

Rethinking *Al-Maghdoobi Alaihim*: Muslims, Christians, Jews, and the Wrath of God

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Introduction

Jewish people say hello by wishing “Shalom.” Muslims greet each other with “as-Salaamu Alaikum.” In many countries, Christians pass the greeting of “Peace.” Despite these greetings of kindness and good intention, peace seems elusive in this world. In some cases, war and hostility appear closer than peace.

This article addresses a core Islamic teaching—that the wrath of God rests upon the Jews. Indeed, this underlying presupposition constitutes *the primary reason* for conflict between Muslims and Jews in the Middle East, though it is scarcely mentioned overtly. The article then pivots to more positive Islamic source material for Muslim perceptions of Jews. It concludes with the Christian perspective that the wrath of the Almighty rests upon sin rather than upon a particular ethnic group.

I state as a disclaimer that many Muslims live peaceably with their Jewish neighbors. Not all Muslims feel antipathy toward Jews. Muslims, like all people, have varied opinions and attitudes toward any subject. Yet, we must rethink the paradigm described below if any meaningful progress is to be made in overcoming pre-judging, or prejudice. Writing as a Muslim-background Christian, I encourage Muslims to reevaluate a position that many Muslims have been taught since childhood and perhaps have thus internalized subconsciously.

Foundations of Islamic Antipathy toward Jews

Guide us on the Straight Path

Muslims are taught to pray the opening chapter of the Qur'an known as Sura al-Fatiha. The final two verses provide a prayer of supplication which observant Muslims will pray seventeen times per day as part of daily salat: “Guide us on the Straight Path, the Path of those you have favored—not those who have earned your anger—nor those who have gone astray. Amen.”¹



Adi bin Hatim asked the Prophet of Islam for clarification. Muhammad's answer is reported in a hadith that is considered *sahih* (authentic) and is quoted by at-Tirmidhi and Abu Dawud:

¹ Droege, AJ. *The Qur'an: A New Annotated Translation*. Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2013. Used throughout.

Narrated Adi bin Hatim: I asked Allah's Messenger about the Statement of Allah: "Gharil maghdubi 'alaihim [not (the way) of those who earned Your Anger]," he replied: "They are the Jews." And 2: "Walad dallin (nor of those who went astray)," he replied: "The Christians, and they are the ones who went astray."²

Ibn Kathir, in his *Great Commentary on the Qur'an*, gives the following tafsir for Q1:7:

Allah asserted that the two paths He described here are both misguided when He repeated the negation "not." 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 path of the believers is knowledge of the truth and abiding by it. In comparison, 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. Ibn Kathir.³

The Qur'an buttresses this condemnation of the Jews by likening them to apes in Q2:65; 5:60; and 7:166. It states, "You will surely find the most bitter towards the believers to be the Jews and polytheists..." (5:82). In this way, the die has been cast regarding hostility and distrust on the part of Muslims against Jews. Next, we observe the historical context for these verses.

Muhammad and the Jews of Medina

Though research into early Islamic history and sacred manuscript is raising many questions about that history and those manuscripts, this inquiry centers on what most Muslims have been taught to believe. That standard Islamic narrative chronicles how the Jews of Medina rejected the prophethood of Muhammad. Jewish *kufr* (disbelief) as well as Muhammad's violent response toward this *kufr* created a precedent and a paradigm. Tor Andrae, a biographer of Muhammad, states:

One must see Mohammed's cruelty toward the Jews against the background of the fact that their scorn and rejection was the greatest disappointment of his life, and for a time they threatened to completely destroy his prophetic authority. For him, therefore, it was a fixed axiom that the Jews were the sworn enemies of Allah and his revelation. And mercy toward them was out of the question.⁴

Since Muhammad fulfills the role of *al-insan al-kamal* (the perfect person), his actions are exemplar for Muslims. That "the Jews were the sworn enemies of Allah" became a "fixed axiom" in the Islamically-informed mindset.

² Hilali, Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-, and Muhammad Muhsin Khan. *Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an in the English Language*. Madinah, Saudi Arabia: King Faud Complex, 1984.

<https://www.holybooks.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/english-quranalhilali-khan.pdf>, pp. 15-16

³ "Commentaries for 1.7, Al-Fatiha (The Opening)." <https://quranx.com/tafsirs/1.7>.

⁴ Andrae, Tor. *Mohammed: The Man and His Faith*. Dover. 1955, p. 166

The chant, *Khaybar, Khaybar, ya Yahud! Jaish Muhammad, sawfa ya 'oud!* (Khaybar, Khaybar, O Jews! The army of Muhammad will return!”) is commonly heard around the world. This mantra recalls the conquest and destruction of the Jewish community in AD 628 by Muhammad’s army at Khaybar in Arabia, with the threat that Muslims of today will mete out the same punishment upon contemporary Jews. This phrase is often chanted in public at street protests.⁵

Once again, only a subset of Muslims thinks this way. Yet, to pretend the sentiment neither exists nor that it fuels modern Islamic antisemitism constitutes denialism.

The Growth and Transmogrification of Islamic Antisemitism Today

At the time of this writing in the summer of 2024, the war between Israel and Hamas continues to rage. Iran has recently bombed Israel. Israel’s northern border with Hezbollah in Lebanon sits on a powder keg. All of these Muslim actors—Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran—consider themselves agents of Allah in inflicting wrath upon the Jews. Militarily, they have been unsuccessful. The successful surprise attack of 7 October 2023 serves as a military outlier.

Leftist groups in the West immediately took up the banner of Hamas following this tragic event. Online keffiyeh sales skyrocketed as people sought to stand with “the oppressed.” Some learned pro-Hamas chants and created pro-Hamas placards. These largely non-Muslim protesters took it upon themselves to inflict wrath upon Jews, in line with al-Fatiha. At American universities, Jewish students and faculties were singled out and threatened.⁶

Islamic antisemitism has been spreading and mingling with other streams of antisemitism. The unhappy result constitutes a significant threat to Jews today. Antisemitism stymies peace between Muslims and Jews, and thus forms a danger to Muslims as well.

Perceptions of the “The Religious Other”

In reflecting on interfaith relationships, we encounter the subject of “the Religious Other.” The views of believers toward unbelievers may be shaped by Scripture, history, and contemporary events. Yet, no religion can boast a majority of the world’s inhabitants. This reality demands a certain humility. The Religious Other always outnumber co-religionists.

The Creation

⁵ MEMRI.org. “Passerby Scolds Sheik for Teaching Martyrdom to Children at al-Aqsa Summer Camp.” July 27, 2015. <https://www.memri.org/tv/passerby-scolds-sheik-teaching-martyrdom-children-al-aqsa-mosque-summer-camp>. (See 3:09 on the video)

⁶ Greyman-Kennard, Danielle. “Jewish UCLA Student Blocked from Entering Campus by Pro-Palestinian Activists.” April 30, 2024. <https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/article-799131>.

The Bible teaches that God created all humans in his own image, the *imago Dei*. “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:27, NASB95 throughout). By simple logic, a certain equality must exist between creatures created in the same image. This includes equality of men and women at an essential level in the eyes of God, though their functions may vary.

While the Qur'an does not portray an equality of the sexes in the same way (see Q4:34), it does teach the creation of all humans by Allah. Further, Q30:30 states that all of humanity has been created upon the same pattern: “So be steadfast and truth to the faith, *the natural pattern of Allah which He has created in humankind*. Let there be no change in this creation of Allah. That is upright religion, but most people do not know.” The italicized text includes two words formed from the same root f-t-r which has the basic meaning ‘create’. The word *fitr* means ‘natural created human disposition or pattern’ and *fatara* means ‘create’. In this verse, Muhammad uses the word for humankind, *naas*, rather than the gender-specific word for men, *rijaal*. The verse employs no delimiting language regarding believing Muslims, (*mu'umin*) or unbelievers (*kafiruun*). So, Allah created all people according to the same pattern or *fitra*. Such an understanding potentially injects a more optimistic tone into Islamic views of the Religious Other, including Jews.

Religious Favoritism

The Hebrew Scriptures warn strongly against pagan idolatry. The first two of the Ten Commandments forbid worship of other gods and fabrication of graven images. The Old Testament includes numerous admonitions against adopting the pagan practices of the nations, the *goyim*. While various Gentiles, such as Ruth and Cyrus the Great, play a positive role in the Old Testament, the general tenor is marked by a “we-they” mentality. More often than not the pagan practices of the *goyim* caused the Jewish nation to fall into idolatry. This reality continued into the intertestamental and Maccabean periods, with a pronounced firewalls against perceived Gentile pagan pollution. This reality forms a major subtheme of the New Testament as the Jewish apostles of Jesus sought to integrate Gentiles into the messianic movement.

To balance the picture, Jewish worshippers were not commanded to hate Gentiles as people—only their pagan practices. God provides in Torah a great command regarding hospitality in Leviticus 19:33-34:

When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.

Lastly, the Jewish religious worldview does not feature the precise a mirror image to *al-maghoubi alaihim* (the wrath of God upon them). While events in the Middle East over the past century have heightened the animosity many Jews feel toward Muslims, and the Jewish-*goyim* tension is real, this animosity is asymmetrical. One may simply envision the state of Israeli Jews

had the strategic military equation been reversed. If Hamas possessed Israel's military capability, there is little doubt they would institute a widespread genocide—7 October writ large. Jews can live peaceably with Muslims, and vice versa, if it were not for the *al-maghoubi alaihim* mindset.

Christians largely adopted Jewish morality and ethics, though their movement proved global in nature. James, the half-brother of the Lord Jesus, states: "My brethren do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism" (James 2:1). Christians are encouraged to "do good to all men, especially to those of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). So, the New Testament does recognize co-religionists, as well as the Religious Other.

Regarding Islam, we have already observed a certain stated equality of *fitra* in the creation. Refining this principle, Islamic Law promotes equality within categories. Yet, certain categories or classes of people retain innate legal superiority over others. In general, people cannot overcome categorical inferiority by merit. These are: Muslims are superior to non-Muslims (Q5:3); Men are superior to women (Q4:34), and free people are superior to slaves. Though these are categories under Islamic Law, they do not annul the Creator-Mankind *fitra* paradigm of Q30:30.

In conclusion, the major religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share belief in a Creator God and humans as a distinct class of his creation. Humans share a basic equality as created beings under the authority of the sovereign Creator. The religions under study all share a component of Religious Other worldview in which believers are endowed with at least a measure of spiritual or legal favoritism.

Numerical Realities

Lastly, all religions are minority religions. President Sisi of Egypt reminded the scholars of Al-Azhar of this truth in his heralded "Revolutionize our Religion" speech of 2015: "Is it possible that 1.6 billion Muslims would kill the world's population of 7 billion so that the Muslims could live on their own?"⁷ It was a brave speech, exemplifying the type of courage that will be needed to make progress in interfaith relations.



Re-thinking the *al-Maghoubi Alaihim* Paradigm (AMAP)

As stated in the first section of this paper, the default popular Islamic view regarding Jews is that the wrath of Allah rests upon them. The term *al-maghoubi alaihim* from Sura Fatiha,

⁷ MEMRI.org, "Egyptian President al-Sisi at al-Azhar: We Must Revolutionize our Religion." Egyptian Channel 1, January 1, 2015. <https://www.memri.org/tv/egyptian-president-al-sisi-al-azhar-we-must-revolutionize-our-religion>

literally, “the wrath (or anger) upon them,” can be rendered in the shorthand AMA. The AMA Paradigm can be rendered AMAP. The following are reasons to rethink the AMAP.

The Jews as a Less Populous People

Jews do not constitute a demographically large group of people. The world population presently stands at eight billion people. Of these, two billion are Muslims, and 15 million are Jews. To imagine this proportion, one could envision an assembly hall with 500 people in it. Of those 500 people, 125 of those people would be Muslims, yet only one of them would be Jewish. Muslims outnumber Jews by 125 to 1. By comparison, the Muslim cities of Jakarta, Karachi, Dhaka, Cairo, and Istanbul *each* outnumber the world Jewish population. For Muslims to fear such an outnumbered foe seems irrational.

God even explains to the Jewish people in the Torah that they should not boast of their numbers:

The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples,⁸ but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (Deut. 7:7-8)

The Overstatement of Jewish World Influence

Many have attempted caricatures of Jewish control over human events and finances. Most are malicious fabrications. A prime example is the fictitious *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, forged by a Russian gentile in 1905. The book has been translated into Arabic and enjoys wide circulation among Muslims to this day.

Jews, like Armenians, Lebanese, and Chinese, are a diasporic people seeking their fortune wherever they can find it. Their success can be attributed to their own hard work and wisdom.

Jews as a People of Prophets

The Qur'an testifies that the Jewish nation is a people of prophets. Q4:163: “We also sent revelation to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and his descendants...” Hence, the Qur'an singles out the descendants of Jacob as prominent in the prophetic chain.

Islamic traditions vary on the total number of prophets sent by Allah. The Qur'an does not specify that number, though 124,000 is mentioned in some traditions. Other traditions include the high proportion of Jewish prophets in these large numbers: “Anas said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: ‘Allah sent eight thousand Prophets, four

thousand to the Children of Israel and four thousand to the rest of mankind.' (Narrated by Abu Ya'la in his Musnad, 7/160)"⁸

The Qur'an specifically names 25 prophets. Thirteen of these – a majority – are Jewish. A people whose population is 1/500th of the global population contributed over ½ of named prophets in the Qur'an. This constitutes an astounding ratio.

Another five of the named prophets of the Qur'an are in the genealogical line from which Jews are descended, for example Abraham. An additional two are close family members to the Jews—Ismael was the uncle of Jacob; and Shu'ab (Jethro) was the father-in-law of Moses. Thus, 20 of the 25 named prophets of the Qur'an are either Jewish or in the Jewish family. This is simply astounding. Should not Muslims as well as Christians extend some spiritual gratitude to the Jewish people for their prophetic contribution to humanity?

Rejecting the AMAP

By deciding definitively that the wrath of God rests upon a people, Muslim scholars have created a roadblock to healthy interfaith and intercommunal relationships. Yet, the previous section has highlighted the laudable prophetic output of the Jewish people in relation to their small size. All monotheists in the world, including Muslims, have benefitted from what this tiny nation has produced.

According to the AMAP, and al-Fatiha, as interpreted by Muhammad himself, the wrath of Allah rests upon the Jews. This mentality drives actors such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran, which are attacking Jews in our times. In fact, it is impossible to understand the Middle East conflict without awareness of the spiritual and theological nature of the AMAP. This paper asks Muslims to reevaluate that position.

The Locus of the Wrath of God

The Bible informs the Christian belief regarding the wrath of God. In short, the wrath of God does not ultimately rest upon humans—sinners—but upon sin. God's wrath also rests upon Satan and his hosts, whom the Lord Jesus defeated on the cross. However, this concluding section will focus upon sin as the focus of the wrath of God.

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible teaches that sin constitutes a falling short of the glory of God through the breaking of the laws of God. Sin deserves punishment. Human sinners commit sins, so we are all deserving of punishment. God set in place the Levitical sacrificial system to atone for sins. Aaron's sons administered these sacrifices.

⁸ Islam Question & Answer. "How Many Prophets are There in Islam." February 17, 2013. <https://islamqa.info/en/answers/95747/how-many-prophets-are-there-in-islam>.

Paul states that the Jewish Messiah, Jesus, paid for our sins and took the wrath which we deserve:

Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the *wrath of God* through Him.¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.¹¹ And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. (Romans 5:9-11, emphasis added)

The death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus constitute God's answer to the problem posed by the sins which deserve wrath. God does not overlook sin but deals with it decisively. Christ saves the sinner from divine wrath. Moreover, the sacrifice of Christ, having removed the barrier caused by sin, restores the relationship of the believer to God. Forgiven sins yield salvation.

Reconciliation with God can provide a steppingstone to reconciliation amongst peoples. The fulcrum of this discussion rests upon the spiritual reality that the wrath of God need not be executed *by people against people*. Christ has dealt with divine justice, wrath, and retribution.

Conclusion

This article addressed a root cause of Islamic antipathy toward Jews, based on Muslims' daily prayer for guidance from Sura Fatiha. This prayer, recited 17 times per day by observant Muslims, includes the supplication to be kept from the straight path, not those upon whom the anger of Allah abides, namely, the Jews. Such an attitude, rehearsed, sanctified, and described herein by its Arabic expression, *al-Maghdoubi alaihim*, has prejudiced the minds of some Muslims against Jews. The behavior of Hamas terrorists on October 7, 2023, reflected the common Islamist tendency of seeing themselves as righteous agents of Allah's wrath upon the Jews.

The study pivoted to find more hopeful material in the Qur'an. First, Allah has created all people according to the same pattern, known as *fitra*, providing at least a basic threshold of equality. Secondly, Jews have assisted Muslims by providing and sharing with them their prophetic line. These prophets constitute the majority of named prophets in the Qur'an, though the Jewish world population has historically remained a small minority. Such realities provided more optimistic alternatives for Muslim perceptions of Jews.

As President Sisi of Egypt recommended, the time has come for Muslim clergy to reevaluate their beliefs and the consequences thereof. They may find that they can enjoy—like many other Muslims already do—holistic and synergistic relationships with Jewish people. In doing so, Muslims may find themselves to be catalysts for peace. As-salaamu alaikum.

السلام عليكم
Peace be upon you