

“And We Said After that to the Children of Israel, ‘Settle the Land’”

Is there a Qur’anic Mandate for Eretz Yisroel? (Part 2)



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Introduction to Classical Study of the Qur'an

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Outline

- Continuing from the last session on Jerusalem, this class will be a text study of materials relating to the status of the Holy Land and the Qur'anic account of Jewish settlement in the Land
- The aim is to allow you through examination of Islamic exegetical discourse on these Qur'anic verses, to determine what Islamic tradition actually states or does not state in relation to ownership claims to Jerusalem and the Holy Land
- We will review the historical context
- Examine references to Jewish settlement in the Holy Land in primary text
- Explore points arising in the commentary on these verses in classical *tafsir*
- Questions that might arise include the fact that given that some of this commentary material is highly polemical and anti-Jewish in its content and tone, surely there would be somewhere an Islamic claim made to the Land, superseding the Jewish claim whose historical narrative is recounted in the Qur'an. Do you find such a counter-claim, explicitly or implicitly stated anywhere in the materials you have examined?
- *Text Study:* Qur'anic texts on the Holy Land

Historical Context

- 630 – Bloodless conquest of Makkah
- 632 – Death of the Prophet Muhammad
- 632-634 – Caliphate of Abu Bakr
- 634-644 – Caliphate of ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab
- 637 – Conquest of Jerusalem by ‘Umar, and promulgation of the *Treaty of ‘Umar*

In contrast to the preoccupation with the taking of the Sacred House at Makkah, is there any historical evidence during the lifetime of the Prophet for territorial interest in Jerusalem and the Holy Land?

The Covenant of 'Umar

In the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Beneficent.

This is what the servant of Allah, Umar b. al-Khattab, the Commander of the Faithful, has offered the people of *Iliya* security granting them '*aman* "protection" for their selves, their money, their churches, their children, their lowly and their innocent, and the remainder of their people.

Their churches are not to be taken, nor are they to be destroyed, nor are they to be degraded or belittled, neither are their crosses or their money, and they are not to be forced to change their religion, nor is any one of them to be harmed.

No Jews are to live with them in *Iliya* [this was a Christian negotiation demand] and it is required of the people of *Iliya* to pay the *jizya* like the people of the cities. It is also required of them to remove the Romans from the land; and whoever amongst the people of *Iliya* that wishes to depart with their money together with the Romans, leaving their trading goods and children behind, then they selves, their trading goods and their children are secure until they reach their destination.

Upon what is in this book is the word of God, the covenant of His Messenger, of the *khulafa'* "caliphs" and of the believers if they (the people of *Iliya*) gave what was required of them of *jizya*.

The witnesses upon this were Khalid ibn al-Walid, 'Amr b. al-'As, Abd ar-Rahman bin Awf and Mu'awiya bin Abi Sufyan . Written and passed on the 15th year of the Hijrah

Qur'anic References to the Holy Land and Jewish Settlement

يَا قَوْمِ ادْخُلُوا الْأَرْضَ الْمُقَدَّسَةَ الَّتِي كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَلَا تَرْتَدُّوا عَلَى أَدْبَارِكُمْ فَتَنْقَلِبُوا
خَاسِرِينَ

'O my people, enter the land which God has decreed [lit. written כתב] for you, and turn not back on your heels, otherwise you be overturned as losers'

The Table (Qur'an 5):21

وَقُلْنَا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ لِبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ اسْكُنُوا الْأَرْضَ فَإِذَا جَاءَ وَعْدُ الْآخِرَةِ جِئْنَا بِكُمْ لَفِيفًا

'And we said after that to the Children of Israel settle [*uskunu* שכן] the Land [*ard* ארץ], and when the latter promise came to pass we brought you together as a company'

The Night Journey (Qur'an 17):104

Points Arising in the Classical Commentaries – the Holy Land

- *al-ard al-muqaddasa* “the Holy Land”
- al-Tabari and al-Qurtubi discuss variant *hadith* on the question of the identity of the territory in question – 1) *al-Tur* (the mountain, Mount Sinai in the Quran) 2) *al-Sham* (Syria-Palestine, or Syria-Palestine-part of Jordan, or Damascus) 3) *'Ariha'* (Jericho and surrounding territories)
- al-Zamakhshari and al-Baydawi recount the narrative of Abraham being called by God to ascend Mount Lebanon, and the vision of his eyes being the territory promised to his descendants

Points Arising in the Classical Commentaries – Covenant

- *allati kataba Allah lakum* “Which God has written for you”
- al-Tabari and al-Qurtubi recount grammatical renderings via oral *hadith* tradition of the semantic implication in this context of *kataba* with *‘amara* “he ordered, commanded” and *wahaba* “bestowed, granted”
- al-Tabari makes explicit reference to this writing being *thabbata* “confirmed, firmly established” on *al-lawh al-mahfuz* “the preserved tablet”, being the eternal tablet in heaven from which are said to emanate all the holy scriptures, the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospel and the Qur’an

Points Arising in the Classical Commentaries – Israel’s Disobedience

- Clearly, according to the primary Qur’anic text and to classical *tafsir* discourse, Israel’s major wrongdoing was her cowardly *disobedience* when commanded by God, to *enter the Land* and to undertake *jihad* against its inhabitants. This is recorded in al-Tabari, al-Qurtubi, al-Baydawi and al-Zamakhshari. A strong anti-Jewish polemic on the cowardice and disobedience of Israel is expounded in Ibn Kathir’s commentary.
- In Qur’an 5:20 Moses remonstrates with his people to recall God’s favour upon them, to which the people’s response is one of cowardly desertion from battle, leaving the task to “two brave men” (according to traditional commentaries, Joshua and Caleb). There are *tafsir* narratives on the immense strength of the existing inhabitants of the Holy Land and the cowardice of Israel in the face of this formidable enemy.
- For this disobedience, Israel is forbidden entry to the Land for 40 years and condemned to wander, prior to finally entering the Holy Land.

Qur'anic Reference to Disobedience

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَى لِقَوْمِهِ يَا قَوْمِ اذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ جَعَلَ فِيكُمْ أَنْبِيَاءَ وَجَعَلَكُمْ مُلُوكًا وَآتَاكُمْ مَا لَمْ يُؤْتِ أَحَدًا مِّنَ الْعَالَمِينَ

يَا قَوْمِ ادْخُلُوا الْأَرْضَ الْمُقَدَّسَةَ الَّتِي كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَلَا تَرْتَدُّوا عَلَى أَدْبَارِكُمْ فَتَنْقَلِبُوا خَاسِرِينَ

قَالُوا يَا مُوسَى إِنَّ فِيهَا قَوْمًا جَبَّارِينَ وَإِنَّا لَن نَّدْخُلَهَا حَتَّىٰ يَخْرُجُوا مِنْهَا فَإِن يَخْرُجُوا مِنْهَا فَإِنَّا دَاخِلُونَ

قَالَ رَجُلَانِ مِنَ الَّذِينَ يَخَافُونَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمَا ادْخُلُوا عَلَيْهِمُ الْبَابَ فَإِذَا دَخَلْتُمُوهُ فَإِنَّكُمْ غَالِبُونَ وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَتَوَكَّلُوا
إِن كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

قَالُوا يَا مُوسَى إِنَّا لَن نَّدْخُلَهَا أَبَدًا مَا دَامُوا فِيهَا فَاذْهَبْ أَنْتَ وَرَبُّكَ فَقَاتِلَا إِنَّا هَاهُنَا قَاعِدُونَ

قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي لَا أَمْلِكُ إِلَّا نَفْسِي وَأَخِي فَافْرِقْ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَ الْقَوْمِ الْفَاسِقِينَ

قَالَ فَإِنَّهَا مُحَرَّمَةٌ عَلَيْهِمْ أَرْبَعِينَ سَنَةً يَتِيهُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَلَا تَأْسَ عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْفَاسِقِينَ

‘Remember Moses said to his people: "O my people! Call in remembrance the favour of God to you, when He produced prophets among you, made you kings, and gave you what He had not given to any other among the peoples. "O my people! Enter the holy land which God has assigned to you, and turn not back ignominiously, for then will you be overthrown, to your own ruin. They said: "O Moses! In this land are a people of exceeding strength: Never shall we enter it until they leave it: if (once) they leave, then shall we enter. (But) among (their) God-fearing men were two on whom God had bestowed His grace: They said: "Assault them at the (proper) Gate: when once you are in, victory will be yours; But on God put your trust if you have faith. They said: "O Moses! while they remain there, never shall we be able to enter, to the end of time. Go you, and your Lord, and fight you two, while we sit here. He said: "O my Lord! I have power only over myself and my brother: so separate us from this rebellious people! God said: "Therefore will the land be out of their reach for forty years: In distraction will they wander through the land: But sorrow not over these rebellious people.’

The Table (Qur'an 5):20-26

Some Modern Academic Commentators

- There is a considerable quantity of popular Islamic material contending viewpoints in support of the theory of Jewish dereliction of their ownership to the Holy Land by reason of Israel's wrongdoing and alleged Jewish crimes through history, and also theories of the Canaanite origin of the Palestinian people
- "Apes, Pigs and Islamic Identity" by Uri Rubin traces the historical development of the mindset of Muslim ascendancy during the military expansion in the first two centuries after the Prophet
- "In both Jewish and Islamic understandings of the term 'written,' there is the meaning of finality, decisiveness and immutability...So the simple fact is then, from a faith-based point of view: If God has 'written' Israel for the people of Moses, who can change this?' He also quoted two of Islam's most famous exegetes - Ibn Kathir and Muhammad al-Shawkani - as supporting this explanation."

Interview with Professor Khaleel Mohammed, San Diego University

Summary

- Is there historical evidence either within or outside the Qur'an and Islamic Tradition during the lifetime of the Prophet for any Islamic territorial interest in Jerusalem and the Holy Land?
- What are some classical commentaries on the Qur'anic accounts conveying in their narratives of the settlement by the Children of Israel of the Holy Land as territory which "God has written" for them and "firmly established" on the "preserved tablet in heaven"? In this literature, is there any explicit or implicit sense in which such Jewish covenant with the Land has been terminated? Is there any Islamic or Arab or other counter-claim to the Holy Land either stated or implied in the primary Qur'anic text or in the classical *tafsir* commentaries?
- What are the implications of the Qur'anic account of God's punishment being meted out to Israel for her disobedient *refusal* to settle the Land and wage *jihad* when commanded? The classical *tafsir* commentaries are damning in their polemic against the Jews for their cowardice in this respect – hence, what would be the implications if it were found that such strongly polemical and anti-Jewish material nonetheless contains no counter-claim of Islamic supersession of ownership of the Holy Land from the Jews?