

ON THE QUR'ĀN AND THE THEME OF JEWS AS "KILLERS OF THE PROPHETS"¹

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Abstract

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A prominent element of the Qur'ān's material on the Jews is its report that the Israelites killed prophets sent to them. The Qur'an does not describe the killing of any particular prophet, nor does it attempt to prove in any other way that the Jews have killed the prophets. Instead the Qur'an seems to consider it common knowledge that the Jews have done so as it makes certain inter-religious arguments in this light. However, on the basis of the Hebrew Bible the prominence of this theme in the Qur'an hardly makes sense. None of the great prophets in the Hebrew Bible are killed by the Israelites. In the present paper I argue that this theme emerges from the para-biblical traditions which indeed describe how the Jews killed the prophets whom God sent to them. These traditions are found already in Jewish texts, and they lead Christian authors -- including New Testament authors -- to connect the Jewish persecution of Christian believers with their earlier persecution of the prophets who predicted the coming of Christ. This connection is prominent in the anti-Jewish literature of the Syriac Christian authors. The manner in which the Qur'an employs the theme of Jews as killers of the prophets is closely related to that literature.

Keywords: *Qur'an, Jews, Christians, Prophets, Syriac, Midrash, Ephrem, Jacob of Serug.*

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