,’ and those are who? The Christians. Because they always follow them. Don’t go too far, right here, in the country where we live, look what the Zionist Christians are doing.”[19]

Thus, the view that this text refers to the Jews is widespread and continues to this day. Many Muslims believe that when they recite their daily prayers they are being reminded of Allah’s ongoing anger towards the Jews.

In the next article in the series, Tim will explore antisemitism in the Hadith.

Endnotes

[1] See here: <https://opentodebate.org/debate/is-islam-antisemitic/> The debate can also be watched on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FbNVpJAUIf0> , and it is available on mainstream podcast platforms under *Open to Debate*.

[2] <https://christianconcern.com/resource/is-islam-antisemitic/> Written in 2021.

[3] <https://www.adl.org/antisemitism>.

[4] <http://m.qtafsir.com/Surah-Al-Baqara/Covering-the-Jews-in-Humiliati—>.

[5] <https://www.imra.org.il/story.php?id=14285>.

[6] See discussion in: Spencer, Robert (2022), *The Critical Qur’an: Explained from Key Islamic Commentaries and Contemporary Historical Research* (Bombardier Books), p90.

[7] See this article for discussion and more sources:
<https://www.andrewbostom.org/2019/05/qaradawis-ramadan-koran-homily-curse-jews-and-christians-17-times-daily/>.

[8] <https://quranx.com/hadith/Bukhari/USC-MSA/Volume-1/Book-12/Hadith-749/>.

[9] <https://sunnah.com/urn/639380>.

[10] J. Renard ed. *Windows on the House of Islam: Muslim Sources on Spirituality and Religious Life* (ed.: University of California Press, 1998), 33.

[11] Renard ed. *Windows on the House of Islam: Muslim Sources on Spirituality and Religious Life* (ed.), 30.

[12] This is the hadith of Tirmidhi cited above: <https://sunnah.com/urn/639380>.

[13] Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī Vol , Juz’ 1: Al-Fātiḥah & Sūrat al-Baqarah 1-141, translated by Aisha Bewley (Diwan Press), 53-54. <https://ia803201.us.archive.org/10/items/tafsir-al-qurtubi-4.-Volumes/Tafseer%20Al-Qurtubi/Tafsir%20al-Qurtubi%20Vol.%201.pdf>.

[14] <http://m.qtafsir.com/Surah-Al-Fatiha/The-Faithful-ask-for-and-abide—>.

[15] <https://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=74&tSoraNo=1&tAyahNo=7&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2>.

[16] Leaman, Oliver, ed. (2006), *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia* (Taylor & Francis): 613-614 https://archive.org/details/thequrananencyclopediad.byoliverleaman_201909/page/n641/mode/2up?q=%22as+the+Jews%22.

[17] <https://www.memri.org/reports/ramadan-religious-lesson-muslim-brotherhood-spiritual-leader-sheikh-yousef-al-qaradawi>.

[18] <https://www.memri.org/tv/friday-sermon-new-haven-ct-bow-islam-jews-anger-allah-kill-prophets>.

[19] <https://www.memri.org/reports/fort-lauderdale-florida-friday-sermon-why-are-jews-such-breed-humans-their-talmudic-creed>.