

Understanding “Banī Isrāʿīl”, the “Jews”, “Judaism” and the Religious Sects of the Jews (4)

Banī Isrāʿīl and Their Priestly Elites (Cohens) in the Hijāz (Yathrib) Prior to the Prophet and Islām



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The wife of the Prophet Muḥammad (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) **Şafiyyah bint Ḥuyayy** (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهَا) was descended from Levi, son of Jacob (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) through Aaron (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ), the brother of Moses (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ). Her father was from the tribe of Banū Naḍīr and her mother, Barrah bint Samuel, was from Banū Qurayzah. Şafiyyah would boast that Ḥarūn (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) was her father (paternal ancestor), Mūsā (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) was her uncle and Muḥammad (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) was her husband, as occurs in the Prophetic traditions. This was a tremendous honouring for her after she accepted Islām, after already being inclined towards it.

‘**Abd Allāh bin Salam** (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ), the Jewish rabbi who converted to Islām was descended from Yūsuf (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ), son of Jacob (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ).

The **Banū Qurayzah** and **Banū Naḍīr** were among the Cohens (Priests) of the family of Aaron son of ‘Imrān, descendent of Levi, brother of Yūsuf (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ). They were the priestly elite of the Jews. In his book, *al-Aghānī*, Abū al-Faraj al-Aṣbahānī (d. 356H) writes under the chapter heading, “News about the Aws and the Lineage of the Jews Who Descended to Yathrib” writes: “Aws bin Dhabiyy, the Jew. A man from Banū Qurayzah. And it is said that Banū Qurayzah and Banū Naḍīr are Cohens (al-Kāhinān), and they are from the offspring of al-Kāhin (Cohen) son of Hārūn, son of ‘Imrān, the brother of Mūsā, son of ‘Imrān—may Allāh honour Muḥammad and them and grant them safety. They took up residence at Yathrib after the death of Mūsā bin ‘Imrān (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ).”¹

Other tribes of Banī Isrā’īl in region of Madīnah were **Banū ‘Ikrah, Banū Tha‘labah, Banū Maḥmar, Banū Zaghūrā, Banū Zayd, Banū Bahdal, Banū ‘Awf and Banū al-Faṣīṣ.**²

¹ Kitāb al-Aghānī (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir) 22/77.

² Ibid. 22/78.

These are the very Banī Isrā'īl that the Qur'ān was addressing. These people knew the Prophet mentioned and prophesied in their books—as receiving revelation in the mountains of Fārān (in the Ḥaram of Makkah) and being received with joy at Mount Sela in Yathrib (Madīnah)—just like they knew their own sons and thus their disbelief—those from them who never accepted Islām—was that of juḥūd, which is rejection after full knowledge.

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