

THE  
DESCRIPTION OF  
BENI  
ISRAEL  
IN THE QUR'AN

Compiled by Abū Muhammad Yaḥyā



# The Description of Beni Israel in The Qur'an

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## **Author's Preface**

All praise is due to Allah alone, Lord of all that exists. I begin this humble work with the sincere intention to seek His pleasure alone, to serve His Book and the guidance of His Messenger ﷺ, to teach myself and my fellow believers, and to deepen my own understanding of His Revelation. I remind myself, before anyone else, that this writing is not for status, fame, nor recognition — but solely to seek His Face, His acceptance, and His forgiveness.

This reminder is for my own heart before it is for others, and I ask Allah to purify my intention from any hidden desires or worldly attachments, and to make every word a testimony for me and not against me on the Day when no soul will benefit except by what Allah has accepted from them.

### **Du‘ā:**

O Allah, I ask You by Your Beautiful Names and Perfect Attributes to make this work sincerely for Your sake, and to accept it from me even with its shortcomings and deficiencies. Make it a means for me and those who read it to draw nearer to You, to reflect deeply upon Your Words, and to act upon what is contained therein.

O Allah, grant us beneficial knowledge, hearts that are humbled before You, and actions that are pure and righteous. Do not make this knowledge a proof against us, but rather a light in our graves, a companion in our loneliness, and a witness for us on the Day we meet You. Ameen.

## Introduction

In Sūrat al-Baqarah, beginning at verse 40, Allah the Most High turns His address to Banī Isrāʾīl, commanding them: “O Children of Israel! Remember My favor which I bestowed upon you, and fulfill (your obligations to) My covenant (with you) so that I fulfill (My obligations to) your covenant (with Me), and fear none but Me.”

The scholars of tafsīr among the Salaf—such as Ibn ‘Abbās, Mujāhid, Qatādah, and others—explained that with this divine call, Allah begins a detailed recounting of the favors, blessings, responsibilities, transgressions, and spiritual conditions of Banī Isrāʾīl. This address forms one of the longest, most comprehensive discussions of any previous nation in the entire Qurʾān. It occupies nearly a full juz’ and serves as both a warning and a lesson for the Ummah of Muhammad ﷺ.

Ibn Jarīr at-Ṭabarī and others mention that Allah’s command to “remember My favour” is not merely a reminder of past bounties, but an exhortation to gratitude, humility, and obedience. The Mufasssirūn say that Allah mentioned the ni‘mah—His favour—because Banī Isrāʾīl were granted leadership, Prophethood, scriptures, sustenance, and safety, yet many of them responded with rejection and arrogance. Allah’s preference (tafḍīl) over the worlds refers to their unique status among the nations of their time, as Ibn Kathīr and as-Sa’dī affirm, due to the succession of Prophets and the sending of clear miracles.

From this verse onward, Allah recounts incident after incident: their deliverance from Pharaoh, the covenant at Mount Ṭūr, the descent of manna and quails, their persistent defiance, and their repeated breaches of faith. As Ibn al-Qayyim رحمه الله summarizes, these āyāt expose the spiritual diseases—ingratitude, pride, distortion of scripture, and obstinate argumentation—that afflicted many among them.

Allah, in His infinite wisdom and perfect justice, singles out Banī Isrāʾīl in this extended discourse—bestowing upon them unique favor and distinction, while also setting forth profound lessons and enduring admonitions for all who come after. By recounting their history in such detail, Allah manifests both His bounty and His justice: elevating them through His gifts, holding them accountable for their responses, and drawing out lessons of guidance, gratitude, and warning for the entire Ummah. This approach exemplifies Allah’s comprehensive wisdom—clarifying the consequences of both obedience and rebellion, and imparting essential truths for those who reflect, as explained by the Salaf and firmly rooted in the revelation itself so that the Ummah of Muhammad ﷺ might reflect, avoid their mistakes, and heed the consequences of neglecting divine guidance.

The Salaf would frequently warn against following the ways of Banī Isrāʾīl in their rebellion, as in the authentic statement of Ibn ʿAbbās رضي الله عنه: “Whatever Allah mentions about Banī Isrāʾīl in the Qurʾān, do not do what they did.” (Reported by Abū Nuʿaym in al-Hilyah) Likewise, as-Saʿdī رحمه الله stated, “This passage is not merely history; it is an admonition for those who inherit the Book after them.” This is also seen in the hadith of the Prophet ﷺ: “You will surely follow the ways of those before you...” (al-Bukhārī, Muslim), indicating the importance of this section for every believer.

These verses are thus a living mirror for the Ummah, offering both warning and guidance. They illuminate the path of truth by recounting how an entire nation was elevated by Allah’s grace, then brought low – to the worst of lows through persistent disobedience, rebellion and distortion. The statements of the Salaf confirm that reflecting upon these āyāt is essential for safeguarding one’s imān and rectifying the heart.

As the narrative unfolds, Allah exposes the intricate patterns of stubbornness and evasion that marked Banī Isrāʾīl’s response to His commands. The episode of the cow—central to these āyāt—demonstrates their habitual resistance, reluctance, and the excessive questioning that resulted in hardship upon themselves. Ibn Kathīr, Qatādah, and Abū al-ʿĀliyah all noted that when they were told to slaughter a cow, they needlessly complicated the matter, seeking unnecessary details until, finally, they submitted begrudgingly. As Shaykh Ibn ʿUthaymīn رحمه الله highlighted, their example is a lesson that Allah tests His servants with simple commands, and that true guidance and ease is found in immediate, unquestioning obedience—not in argumentation or obstinacy.

The Qurʾān, by detailing these behaviors, warns this Ummah not to repeat such patterns. The Prophet ﷺ said, “The most severe punishment is for those who ask too many questions and differ with their prophets” (as found in Ibn Mājah and others). Thus, these āyāt establish a fundamental lesson: when Allah or His Messenger ﷺ commands, the believer’s only response is to submit with hearing and obeying—samʿan wa ṭāʿatan—not to complicate, delay, or resist.

The hearts of Banī Isrāʾīl became so hardened that even the greatest signs and miracles could not penetrate them. Allah likens their hearts to stone, or even more unyielding—while some stones are soft enough to burst forth with water, their hearts resisted every form of admonition. As Ibn ʿAbbās رضي الله عنه said, “Some stones are softer than your hearts, for they acknowledge the truth you have been called to.” And al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Mujāhid added that the warning to the Muslims in Sūrah al-Ḥadīd (57:16) serves as a caution: if the hearts of those who received revelation were admonished, how much more must we fear for our own?

The Salaf were unanimous that reflecting on these āyāt is a means to soften the heart and preserve faith. Ibn Taymiyyah رحمه الله emphasized that the literal nature of the Qur'an's language leaves no doubt—these are real stories with real consequences, and the believer must approach them with humility and resolve, not skepticism or conjecture.

Additionally, the verses expose the corruptions that entered into Banī Isrā'īl's practice: distorting their scripture, believing in parts of the Book and rejecting other parts, following false hopes, and inventing lies against Allah for worldly gain. Mujāhid, Qatādah, and Ibn Zayd, among others, documented how their scholars changed both the wording and meaning of the revelation, earning Allah's curse and disgrace both in this world and the next. This is why the Salaf warned so strongly against *tahrīf* (distortion), *ta'wīl* (misinterpretation), and partial acceptance of revelation—traits that would later manifest among sects and people of desire (*ahl al-bid'ah wal-hawā*).

Allah, in His perfect justice, further reminds the Ummah that hope for forgiveness cannot be built upon vain desires, imagined covenants, or a reliance on tribal identity. The only salvation lies in sincere faith and righteous action (*ittibā'* of everyone's respected Prophet), as Allah makes clear: "Whosoever earns evil and his sin has surrounded him, they are the dwellers of the Fire, they will dwell therein forever. And those who believe and do righteous good deeds, they are the dwellers of Paradise, they will dwell therein forever." (al-Baqarah 2:81-82).

Thus, these passages serve as a timeless standard and a divine criterion (*furqān*). They unveil the reality of hearts—how they can become deadened through sin, delay, and resistance—and remind us that the path to Allah is one of immediate submission, purification, and clinging to the Sunnah.

As al-Fuḍayl ibn 'Iyād رحمه الله said, "Whoever seeks the pleasure of people by angering Allah, Allah will leave him to the people," and Ibn Mas'ūd رضي الله عنه stated, "The destruction of Banī Isrā'īl began when they abandoned commanding good and forbidding evil." The believer, therefore, finds in these āyāt not just warning but a living roadmap: to recognize Allah's favors, avoid the pitfalls of Banī Isrā'īl, and hold fast to the truth as understood by the Salaf, seeking Allah's mercy through sincere *ittibā'* and continuous purification of the heart.

Their covenant with Allah was the sole condition by which Banī Isrā'īl could retain the blessings and honour bestowed upon them. Allah, the Most High, stated: "O Children of Israel! Remember My favour which I bestowed upon you, and fulfill My covenant so I will fulfill your covenant, and fear none but Me" (al-Baqarah 2:40). The Mufasssirūn from the Salaf, such as Ibn Kathīr and as-Sa'dī, clarified that this



covenant encompassed faith, obedience, and adherence to the guidance revealed to them. Their unique station among the nations depended entirely on upholding this trust.

Yet, when they repeatedly broke their promises—turning to disobedience, worshipping the calf, and even committing grave injustices such as killing their own prophets—they forfeited the covenant and its blessings. Allah’s justice was made clear when Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, the forefather of many prophets, sought assurance for his descendants, and Allah responded: “My covenant does not include the wrongdoers” (al-Baqarah 2:124). As the Salaf explained, this statement established that divine favour, leadership, and guidance are withdrawn from those who persist in oppression and rebellion, regardless of lineage.

This is a living lesson for the Ummah of Muhammad ﷺ: Allah’s promises are realized only through faithfulness and uprightness, not by heritage or empty claims. Thus, the believer must recognize that the downfall of Banī Isrā’īl stemmed from abandoning the covenant, and must steadfastly cling to Allah’s rope—avoiding even a single step down the path of the Jews, Christians, or innovators, lest the same fate overtake them. As Ibn ‘Abbās and the Salaf warned, every lesson from Banī Isrā’īl is a mirror for us: to remain firm upon the covenant of revelation, lest blessings are lost and the soul is left in ruin.

A central lesson with this book is the difference between mere claim and true faith. The Jews claimed faith and piety, yet for example refused to invoke death upon themselves when challenged by the Prophet ﷺ—revealing their inner knowledge of their own falsehood. The Prophet ﷺ and the Salaf were never attached to mere claims, but to truth, sincerity (ikhlās), and constant action upon guidance. The Qur’an denounces longing for this world and exposes the greed of those who value life above the hereafter, teaching that only true deeds, rooted in following the Messenger ﷺ, benefit the soul.

These āyāt also clarify the centrality of loving and respecting all Messengers and the Angels, e.g., Angel Jibrīl and Mika’īl, refuting those who choose some over others. Enmity to a single friend of Allah is enmity to Allah Himself, as established in the authentic Sunnah. Thus, walā’ and barā’ (loyalty and disavowal) must be directed solely by the criterion of revelation—not culture or identity.

A severe warning is delivered in these verses regarding the abandonment of the Book of Allah in favour of magic, the occult, or destructive innovations. Despite the countless blessings and clear guidance sent to Banī Isrā’īl, their persistent disbelief, shirk, and hypocrisy led some among them to embrace magic. Allah the Most High says: “They followed what the devils gave out (falsely) against the kingdom of



Sulaymān. Sulaymān did not disbelieve, but the devils disbelieved, teaching people magic...” (al-Baqarah 2:102). The Salaf, including Qatādah, Mujāhid, and Ibn Kathīr, explained that this verse exposes how a people—after neglecting Allah’s Book—became ensnared in one of the gravest sins, learning and teaching what destroys faith and severs a person from Allah’s mercy.

This is not merely a historical account, but a timeless warning for the Ummah. The abandonment of revelation always leads to darkness and fitnah; when the Book of Allah is neglected, innovations, superstitions, and even sorcery fill the void. The Prophet ﷺ said: “Whoever learns magic has committed disbelief” (Ahmad, authenticated by al-Albānī). Yet, the mercy of Allah is evident throughout these verses: sincere repentance, purification, patience, and steadfastness in obedience are always open for those who return to the straight path. As Ibn al-Qayyim and the Imams of the Salaf clarified, Allah’s door remains open for the one who seeks forgiveness and holds fast to the Book and Sunnah, but destruction awaits those who turn away to the ways of the devils.

The believer is taught not to imitate the disbelievers in word, action, or even ambiguous expressions. The Manhaj of the Salaf—as outlined by Ibn Taymiyyah, Ahmad, and others—is to avoid tashabbuh (imitation), to sever all pathways to evil, and to purify the heart, intention, and speech. This rigorous discipline leads to true jubilation, humility, and ikhlāṣ—constantly measuring every deed and word by the standard of Qur’an and Sunnah.

Above all, these passages make clear that the only way to attain Allah’s pleasure and ultimate success is through complete ittibā (adherence), sincere worship, and unwavering tawakkul (reliance) upon His Qadr (Decree). The condition of Banī Isrā’īl—whether honour or disgrace—was determined by their own choices regarding Allah’s guidance. As Allah, the Most High, states: “Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves” (ar-Ra’d 13:11). The very Qadr that befell them—their loss of blessings, descent into humiliation, and exposure to fitan—was the just result of what their own hands earned. When they upheld the covenant, Allah raised them in rank; when they broke it, He removed His favour. This is a universal principle in Allah’s Sunnah with His creation.

This is decisive proof of Allah’s perfect mercy, justice and wisdom: He grants or withholds according to a people’s actual response to revelation, in particular His Messenger (May Allah be pleased with all of them), not their lineage or claims. Thus, O Ummah of Muhammad ﷺ, take heed—for this was the Qadr that befell them because of their actions. Reflect deeply upon this: sever every attachment to the ways

of Ahlul Kitāb, the innovators, and the people of desires, and build your life solely upon revelation as understood and lived by the Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ.

By examining these descriptions with precision and adherence to authentic tafsīr, the reader will gain not only an understanding of Banī Isrāʾīl's unique position in history, but also a mirror through which the Ummah can assess its own relationship with the Qur'an, Sunnah, and the legacy of the Salaf as-Ṣāliḥ.

These verses set forth essential lessons for all those who reflect upon the story of Beni Israel. Allah, in His wisdom, repeatedly calls upon the Children of Israel to remember His unique favors and warns them against the pitfalls of pride, neglect, and deviation after receiving clear guidance. These reminders are not just for them, but are living warnings to this Ummah: true success and salvation lie only in unwavering obedience to Allah and fulfillment of His covenant.

Those who distort, neglect, or seek the pleasure of others at the expense of the truth are threatened with loss—both in this life and in the Hereafter. The examples of Ibrahim (ʿalayhi-s-salām) and his offspring are presented to show that only those who truly submit to Allah, fulfill His commands, and avoid wrongdoing are deserving of leadership, honor, and Allah's promises.

Allah further reminds that on the Day of Judgment, neither family ties nor intercession will avail anyone who neglected the message after it reached them. Every person will be accountable for their own deeds, and the only path to salvation is to cling firmly to what was revealed, to follow the way of the Prophets and the righteous predecessors without alteration or compromise.

Thus, these verses lay the foundation for understanding Beni Israel—not as a distant nation, but as a living example and a warning for those entrusted with revelation. The message is clear: follow the guidance as revealed, revive the Sunnah, and fear Allah alone, for true distinction and success are found only in holding firmly to the rope of Allah and the path of His Messenger ﷺ.