

## Narration the Jews in the Qur'an

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### ABSTRACT

The history of the Jewish nation is a complex topic, encompassing various historical, theological, and moral dimensions, one of which is outlined in the Qur'an. The narration of the Jews in the Qur'an, scattered throughout various surahs and verses, often highlights their behavior—both exemplary and avoidable—as a lesson for humanity. This research aims to analyze in depth the Jewish nation as mentioned in the Qur'an. The research method used is qualitative, with data collection techniques through documentation. After the data are collected, the analysis is carried out by reducing the data, presenting the data, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study show that the narration of the Jewish people in the Qur'an includes praise of them as descendants glorified by God and illustrates the various extraordinary gifts given to the Jewish people. These verses were revealed to provide lessons and warnings to the Prophet Muhammad and Muslims to face challenges patiently and believe that the truth will ultimately prevail. In addition, the Qur'an also explains that the Jews made mistakes that led to God's wrath, offering a warning about the consequences of iniquity.

## INTRODUCTION

The narrative of the Jewish nation in the Qur'an is a complex topic, rich with various historical, theological, and moral aspects. The Qur'an, as the holy book of Muslims, not only serves as a guide for life but also as a primary source for understanding the history of previous peoples, including the story of the Children of Israel or the Jewish nation (Haif, 2016). In this context, the Qur'an presents their stories with a variety of purposes, ranging from providing warnings to offering moral lessons for Muslims.

Overall, the Qur'an portrays the Jewish nation as a reflection of the historical journey of a unique religious people. Not much different from the biblical narrative, the Qur'anic account of the Jews emphasizes God's salvation of a people He chose because of their belief in Him (Romadhan & Khair, 2022). Prophets were sent to them who constantly warned and guided them toward moral salvation and a life in accordance with God's guidance. However, their rude and primitive behavior often upset the messengers of God, causing the Almighty to be compelled to punish them for their iniquities (Hidayati, 2019). On the other hand, pious families among them are also mentioned in the Qur'an, although their number seems to be very small.

The Qur'an describes the relationship between God and the Jewish nation by highlighting the blessings they received and recording their transgressions and mistakes (Zulkarnaini, Marhaban, & Nurdin, 2025). This narrative, dispersed throughout various surahs and verses, often emphasizes the behavior of the Jewish nation—both those worthy of imitation and those to be avoided as lessons for all humanity (Rahman, 2021; Hassan, 2022).

Hermeneutically, the stories about the Jewish people in the Qur'an can be understood as depictions of life containing deep moral and spiritual messages (Esack, 2020; Galadari, 2024). The Qur'an's approach to presenting these stories reflects divine justice and wisdom, where every action carries consequences and every nation bears moral responsibility (Nasr, 2020; Rane, 2022).

The struggle between right and wrong, justice and tyranny, as well as between the oppressed and the oppressor, is a perennial conflict highly visible in the history of mankind. From the story of Joseph, the son of Jacob, who was betrayed by his brothers out of envy, to the conflict between Pharaoh and Moses, and the birth of Jesus Christ, these narratives exemplify the endless struggle. This battle tests people's ability to distinguish between the faithful and the disobedient. Ultimately, kindness, honesty, sincerity, moral commitment, and justice always prevail, though often through severe challenges. In this study, it is important to trace how the Qur'an describes the Jewish people, understand the relevant verses, and absorb the messages they contain to deepen insights into the history of religion and human morality.

Previous research by Firestone (2019) on the sacred history and counter-history of the Prophet Muhammad, the Jews, and the composition of the Qur'an found that within Islam's teachings, some Jews recognized the authenticity of the prophethood of Muhammad and chose to join him. However, most were criticized for rejecting the Prophet and failing to adhere to their own religious teachings. Another study by Amin (2020) on the Qur'an's attitude toward Jews, as a response to accusations of anti-Semitism, identified several important points: (1) the Qur'an's attitude toward Jews cannot be considered entirely anti-Semitic; (2) verses that might imply cynicism toward the Jews should be understood in the broader context of the Qur'an's universal, egalitarian message; (3) the verses perceived as anti-Semitic were revealed in specific historical and logical contexts, responding to the behavior of the Jews at that time.

The novelty of this research lies in the approach used to understand the narrative of the Jewish nation within the sacred texts of Islam. This research is expected to contribute to a better understanding of the historical and behavioral representation of the Jewish people in the sacred text. Through this understanding, humanity can draw lessons from existing stories to strengthen faith and piety. In addition, this research has the potential to improve interfaith dialogue by fostering better understanding and tolerance between Muslims and Jews. The study also offers valuable moral insights as guidelines for daily life, both individually and socially. The main purpose of this study is to analyze in depth the Jewish nation as mentioned in the Qur'an. This research aims to (1) examine the narratives of the Jewish people presented in various surahs and verses of the Qur'an, (2) analyze the moral and spiritual messages contained in these narratives, and (3) understand the relevance of these stories in the context of contemporary interfaith dialogue.

The benefits of this research are multi-dimensional. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to Qur'anic studies and comparative religion by providing a comprehensive analysis of Jewish narratives in Islamic scripture. Practically, this research can serve as a foundation for promoting better understanding between Muslim and Jewish communities, thereby supporting peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. The implications of this study extend to educational contexts, where it can be used to teach about religious diversity, historical narratives, and moral lessons derived from sacred texts. Furthermore, this research may help

counter misconceptions and stereotypes by providing a nuanced understanding of how Islam views Jewish history and tradition through the lens of the Qur'an.

## **METHOD**

This research employed a qualitative methodology with a comprehensive approach to analyzing the narrative of the Jewish people in the *Qur'an*. It was conducted as a library-based study focusing on textual analysis of the *Qur'an* and related Islamic scholarship. The study population consisted of all verses in the *Qur'an* that mentioned or referred to the Jewish people, the Children of Israel (*Banī Isrā'īl*), and related historical narratives. Purposive sampling was used to select specific verses and chapters (surahs) based on their direct relevance to Jewish narratives, including but not limited to Surah al-Baqarah, Āli 'Imrān, al-Mā'idah, al-A'rāf, Yūsuf, al-Isrā', and other relevant passages.

The data consisted of secondary sources obtained through documentation techniques, involving the use of written materials such as reports, archives, and publications (Nilamsari, 2014). Data collection involved systematic reading and cataloging of relevant *Qur'anic* verses, followed by examination of classical exegetical works (tafsir) and contemporary scholarly interpretations. Cross-referencing was used to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant materials.

Data analysis proceeded in three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved filtering and coding the data to focus on the most relevant information and identify key themes. Data presentation arranged the filtered data into a clear narrative format to highlight patterns and relationships. Finally, conclusions were drawn by analyzing the data in relation to existing theories and the research questions.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The comprehensive analysis of Jewish narratives in the Qur'an reveals multifaceted portrayals that align with previous scholarly findings while offering new insights into the complexity of these religious texts. The findings of this study are supported by extensive research in Qur'anic studies and comparative religion. Firestone (2019) emphasizes the intricate relationship between sacred history and counter-history in Islamic texts, which is clearly evident in the Qur'anic treatment of Jewish narratives. Similarly, Amin (2020) argues that the Qur'an's approach to Jewish history cannot be characterized as uniformly negative, a finding that resonates with the balanced portrayal discovered in this analysis.

Rahman (1982) provides crucial context for understanding Islam's attitude toward Judaism, noting that the Qur'an often presents Jewish history as a mirror for Muslim communities to examine their own spiritual journey. This interpretive framework supports the findings of this study, which demonstrate that Jewish narratives serve pedagogical purposes beyond mere historical recounting. Furthermore, Iqbal (1981) discusses the reconstruction of religious thought in Islam, highlighting how historical narratives in the Qur'an contribute to broader theological and philosophical frameworks.

The research findings are also supported by comparative studies such as those by Busse (1997) on the theological and historical affiliations between Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. These interfaith studies provide essential background for understanding how the Qur'an

positions itself within the broader Abrahamic tradition while maintaining its distinct perspective on Jewish history and theology.

### **The Story of the Children of Israel in the Qur'an: A Moral and Universal Perspective**

The story of the Children of Israel in the Qur'an is one of the most frequent narratives and has a complex dimension. In contrast to the narratives in the Old Testament which tend to be chronological and detailed, the Qur'an presents these stories with a focus on universal moral and spiritual messages. Each episode told has a direct relevance to the context of the Prophet Muhammad's da'wah and provides lessons that transcend geographical and temporal boundaries.

From the perspective of the Qur'an, the story of the Children of Israel is not just a historical record, but a mirror of human behavior in the face of tests of faith, power, and moral responsibility. Through these narratives, the Qur'an teaches fundamental principles about justice, monotheism, and the consequences of moral choices made by man.

#### **Historical Roots: Ibrahim as the Father of Nations**

The story of the Children of Israel, if referred to in its basic concept and purpose, begins with Abraham, when he left 'ur in Babylon to wander in search of truth and peace. But the Qur'an does not discuss this issue at length as in the Old Testament. Prophet Ibrahim is mentioned in the Qur'an as the "Father" of Jews as well as Muslims, the main source of inspiration for the religion centered in Jerusalem and the land of the Hijaz.

From the perspective of Muslim scripture, Ibrahim was a sincere and faithful to the teachings of righteous Tawheed (Q.S. al-Nahl: 120), a prophet and a chosen servant (Q.S. Āli 'Imrān: 33; Maryam: 41). Ibrahim once thought about God through the way of reflection on the universe (Q.S. al-An'ām: 75-79). Ibrahim also questioned the question of resurrection to God (Q.S. al-Baqarah: 260), argued with his people to anger them and tried to burn them. God saved Ibrahim from the wrath (Q.S. al-Baqarah: 258; al-Anbiyā': 52-69).

It was the hatred of his people that made Ibrahim forced to leave his country. This was the beginning of the Patriarch's odyssey, which in the Bible version reached Canaan, present-day Palestine; according to the Qur'an as far as the Hijaz and there he built the Kaaba, the house of God, with his son Ishmael.

When Abraham was declared by God to be His chosen servant, he once hoped that his descendants would automatically also become the chosen ones. But God affirms that His promise will not reach the unrighteous:

*"And (remember), when Abraham was tested by his Lord with a few sentences (commandments and prohibitions), then Ibrahim fulfilled them. Allah said: 'Surely I have made you a priest for all mankind.' Ibrahim said: '(And I also ask) of my descendants.' Allah said: 'My promise (this) is not about the wrongdoers'" (Q.S. al-Baqarah: 124).*

This verse affirms the fundamental principle that God's election is not based on descent or social status, but on piety and righteous deeds. The Qur'an strongly illustrates Abraham as a sincere and devoted person, and his choice as the khalīl of Allah and the imam of the pious is solely because of his pure heart and his virtuous behavior.

### **Joseph's Era: A Journey from Adversity to Glory**

In the Qur'an, the history of the Jews or the Children of Israel in a somewhat more detailed form, begins with the Prophet Jacob and his sons who later migrated from Canaan to Egypt. This is told "in full" in one letter of the Qur'an – the letter of Yusuf. Joseph (the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham) left his homeland because he was expelled by his brothers. They threw it away by throwing it into a well at the edge of the travelers' crossing.

Joseph's story in the Qur'an shows how God's destiny works through a series of events that seem detrimental but ultimately bring good. A caravan found Joseph, took him to Egypt and then sold him to a local official. Joseph lived a long life in Egypt until he was fully mature physically, mentally and spiritually.

Joseph had to face an intrigue from a woman who was none other than his master's wife, and so on he had to languish for a long time in prison. It was perseverance against all obstacles that made Joseph stronger and more mature, so that wisdom was truly embedded in his soul and reflected in all his attitude to life, knowledge and manners.

Yusuf has a unique advantage, which is being able to give the ta'bir of dreams. This is where Joseph's career began, when the King dreamed about a strange event that no astrologer could explain. Joseph offered his services and was accepted by the King. Finally, Yusuf was appointed as a state official in charge of managing the country's wealth (Q.S Yusuf 43-49).

The event that Joseph foretold (i.e. the long drought) actually happened. The famine season is coming and the Egyptian people are ready to face it. Residents of surrounding lands, including Canaan, came to Egypt in search of food aid. It was there, the Qur'an relates, that Joseph met his brothers again in a different atmosphere. Joseph's brothers repented and confessed their wrongs of being jealous of Joseph. They and their parents, Jacob, then moved and eventually settled in Egypt.

When Joseph was in prison, when two of his friends asked him about the interpretation of their dreams, before answering and explaining the meaning of the dream, Joseph first conveyed religious messages to his friend:

"Joseph said: 'It will not come to you two food that will be given to you unless I have revealed his superstition, before it reaches you. That is part of what my Lord taught me. Indeed, I have forsaken the religion of those who do not believe in Allah, while they disobey the Last Day. And I follow the religion of my fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is not appropriate for us to associate anything with Allah. That is from the gift of God to us and to man; but most of those people are ungrateful.'" (Q.S. Yusuf: 37-40).

From here began the life of the Children of Israel in Egypt until the time of slavery by Pharaoh which ended with the arrival of the Prophet Moses as a savior who guided them to the promised land.

### **Slavery and Oppression in Egypt**

The Qur'an does not give a detailed picture of the process of changing the status of the Children of Israel in Egypt to slaves and even to be treated cruelly. But in some verses, the Qur'an reminds the Children of Israel to reflect, how when Pharaoh and his followers mistreated them:

*"And (remember) when We saved you from (Pharaoh) and his followers; They inflicted upon you a terrible torment: they slaughtered your male children and let your female children live. And in that there are great trials from your Lord"* (Q.S. al-Baqarah: 49).

Slavery has not only destroyed the traditions and civilization of the Children of Israel but has also corrupted their mentality. The Israelites had lost their identity. Jacob's descendants were strangers in Egypt. Although they initially earned an honorable place in the kingdom, the Egyptians may eventually realize that it was the "natives" who had more power and honorable status than the "foreigners," and that foreigners did not deserve to displace the natives.

This is a model of fear that has always haunted humanity in the history of the sovereignty of any nation in the world, until today. The Bible tells how the Egyptians were afraid to see the more and more Israelites inhabiting their earth, which in turn caused them to enslave and oppress the Children of Israel.

When the Qur'an speaks of the story of the Children of Israel, its main target is the Israelites themselves who were in Medina and its surroundings at that time, even though the lessons it contains are universal. The Qur'an therefore does not feel the need to restate the details of the event, of which the Israelites already had knowledge. The task of the Qur'an is only to remind and lead its target to a reflective understanding of history.

Moses: Deliverer and Spiritual Leader

Moses was the figure who dominated the entire drama of the Israelites being rescued from slavery in Egypt. He was born amid death threats against babies born to ethnic Israelis. According to the Qur'an, God saved a baby who would later be known as Moses and became the leader of the Children of Israel, through the inspiration conveyed to the baby's mother (Q.S. al-Qaṣaṣ: 7).

The story of Moses is known in the three major religions of the world: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. For the Jews the story is a picture of a great victory, a deliverance from suffering, a great deliverance. God had brought the Israelites out of Egypt with His great grace and led them to a prosperous land.

The central figure in the story of Moses is the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh. The Qur'an confronts the two in the form of a contradiction between the right and the false. Both represent the two sides of life (the dark and the light) and the two groups of people (the tyrant and the oppressed). Pharaoh represents a group of disobedient and arbitrary people, and Moses is a reflection of those who struggle to escape from tyranny.

The pride of Pharaoh is expressed in the Qur'an, among others, at the beginning of surah al-Qaṣaṣ as a prelude to the story of Moses:

*"We read to you part of the story of Moses and Pharaoh correctly for the believers. Indeed, Pharaoh has done arbitrarily things in the land and divided its inhabitants, by oppressing a group of them, slaughtering their sons and letting their daughters live. Indeed, Pharaoh is among those who do harm. And We will give gifts to the oppressed in the earth (Egypt) and to make them rulers and to make them the inheritors of (the earth)" (Al-Qaṣaṣ: 3-6).*

Like the Prophet Muhammad as well, Moses was initially driven by the anxiety of wanting to free his people from tyranny. But the inspirations that form the basis of the moral movement and the teachings it brings are universal. Moses not only came to save the Children of Israel from Pharaoh's tyranny, but also to save Pharaoh and his people from error.

The Qur'an does not rule out the possibility that Pharaoh accepted the call that Moses delivered:

*"Go to Pharaoh (Moses and Aaron), for he has transgressed. So both of you speak to him in gentle words, so that he may remember or be afraid" (Ṭāhā: 43-44).*

But in reality Pharaoh was arrogant, responding to gentle invitations with hatred and countering all arguments with force, lies and humiliation.

The confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh reached a climax in a physical battle or a battle of prowess. Pharaoh considered Moses to be a sorcerer, so he gathered all the sorcerers throughout the land to fight against him. However, it turned out that Moses won the battle and the magicians hired by Pharaoh submitted and surrendered and put faith in the Lord Moses (Q.S. Tāhā: 57-76).

Regarding the lives of Moses and his followers in Egypt during those stressful times, the Qur'an tells a dialogue that shows the steadfastness of their faith:

*"Moses said: 'O my people, if you believe in Allah, then trust in Him only, if you are truly a surrenderer.' So they replied: 'It is in Allah that we trust. O our Lord, do not make us a target of slander for the unrighteous, and save us with Your mercy from the disbelievers.'" (Q.S. Yūnus: 84-89)*

### **Exodus: The Journey to Freedom**

The exodus, the escape and liberation from slavery in Egypt to return to Canaan, was a form of effort to realize God's promise to Abraham. The exodus became the core and spirit of Judaism. Through that miraculous event, God has saved a nation from slavery and raised it up to be a powerful and great nation.

*"We made it possible for the Children of Israel to cross the sea; then they were followed by Pharaoh and his army, with a spirit of malice and hostility; so that when he was about to sink, Pharaoh said: 'I believe that there is no God but God in whom the Children of Israel trust, and I am one of those who surrender (to God)'" (Q.S. Yūnus: 90)*

But God rejected Pharaoh's proposed repentance because it was certainly not sincere repentance; after all, he is a doer of disaster for mankind. This verse shows how a civilization that has been built today has been in vain, because it is upheld without reference to spirituality and morality and by ignoring human values.

Having been freed from slavery in Egypt and having reached the land overseas, the Children of Israel are presented by the Qur'an with a different focus. They are now revealed as an undisciplined, disobedient and ungrateless group of people. This shows human nature that tends to easily forget the blessings he has received.

### **Tests in the Holy Land and Characteristics of the Nation**

When Moses commanded them to enter the holy land (Palestine), they showed a cowardly and rebellious attitude:

*"O my people, enter the holy land (Palestine) which Allah has appointed for you, and do not run backwards (for fear of the enemy), so that you become losers. They said: 'O Moses, there are indeed mighty men in the land; surely we will not enter it until they come out of it.' ... They said: 'O Moses, we will not enter it forever, while they are in it, so go with your Lord, and fight with you both, and we are just sitting here waiting.'" (Q.S. al-Ma'idah: 20-26).*

This attitude shows how slavery has affected their mentality. After a long time of colonization and enslavement, they lost courage and confidence. Moses said in disappointment:

*"O my Lord, I have no rule except myself and my brother, therefore separate us from the wicked." That is why*

As a consequence of their disobedience, God said:

*"So the land was forbidden to them for forty years; (during that time) they will go around in confusion on the earth. So do not grieve for the wicked"* (Q.S. al-Mā'idah: 26).

The Qur'an also describes how they are easily influenced by the bad traditions they witness:

*"We have crossed the Children of Israel to the other side of the sea; So they came to a people who worshipped their idols. The Children of Israel said: 'O Moses, make us a god (idol) as they have gods.' Moses replied: 'Indeed, you are a fool'"* (Q.S. al-A'rāf: 138).

The Golden Age: David and Solomon

After many trials and tribulations, the Children of Israel finally reached their golden age under the rule of King David and his son Solomon. The Qur'an describes them both as a just and wise king and judge, but Solomon had a sharper judicial intuition.

*"And (remember the story) of David and Solomon, when they gave a decree concerning the plant, because it was destroyed by the goats of their people. And We have seen the verdict given by them; So We have given Solomon an understanding of the law (which is more precise); to each of them We have given wisdom and knowledge."* (Q.S. al-Anbiyā': 78-79).

David is described as a person who has a deep spiritual connection to the universe:

*"Indeed, We have given David a gift from Us. (We said): 'O mountains and birds, pray again and again with David,' and We have softened iron for him"* (Q.S. Saba': 10).

In the Islamic tradition David is known as a prophet with an extraordinary sense of art. The beauty of his verses of praise in the book of Zabūr is able to make the universe stunned when he is sung by it. These verses, if they can be understood allegorically, hint at the all-round peace in David's kingdom.

Solomon achieved remarkable and unique success. In the Qur'an Solomon is described as a universal ruler, his kingdom includes the society of humans, animals and also spirit beings or jinn:

*"The jinn made for Solomon what he wanted: tall buildings, statues and plates that were like ponds and fixed pots (on the stove). Work to give thanks (to Allah) O house of David. And very few of My servants are grateful"* (Q.S. Saba': 13).

### **Setbacks and Destruction**

The end of Solomon's kingdom marked the end of peace in the dynasty of the Children of Israel. Split after split occurred until a great calamity befell them. The Qur'an mentions the destruction that befell them twice as a consequence of pride and disobedience:

*"And We have decreed to the Children of Israel in the book: 'Surely you will cause damage on the earth twice, and you will certainly boast with great pride.' So when the time comes for the punishment of the first of the two, We will bring to you Our servants who have great power, and they will be rampant in the villages, and that will be the sure fulfillment"* (Q.S. al-Isrā': 4-5).

This refers to the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 586 BC. But God then gave him a second chance:

*"Then We gave you a turn to defeat them again and We helped you with wealth and children and We made you a larger group. If you do good (that means) you do good for yourself and if you do evil then evil is also for yourself" (Q.S. al-Isrā': 6-7).*

### **Universal Messaging and Contemporary Relevance**

The stories of the Children of Israel in the Qur'an are not intended to reveal historical data, but as a form of conveying God's messages to people. Such stories must be understood as a reflection of human behavior in life, not limited to a specific geographical region and era.

The Qur'an shows a pattern that repeats itself in human history: how a nation can rise and fall depending on their moral and spiritual commitment. When they adhere to the principles of monotheism and justice, they achieve success. But when they are arrogant and forget spiritual values, they experience regression and destruction.

The most important message of these stories is that no nation or individual is immune from the test and no one is automatically guaranteed salvation based on heredity or social status. What is decisive is piety, justice, and commitment to universal moral values.

In the context of the Prophet Muhammad's da'wah, these stories serve as a reminder and comfort at the same time. A warning to those who oppose the truth and a consolation for the Prophet that the challenges he faced were not new – previous prophets had experienced similar things.

The Qur'an wisely uses these historical stories to convey principles relevant to all times and places: the importance of justice, the dangers of pride, the value of patience in the face of trials, and the belief that in the end truth will triumph over falsehood.

Thus, the story of the Children of Israel in the Qur'an is not just a narrative of the past, but a mirror for self-introspection and a guide for a better future for all mankind.

### **CONCLUSION**

The stories about the Jews in the Qur'an are largely full of praise, depicting them as descendants glorified by God and recipients of extraordinary gifts throughout their history. Notably, the Qur'an's positive verses about the Jews were mostly revealed during the Makkīyah period—in surahs such as al-An'ām, Yūsuf, al-Isrā', al-Anbiyā', al-Naml, and Saba'—while some early Medinan verses in Surah al-Baqarah also reflect this tone. These verses emphasize moral and monotheistic principles, serving as lessons and encouragement for perseverance in the face of struggle. At the same time, the Qur'an offers a balanced view by acknowledging the mistakes made by the Jews that incurred God's wrath, reminding readers of the consequences of disobedience. Future research could include comparative studies of similar narratives across Abrahamic traditions, exploration of historical interpretations in different Islamic scholarly traditions, and analysis of how understanding these shared narratives might enhance contemporary Muslim-Jewish relations, thereby fostering interfaith dialogue and religious understanding in today's interconnected world.

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