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Vignettes of Jews in the Qur'an: A Thematic Survey

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ABSTRACT: The present study falls within the recent approach concerned with analysing the literary aspects of the Quranic discourse. It surveys the vignettes of the Jews in the Qur'an based on the thematic rubrics under which their images are discursively represented. Shading off into various texts and contexts, the vignettes have been traced and classified so as to form clear ideas about the ultimate depiction of Jews in the Qur'an apart from any biased impetus. Several verses have been cited under each heading to support the argument it tackles. In addition to highlighting a literary feature of the Qur'an, the study concluded that the outlined vignettes – both positive and negative – note to a structural unity of the divine book. They also figure out the strain underlying inter-religion conflicts.

Keywords & Phrases: Vignettes; Jewish people; Quranic studies; structural unity; Quranic discourse.

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Introduction

Taking into account that representing the image of a certain category of people in the body of literature is always controversial as it ensues lots of interpretations, a persistent question arises as to the representation of a people in a scripture that constitutes the religion of others. For, the image of Jews has always been a topic for many debates and critical studies due to their history of victimisation and homelessness that entails being vulnerable to alienation and stereotypes. Many literary works – the Western in particular – have represented Jews either overtly or covertly in accordance with the general view the mainstream people look at them which has always been negative. Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* and Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* are two evident cases in point.¹ As a result, the Jewish highbrows have been goaded by a trend to detect such a type of literary pieces in many languages and cultures to prove the long-lived oppression to which their people were prone in diaspora and, thus, to support their championed claim of the right to have their own homeland.

Apart from the human discourse which could be interpreted in terms of bias and self-interests, the Holy Qurʾān is not to be loaded with hostility towards a particular people or to carry grudges against them. Undoubtedly, the divine point of view is objective and just. It can never judge any people by earthly measures. In addition, the Quranic treatment of Jews is not all the time negative as the Jews are recurrently referred to as “Children of Israel” and “People of the Book”, the epithets that agree with the same references in the Jewish and Christian holy scriptures. According to a study by Gürkan, naming the Jews in the Qurʾān differs in Meccan and Medinan *sūrah*s in accordance with “the experience of the first Muslim Community.”² The Jewish cultural institutions, besides, do not deny or disbelieve in Qurʾān though they tend to officially undermine its significance or raise doubts over its authenticity in order to keep up the priority and superiority of their own religion. This view is adopted by Reuven Firestone whose article “treats a Jewish polemical retelling of the foundational Muslim narrative” in the Qurʾān by way of making a counter history to subvert the Islamic authority.³ Many Jewish intellectuals, moreover, refer the Muslims' bias against Jews to a radical misinterpretation of the Qurʾān's verses rather than the Qurʾān itself. Hence, tracing the image of Jews in the Qurʾān is supposed to give an obvious and objective view that comprises the historical, anthropological, religious, and psychological aspects of the Jewish character.

One of the recent studies that have tackled ideas relevant to the present topic is Israel Shrenzel's article “*Verses and Reality: What the Koran Really Says about Jews*” published

¹ Christopher Marlowe, William H. (William Howard) Sherman, and Chloe Kathleen Preedy, *The Jew of Malta* (London; New York: The Arden Shakespeare, 2021); William Shakespeare and John Russell Brown, *The Merchant Of Venice*, [Reprint ed.]. (Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2008).

² Salime Leyla Gürkan, “Jews in the Qurʾān: An Evaluation of the Naming and the Content,” *Ilahiyat Studies* 7, no. 2 (2016): 163–206, <https://doi.org/10.12730/13091719.2016.72.148>.

³ Reuven Firestone, “Muhammad, the Jews, and the Composition of the Qurʾān: Sacred History and Counter-History,” *Religions* 10, no. 1 (2019): 63, <https://doi.org/10.3390/REL10010063>.

in *Jewish Political Studies Review* in 2018. The article intends to present the historical problematic relationship between the first generation of Muslims and the Jewish groups in Arabia to trace the origin of the Qurʾān verses that “propound a negative and hostile attitude toward Jews.” The study notes also to the few verses “from which a tolerant attitude can be derived.”⁴ It concludes with the potential for a creative interpretation of the Qurʾān that would foster the tolerant voices among Islamic scholars against the extremist one.

Obviously, Shrenzel’s article is devoted to show the differences in interpreting some Quranic verses, the seventh verse of al-Fāṭiḥah in particular. It compares Muhammad Abduh’s moderate interpretation with others that the researcher considered biased and fundamentalist. To conceal the negative allusions, the study evades many texts and contexts where Jews are represented in clear terms that no two interpretations can disagree about. Such controversial issues tackling the Qurʾān’s representation of non-Muslims is the subject of another study by Tazul Islam highlights the paradoxical Quranic discourse on Christians because “its narratives express both compliments and condemnation, reproach and rapprochement.”⁵ To bridge the gaps left out by above articles, the present study is meant to survey almost the main verses where Jews are referred to in order to make a comprehensive view regardless of any religious or ideological orientations.

Guided by the above motivation, it is important to confirm that the present study, though touches upon a sensitive racial cord, does not intend to be offensive against the people it tackles or even dictated by any ideological purpose, religious difference and ethnic conflicts. It is rather an initial step towards understanding the discourse of the Qurʾān through casting light on some of its literary aspects, a field of study that has been rarely dealt with. Furthermore, investigating the image of Jews throughout the Qurʾān’s various chapters (*sūrahs*) is significant as it casts the light on its thematic unity which refutes the “atomistic view” that claims its incoherence.⁶

With regards to the studies that explore the literary elements in the Qurʾān, they mark an academic turning point helpful in opening the door to a new approach of reading and understanding one of the most important religious scriptures. The approach, however, must count on a specific sensibility that could compromise between the literary reading of a theological text, on the one hand, and the particularity of the Qurʾān as a divine text with an author-reader’s vertical rather than horizontal relationship, on the other. One pioneering study in this vein is “*The Qurʾān As Literature*” by which Mustansir Mir highlights a number of literary techniques that the Qurʾān peerlessly makes use of such as: word

⁴ Israel Shrentzel, “Verses and Reality: What the Koran Really Says about Jews,” *Jewish Political Studies Review* 29, no. 3/4 (2018): 25–39.

⁵ Tazul Islam, “Christian-Muslim Relations: An Analysis of the Quranic Articulation of Christian Friendliness to Muslims,” *al-Bayan: Journal of Qurʾān and Hadith Studies* 17, no. 1 (2019): 24–37, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22321969-12340068>.

⁶ Mustansir Mir, “The Qurʾān as Literature,” *Religion & Literature* 20, no. 1 (1988): 49–64.

choice, pictorial elements, satire, irony, word play and ambiguity, characterization, dialogue, and so on. It concludes by proposing to develop a theory that should adopt exploring the literary aspects of the Qurʾān based on recognizing the subject as an independent field.⁷

Another recent study titled “*The Stories of the Qurʾān: A Study of Qurʾānic Narrative*” by Rahmanʼdoust considers a number of literary elements that can be applicable to some Qurʾānic narratives such as the stories of Joseph, Moses, etc. In addition to surprise, suspense, dialogue, and conflict, the researcher focuses on the character-portrayal in terms of the relationship between the major-minor characters as well as the narrative perspective from which the characters are depicted. The study concludes that the Quranic narrative is distinct from the novel in the modern sense of the term due to a number of features: the factuality of characters and events, the implicit expression of lessons and principles, and the lack of a traditional plot structure.⁸

With the above orientation in Quranic studies taken into account, delving into a thematic survey of the Quranic vignette of Jews marks a progressive step in the field. In addition to viewing characters from a thematic perspective, it also highlights the technique by which the same characters are represented in multi-faceted roles – vignette. Nevertheless, examining the image of characters is supposed to spring from an approach that considers the various chapters of Qurʾān as a broad framework that contains several coherent elements within its discursive discourse. It is noteworthy that the characters examined are factual rather than fictional. They are also referred to as types rather than individuals. Representing the image of people as groups is usually meant to depict their manners and way of thinking. Hence, the present study deals with the above topic thematically through classifying the vignettes of the Jews that the Qurʾān portrays under broad traits. The Quranic verses quoted throughout the study are taken from the translation of Saheeh International,⁹ which is thought to render the best literary English version although unnumerable Quranic terms cannot “be easily rendered into another language.”¹⁰

1. Vignettes of Jews in Qurʾān

Choosing to survey the ‘vignette’ has actually been inspired by the unique Quranic art of characterization by which a notable character portrayal is given briefly, concisely, and by the way. In his above-mentioned study, Mir celebrates “the Quranic technique of presenting memorable characters in a few lines – the vignettes.”¹¹ A vignette often refers

⁷ Mir.

⁸ Mojtaba Rahmanʼdoust, “The Stories of the Qurʾān: A Study of Qurʾānic Narrative,” *European Journal of Scientific Research* 40, no. 4 (2010): 569–79.

⁹ Saheeh International, *Translation of the Meaning of the Qurʾān* (London: al-Muntada al-Islami, 2004).

¹⁰ Linda S. al-Abbas and Ahmad S. Haider, “Evaluating the Accuracy and Consistency in Rendering Qurʾānic Terms with Overlapping Meanings into English,” *al-Bayan: Journal of Qurʾān and Hadith Studies* 18, no. 2 (2020): 111–37, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22321969-12340083>.

¹¹ Mir, “The Qurʾān as Literature.”

to a sketch without border or frame shading off into the surrounding paper. The written vignette is “a short, carefully constructed description of a person, object, or situation, representing a systematic combination of characteristics.”¹² This is most applicable to the images of Jews in Qur'an. The description given about them is always in short flashes that merge with discursive contexts but give precise illustrations outlining certain aspects of their character.

When the Qur'an refers explicitly to the Jews, it uses three different terms. They are referred to as: Jews, *al-Yahūd* (8 times), Children of Israel, *Banū Isrā'īl* (40 times), and in association with Christians 'People of the Book' (31 times). In addition, there are many other contexts where they are implicitly referred to with pronouns. Regardless of the name they are given, Jews are present throughout the Qur'an's chapters as stock characters that share, to greater or lesser degrees, the common features elaborated below.

1.1 Privileged People

The first image Qur'an depicts Jews with comes in sūrah al-Baqarah – the second and longest chapter. Addressed approvingly as ‘children of Israel,’ the Jews are reminded of the Lord's great favors bestowed exceptionally upon them. To add emphasis, the same verse is repeated two times within the same chapter and one more time with a slight change in another:

“O Children of Israel, remember My favor that I have bestowed upon you and that I preferred you over the worlds [i.e., peoples]” (al-Baqarah 2: 47 & 122).

“And We did certainly give the Children of Israel the Scripture and judgement and prophethood, and We provided them with good things and preferred them over the worlds” (al-Jāthiyah 45: 16).

The above verses have their equivalent in the Bible: “For thou art a holy people unto the Lord Thy God: the Lord Thy God has chosen thee to a special people unto himself, above all people that are on the face of the earth.”¹³

The favor that God has bestowed upon the children of Israel is exceptional as He preferred them to any other people. According to *Translation of the meanings of the Noble Qur'an*, the Arabic word *‘ālamīn* (the worlds) which they were made to excel refers to “mankind and jinn of [their] own time.”¹⁴ If so, the Jews were uniquely given a privilege that marks them as the best nation in case they fulfill their covenant with Allah that the other verses elucidate,

¹² Christiane Atzmüller and Peter M. Steiner, “Experimental Vignette Studies in Survey Research,” *Methodology* 6, no. 3 (2010): 128–38, <https://doi.org/10.1027/1614-2241/A000014>.

¹³ *The Holy Bible, New International Version* (Michigan: Zondervan, 2011), see: Deuteronomy, 7:6.

¹⁴ Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *Translation of the Meanings of The Noble Quran in the English Language* (Madinah: King Fahd Glorious Quran Printing Complex, 1998), al-Baqarah: 46.

“And Allah had already taken a covenant from the Children of Israel, and We delegated from among them twelve leaders. And Allah said, “I am with you. If you establish prayer and give *zakāh* and believe in My messengers and support them and loan Allah a goodly loan, I will surely remove from you your misdeeds and admit you to gardens beneath which rivers flow. But whoever of you disbelieves after that has certainly strayed from the soundness of the way” (al-Māʾidah 5: 12).

“And We had certainly settled the Children of Israel in an agreeable settlement and provided them with good things” (Yūnus 10: 93).

In many other contexts, the children of Israel receive the honor of the Book given to Moses (*Musa*) as it guides them to the righteous way. Hence, both Moses and the Book are sent to help them; Moses delivered them from the slavery and oppression meted out by Pharaoh, whereas the Book includes the laws that would organize and enlighten their life:

“And We gave Moses the Scripture and made it a guidance for the Children of Israel that you not take other than Me as Disposer of affairs” (al-Isrāʾ 17: 2).

“And We certainly gave Moses the Scripture, so do not be in doubt over his meeting. And We made it [i.e., the Torah] guidance for the Children of Israel” (al-Sajdah 32: 23).

“And We had certainly given Moses guidance, and We caused the Children of Israel to inherit the Scripture” (Ghāfir 40: 53).

1.2 Victimised and Delivered from Persecution

Unlike any other nation, the Jews are represented in the Qurʾān as a people who suffered from a severe racial persecution at the hand of Pharaoh and his tyrannical regime: “And [recall] when We saved you [i.e., your forefathers] from the people of Pharaoh, who afflicted you with the worst torment, slaughtering your [newborn] sons and keeping your females alive. And in that was a great trial from your Lord” (al-Baqarah 2: 49).

The address herein is to remind the Jews of a bitter history from which they have been delivered with the help of Moses who challenged the Pharaoh’s tyranny demanding, “I have come to you with clear evidence from your Lord, so send with me the Children of Israel” (al-Aʾrāf 7: 105).

Upon the tyrant’s rejection, the great Passover took place, “And We took the Children of Israel across the sea” (Yūnus 10: 90). Thereafter, a radical change altered the relationship of Israelites and Egyptians. The weak people who suffered from oppression and enslavement by virtue of Allah’s words inherit the lands of their perpetrators who, by contrast, were destroyed to reap the harvest of their injustice: “And We caused the people who had been oppressed to inherit the eastern regions of the land and the western ones, which We had blessed. And the good word [i.e., decree] of your Lord was fulfilled for the Children of Israel because of what they had patiently endured. And We destroyed [all] that Pharaoh and his people were producing and what they had been building” (al-Aʾrāf 7: 137).

Literary speaking, the above vignette implies an oppressor-oppressed dramatic conflict that ends up with a poetic justice. The Jews assume the role of the final winner who not only witness the elimination of their enemy but also get rewarded with wish fulfillment a God's favors that can be added to a long list which they have to remember and thankfully observe: "O Children of Israel, We delivered you from your enemy, and We made an appointment with you at the right side of the mount, and We sent down to you manna and quails" (Tāhā 20: 80).

1.3 Empowered and Corrupt

At the outset of chapter 17 al-Isrā' which is also named after 'Children of Israel,' a significant review of a prophecy that the Book included sums up the alternate history the Jews will undergo: "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" (al-Isrā' 17: 4).

The Jews are doomed to be very powerful two times. In each time they will have a power allied with corruption. This is a case when victims exchange roles and become perpetrators the situation that might be suggestive of the tragic flaw which leads to the downfall of a tragic hero. No heavenly or earthly laws actually entitle the victim of persecution to use absolute power in an evil way against others. As a result, Allah would assign more powerful nation over them to massacre them (al-Isrā' 17: 5).

Coming before Christianity and Islam, Judaism contains strict laws that were meant to organize the life of Jews. They, however, tended to neglect those laws and refute the apostles' mission, "And Our messengers had certainly come to them with clear proofs. Then indeed many of them, [even] after that, throughout the land, were transgressors." (al-Mā'idah 5: 32). The corrupt use of power is a sign of a moral downfall that precedes the actual tragic downfall.

1.4 Sceptics and Cynics

This image is often associated with Jews throughout the Quranic verses. Guided by the supremacy of their religion, the Jews living during Prophet Muḥammad's days tended to raise doubts over the credibility of His mission: "... And that which has been revealed to you from your Lord will surely increase many of them in transgression and disbelief" (al-Mā'idah 5: 68).

In the following verse, they are in league with the hypocrites to distract the people from the Prophet's guidance: "... and from among the Jews. [They are] avid listeners to falsehood, listening to another people who have not come to you.²³⁴ They distort words beyond their [proper] places [i.e., usages], saying, 'If you are given this, take it; but if you are not given it, then beware'" (al-Mā'idah 5: 41). Also, "[They are] avid listeners to falsehood, devourers of [what is] unlawful" (al-Mā'idah 5: 42).

They are even skeptical about Jesus' (ʿĪsā) vivid prophesy by which he foretells the coming of a messenger named Aḥmad—the alternative name of Muḥammad: "And [mention] when Jesus, the son of Mary, said, 'O Children of Israel, indeed I am the

messenger of Allah to you confirming what came before me of the Torah and bringing good tidings of a messenger to come after me, whose name is Ahmad.' But when he came to them with clear evidences, they said, 'This is obvious magic'" (al-Şaf 61: 6).

Neither Jesus nor Muḥammad was spared the Jews' cynical attitudes since such messages might bring a great change to the status quo that they do their best to maintain. Certainly, Christianity and Islam would strip them of the 'chosen' privilege because they have to believe in such religions and step down to equality. Apart from other religions, the Jews succumbed to skepticism at a moment they have survived death with a great heavenly miracle they evidently witnessed: "And We took the Children of Israel across the sea; then they came upon a people intent in devotion to [some] idols of theirs. They [the Children of Israel] said, 'O Moses, make for us a god just as they have gods.' He said, 'Indeed, you are a people behaving ignorantly'" (al-A'rāf 7: 138).

One can imagine the amount of the cynical and skeptical thoughts filling in the minds of those people who, soon after the Exodus by which they were delivered from Pharaoh's tyranny and the miracle of passing through the sea divided by Moses' stick, they asked Him to create idols for them to worship.

1.5 Cursed and Wrath-worthy

In many cases, the Jews are described as deserving the Lord's wrath due to violating His laws, unbelief, and breaking their covenant. They angered their Lord when they disbelieve in his Apostles: "And they said, 'Our hearts are wrapped.' But, [in fact], Allah has cursed them for their disbelief, so little is it that they believe" (al-Baqarah 2: 88).

The Jews who violated the Sabbath and thereafter were cursed and metamorphosed into apes and swine are always referred to in Qur'an for unbelievers to take as examples; "O you who were given the Scripture, believe in what We have sent down [to Muḥammad], 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 Allah accomplished" (al-Nisā' 4: 47). Also, "Say, 'Shall I inform you of [what is] worse than that as penalty from Allah? [It is that of] those whom Allah has cursed and with whom He became angry and made of them apes and pigs and slaves of ṭāghūt'" (al-Mā'idah 5: 60).

God's wrath also deprived the Jews of many good things which were supposed to be lawful.; "For wrongdoing on the part of the Jews, We made unlawful for them [certain] good foods which had been lawful to them, and for their averting from the way of Allah many [people]" (al-Nisā' 4: 160).

Besides, following are several occasions on which they are cursed for many blasphemies and law-violations: "So for their breaking of the covenant, We cursed them and made their hearts hardened" (al-Mā'idah 5: 13). Also, "And the Jews say, 'The hand of Allah is chained.' Chained are their hands, and cursed are they for what they say" (al-Mā'idah 5: 64). The Qur'an also says: "Cursed were those who disbelieved among the Children of Israel by the tongue of David and of Jesus, the son of Mary. That was because they disobeyed and [habitually] transgressed" (al-Mā'idah 5: 78).

Part of the Lord's curse afflicting the Jews assume the form of diaspora by which they are doomed to live as exiles: "And if not that Allah had decreed for them evacuation, He would have punished them in [this] world, and for them in the Hereafter is the punishment of the Fire" (al-Ḥashr 59: 3).

Reasons might be miscellaneous, but the Lord's curse and wrath are indications of His great anger against the people whom he favored but they never scruple to violate their covenant and blaspheme Him in return. Hence, set off against the Lord and His Apostles, the Jews in the above context are represented as villains who initiated and maintained a vertical conflict with the divine authority.

1.6 Cowards and Death-fearers

Cowardice and the fear of death are two traits that the Qur'an attached to the Jewish character with no exception. The Qur'an revealed such a hidden desire which certainly contradicts with their claim they are Allah's favorites. For, if it is true, the people who are in good terms with God do not fear death as they are assured of being rewarded in the afterlife. The Qur'an says: "Say, 'O you who are Jews, if you claim that you are allies of Allah, excluding the [other] people, then wish for death, if you should be truthful.' But they will not wish for it, ever, because of what their hands have put forth. And Allah is Knowing of the wrongdoers" (al-Jum'ah 62: 6-7).

Their love of life even exceeds that of the unbelievers. The unbelievers' fear of death is less as they deny the Day of Judgment and thus never worry about punishment. By contrast those who have sins and know for sure that they be punished in the Hereafter are anxious to die. The Qur'an says: "And you will surely find them the greediest of people for life – [even] more than those who associate others with Allah. 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" (al-Baqarah 2: 96).

From a different perspective, the Qur'an represents them as a people who take refuge in fortified castles as they avoid any direct encounter with the Muslim army. The result was that their fortified home could not defend them against Allah's decree. In a verse: "It is He who expelled the ones who disbelieved among the People of the Scripture from their homes at the first gathering. You did not think they would leave, and they thought that their fortresses would protect them from Allah; but [the decree of] Allah came upon them from where they had not expected, and He cast terror into their hearts [so] they destroyed their houses by their [own] hands and the hands of the believers. So take warning, O people of vision" (al-Ḥashr 59: 2). In another, "They will not harm you except for [some] annoyance. And if they fight you, they will show you their backs [i.e., retreat]; then they will not be aided" (Āl 'Imrān 3: 111).

Such a portrayal strips the Jews of one more heroic feature – bravery – which is necessary to cherish the collective memory. Even in victimhood, one needs to face dangers courageously so that he/she can pass a record of struggle over to the next generations.

1.7 Traitors and Oath-breakers

If being coward is negative as far as the individual is concerned, there are several traits that might strike at the root of one's relationship with others. Treachery, conspiracy, and oath-breaking are some examples of the Jews' problematic relationship with the surrounding. In many cases, they failed to maintain their words either with God or with Apostles. In the Qur'an: "Have you not considered the assembly of the Children of Israel after [the time of] Moses when they said to a prophet of theirs, 'Send to us a king, and we will fight in the way of Allah?' He said, 'Would you perhaps refrain from fighting if fighting was prescribed for you?' They said, 'And why should we not fight in the cause of Allah when we have been driven out from our homes and from our children?' But when fighting was prescribed for them, they turned away, except for a few of them. And Allah is Knowing of the wrongdoers" (al-Baqarah 2: 246).

The Qur'an also says: "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, Allah loves the doers of good" (al-Mā'idah 5: 13).

1.8 Greedy and Usurers

One of the stereotypes attached to Jews throughout history is being usurers. Practicing usury signifies the extent to which Jews were associated with the hoarding up of wealth as well as greed. In the following verse, the Qur'an emphasized the above stereotype: "And [for] their taking of usury while they had been forbidden from it, and their consuming of the people's wealth unjustly" (al-Nisā' 4: 161).

In addition, some religious people (rabbis) exploit their position to rob people of their properties. The Qur'an says: "O you who have believed, indeed many of the scholars and the monks devour the wealth of people unjustly and avert [them] from the way of Allah. And those who hoard gold and silver and spend it not in the way of Allah – give them tidings of a painful punishment" (al-Tawbah 9: 34).

Banned in almost every religion, usury is always an indication of a diseased society where materialism overshadows humanitarian causes.

1.9 Disdainful, Self-centered and Arrogant

This feature is a byproduct of the above God-given privileges and the self-righteous, self-centered mentality. Religiously speaking, the Jews, along with Christians, believe in the righteousness of their religion excluding in the process Muslims. As a result, they never scruple to claim that the Paradise, as a reward for the righteous, is to be exclusively theirs. In many Qur'an verses, the Jews, allied with Christians, boast over their religious standpoint as if to condemn the Muslims' faith. The following verses are cases in point:

1. “And they say, ‘None will enter Paradise except one who is a Jew or a Christian.’ That is [merely] their wishful thinking. Say, ‘Produce your proof, if you should be truthful’” (al-Baqarah 2: 111).
2. They say, ‘Be Jews or Christians [so] you will be guided.’ Say, ‘Rather, [we follow] the religion of Abraham, inclining toward truth, and he was not of the polytheists’” (al-Baqarah 2: 135).
3. “Or do you say that Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the Descendants were Jews or Christians? Say, ‘Are you more knowing or is Allah?’” (al-Baqarah 2: 140).
4. “That is because they say, ‘Never will the Fire touch us except for [a few] numbered days,’ and [because] they were deluded in their religion by what they were inventing” (Āl ‘Imrān 3: 24).
5. “But the Jews and the Christians say, ‘We are the children of Allah and His beloved.’ Say, ‘Then why does He punish you for your sins?’” (al-Mā'idah 5: 18).

1.10 Disobedient and Stubborn

Disobedience is a term that might be inclusive of many of the above features. Part of the Jews deviation from the straightway according to the Qur'an is due to disobeying their Lord and His Apostles' instruction. They are portrayed as stubborn people who, in many circumstances, tend to rebel against God for the sake of nothing but disobedience. Deliberately, they insolently mock the God's words in a way that they deserve His wrath. In the Qur'an: “Among the Jews are those who distort words from their [proper] places [i.e., usages] and say, ‘We hear and disobey’ and ‘Hear but be not heard’ and ‘*rā'inā*,’ twisting their tongues and defaming the religion” (al-Nisā' 4: 46).

Consequently, God punished them by marking as unlawful to them many foods that the people of other religions are allowed to eat. The Qur'an says: “And to those who are Jews We prohibited every animal of uncloven hoof; and of the cattle and the sheep We prohibited to them their fat, except what adheres to their backs or the entrails or what is joined with bone. [By] that We repaid them for their injustice. And indeed, We are truthful” (al-An'ām 6: 146).

Conclusion

The noble Qur'an is not a cohesive narrative where characters are carefully sketched and portrayed. Still, it could excel any other discourse in illustrating a character with imagist vignettes that give the reader a comprehensive idea in a terse language. The vignettes of the Jews in Qur'an are scattered and shade off into many different contexts but they give a sufficient knowledge about the characters' main traits. Endowed with God's favor, they were haunted by a sense of pride and disdain to a point that they look down on the opponent religions, broke their covenant and disobey the apostles. They even forgot the history of oppression from which God delivered them and embraced a skeptical, cynical, and materialist worldview. Consequently, their movement from a state of victimhood to that of a corrupt empowerment represents a great test that they failed.

The above multi-faceted image by which Jews are represented might lead to variable attitudes, but certainly it can never be fluctuating or ambivalent. The variation, nevertheless, is meant to make the Jewish vignette more colorful so that God's judgment becomes justifiable. The moral is that, he who wages a war against God must be a loser. Satan, according to Qur'an as well as Milton's *Paradise Lost*, rebelled against God out of jealousy and arrogance and then entered into a futile conflict with his Creator. He was motivated by the sense of pride over being God's privileged angel as well as the feeling of jealous fear that Adam might take his place. His first sin caused him to delve deeply into the rebellion as every step took him towards farther sins. Disobedient, he was cursed and then subjected to God's wrath. Under the claim of victimization, he could convince many to be his followers. In fact, neither Adam nor Satan were spared the original sin though they differ in revocability. Their original polarization, however, caused the recurrence and re-enactment of certain motifs throughout the history of inter-religious conflicts.

Critically speaking, the above comparison is meant at the technical rather than the moral levels. It should not be misunderstood as an attempt to demonize a people among whom there are the pious as well as the law-breakers. Considered thoroughly, the gradual degradation in the representation of the Jews from the Lord's chosen to the cursed marks a dramatic change in the Jewish vignette. Though the images are discursively drawn over the Qur'an's text with no systematic deliberation, their thematic relationship can be traced as the above survey stresses. Hence, the structural unity marking the Qur'an's discourse about Jews undoubtedly refutes Peters claims that Prophet Muhammad was retelling stories of "orally transmitted midrashim" that He "heard at Mecca."¹⁵ Needless to argue, the illiterate prophet can never weave words and history in such mastery. The above vignettes help any ordinary reader of the Qur'an to reshape the rough sketches into an integrated image that precisely defines the Jewish character and its relationship with the world around.

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¹⁵ Francis E. Peters, *Islam : A Guide for Jews and Christians* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 21–22.

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