

## QS 8 Q 5:32

5.32 It is for this reason that We decreed to the Children of Israel that he who kills a soul neither in revenge for another, nor to prevent corruption on earth, it is as if he killed the whole of mankind; whereas he who saves a soul, it is as if he has saved the whole of mankind. Our Messengers came to them bearing clear proofs, but many of them thereafter were disobedient on earth.

5.32 C'est pourquoi Nous avons prescrit pour les Enfants d'Israël que quiconque tuerait une personne non coupable d'un meurtre ou d'une corruption sur la terre, c'est comme s'il avait tué tous les hommes. Et quiconque lui fait don de la vie, c'est comme s'il faisait don de la vie à tous les hommes. En effet Nos messagers sont venus à eux avec les preuves. Et puis voilà, qu'en dépit de cela, beaucoup d'entre eux se mettent à commettre des excès sur la terre.

سورة المائدة  
منْ أَخْلَى ذَلِكَ كَتَبْنَا عَلَى بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ أَنَّهُ مَنْ قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بَعْدَرَبِيْنَ فَكَانَمَا قَتَلَ النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَمَنْ أَخْبَيَهَا  
فَكَانَمَا أَخْبَيَا النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَلَقَدْ جَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ ثُمَّ إِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنْهُمْ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فِي الْأَرْضِ لَمُشْرِفُونَ (32)

### Cuypers

Le début du v. 32 est composé de la manière suivante :

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32a C'est pourquoi Nous avons prescrit [*katabnā*] aux fils d'Israël  
= b que *celui qui tue une âme,*  
- c non pour une [autre] âme, ou pour un désordre sur la terre -  
+ d ***c'est comme s'il avait tué l'humanité entière ;***  
= e et *celui qui la fait vivre,*  
= f ***c'est comme s'il faisait vivre l'humanité entière.***

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Un membre narratif (32a), introduit à une sentence de sagesse, construite en parallélisme antithétique (32b-d ↔ e-f). Le membre 32c est une incise, introduisant une exception à l'interdit du meurtre.

Dans plusieurs occurrences coraniques, le verbe *katabnā* introduit une citation de la Bible, tantôt au sens de « prescrire », tantôt au sens d'« écrire » : la loi du talion en Q 5:45 (// Ex 21:23 – 25) ; les tablettes de la Loi en Q 7:145 (// Ex 24:12) ; Ps 37:29 en Q 21:105. Ici (5:32), il s'agit d'un texte de la Mishna Sanh 4:5, repris presque littéralement :

« C'est pourquoi un seul homme a été créé dans le monde pour enseigner que si quelqu'un a causé la perte d'une seule âme d'Israël [certaines versions omettent « Israël »], l'Écriture le lui impute comme s'il avait causé la perte d'un monde entier, et si quelqu'un sauve la vie d'une seule âme d'Israël, l'Écriture le lui impute comme s'il avait sauvé la vie d'un monde entier ».

Or, les deux textes, celui de la Mishna et celui du Coran, sont précédés immédiatement par le récit du meurtre de Caïn, ce qui ne laisse aucun doute sur la relation

entre les deux textes. Le texte du Coran a supprimé le nom d'Israël, ce qui généralise la prescription à toute l'humanité. Mais il ajoute une incise qui introduit une exception à cette prescription et prépare au verset suivant (5:33) qui menace de mort « ceux qui combattent Dieu et son Envoyé et s'évertuent à semer le désordre sur la terre ».

L'importance du v. 5:35 est soulignée par le fait qu'il se situe au centre exact de la séquence (5:27–40), ce qui le met particulièrement en valeur.

La citation de la Mishna est, par ailleurs, révélatrice du fait que le Coran assimile des textes rabbiniques aux Écritures.

### Firestone

The phenomenon of a parallel literary theme occurring in the Qur'ān despite the lack of linguistic link that ties it to the narrative in a Biblical parallel is not limited to the episode in which Sarah laughed (Q 11:69–73). Another example can be found in *al-Mā'ida* 5:27–32, the story of the two sons of Adam, named Qābil and Hābil in post-Qur'ānic literature. In the parallel Hebrew Bible rendering of the narrative in Genesis, God asks Cain where his brother is. Cain answers with a question, “Am I my brother's keeper?” (Gen.4:9). God then responds, “What have you done! Behold, your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground!” (4:11), thus giving away the murder. The Hebrew word blood (*dām*) occurs uniquely there in the plural form, though the word can also be found in Hebrew as a collective noun in the singular form. In the plural it is *dāmīm* (it actually appears in the plural construct form: *dēmey aḥikha* – “your brother's bloods”), which functions as a linguistic “hook” upon which is constructed a famous exegesis in post-Biblical literature. The Mishnah (Sanhedrin 4:5) explains, “The [narrative] does not say, ‘your brother's blood’, but rather ‘your brother's bloods’ – his blood and the blood of his descendants. Adam was thus created alone, to teach you that anyone who destroys one human soul is considered as if he destroyed an entire world, and anyone who establishes one human soul is as if he has saved an entire world.” This linguistic fulcrum – an unusual plural upon which the exegesis is based – does not work in the Arabic, for although Arabic *damm* is a cognate to the Hebrew *dām*, no such motif appears in the Qur'ānic rendering of the two sons of Adam. Yet the identical lesson remains associated with the same scriptural story and the exegetical conclusion endures: destruction of a single soul is equivalent to the destruction of all humankind. In the Qur'ānic rendering, therefore, the association between the narrative and the ethical and cosmic conclusion is not inherent but rather a result of influence.

### Pregill

A classic example of the supposed Qur'ānic “debt” to rabbinic discourse. *Pace* Geiger, Goitein, et al., we might not wish to reduce this to a case of direct “borrowing” from rabbinic sources, but rather see this verse as simply drawing on a wisdom say-

ing common to many Near Eastern traditions. However, the larger context is telling, since *min aġal dālika* at the beginning refers back to the sin of Cain, described in vv. 27–31, which is precisely the context of the rabbinic dictum in the Mishnah (Sanh 4:5).

As related in this *sūra*, the story of Cain and Abel is thus not merely “rewritten Torah” of a general sort, but rather seems to presuppose a specific midrashic intertext that is being appropriated for a larger purpose; the direct allusion to a Jewish precursor actually seems to be intentional, signaled by *wa-laqad ḡā’athum rusulunā al-bayināt*. God gave Israel this rule prohibiting murder, with the explicit exemption of retaliation or cases of *fasād fī-l-arḍ* (ironic since this is exactly what the Jews are held to be culpable for here and elsewhere). The Qur’ān repeatedly asserts that the Jews kill without justification, in particular the prophets (cf., e.g., Q 2:61), so the clear subtext is that they do not follow this rule even though it is unambiguous divine law.

The larger “ethnopolitics” of the passage are interesting when we compare it to the Mishnah, since in the original the dictum states specifically that one who kills or saves a member of *Israel* kills or saves the world entire; here the principle is extended to all humanity. The mishnaic dictum reflects an underlying concern with communal boundaries, as evinced by the passage that follows: “for the sake of peace was [man] created, that he (presumably a Jew) might not say to his companion, ‘my ancestor was greater than yours,’ and that *minim* (sectarians) might not say ‘perhaps there are many powers in heaven.’” In contrast, the Qur’ānic context is deliberately universalizing; cf. vv. 18–19 preceding, where the exclusivist claims of Jews and Christians are explicitly challenged. Overall, it seems almost undeniable that some direct knowledge of the rabbinic precursor informs the Qur’ān here, given not only the parallel wording but the close analogy in context; at the same time, we must also acknowledge the Christian precedents for other aspects of the passage (Witztum 2011b: 111–153), which demonstrates the richness and complexity of the Qur’ān’s use of older literary materials here.

## Reynolds

As Michel Cuypers (2007: 155–6) mentions, it is not to be missed that the Qur’ān has God speak about “writing” for the Israelites a decree that is found not in the Bible but in the Mishna (Sanhedrin 4:5). The phrase *min aġal dālika* (“because of this”) appears to be a non sequitur in the Qur’ān and, remarkably, it seems to makes sense only in light of the Hebrew of Genesis, where Cain’s blood is described in the plural “bloods,” and the Mishna, which explains this plural with the remark that Cain is guilty not only for the blood of his brother Abel, but also the blood of Abel’s posterity.

However, in the Mishnah the comment which is closest to v. 32 is connected instead to Adam, “For this reason man was created one and alone in the world: to teach that whosoever destroys a single soul is regarded as though he destroyed a

complete world, and whosoever saves a single soul is regarded as though he saved a complete world" (trans. Darby). Moreover, as Joseph Witztum (2011b) illustrates, the passage on Cain and Abel generally (vv. 27–32) involves particular Christian motifs (in particular the presentation of Abel as a willing victim) and is closer to Syriac Christian retellings of the Genesis story than that found in Jewish sources.

### Zellentin

Many Qur'ānic sayings have parallels with rabbinic teachings that are attested both in the Palestinian and in the Babylonian tradition. The close rabbinic parallel of the saying in Q 5:32 gives a possible entry way to the difficult question if either of the two traditions, the Palestinian or the Babylonian, is more pertinent for the studies of the Qur'ān (see also my comments on QS 14, but cf. QS 36). The Palestinian version of this text, in the Mishna, in the context of discussing Cain and Abel (see Reynolds), states that: "for this reason man was created alone, to teach you that whosoever destroys a single soul (*npš*), scripture (*hktwb*) imputes (guilt) to him as though he had destroyed a complete world, and whosoever preserves a single soul, scripture ascribes (merit) to him as though he had preserved a complete world" (Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5 according to the early manuscripts and Geniza fragments, assumed in Talmud Yerushalmi 4.11, 22b). The *editio princeps* of the Babylonian Talmud, however, quotes the Mishna with one additional important specification, stating that "whosoever destroys a single soul *in Israel*," and "whosoever preserves a single soul *in Israel*" (Sanh 37a, also with reference to Cain and Abel, this is also what one will find in popular translations of the Mishna). This saying is recorded in a variety of passages in the manuscripts of the Babylonian Talmud, and the majority of manuscripts considers the destruction of any soul to be like the destruction of all mankind, yet only the creation of a soul "in Israel" to be like the creation of a world. Only one manuscript (Cambridge F-S-F2 (1)26) preserves the Palestinian tradition unchanged, without any specification of an *Israelite* soul—the version closest to the Qur'ān (even though here, of course, the entire verse is addressed to the sons of Israel).

In my view, this is yet another indication that here and in general— with noteworthy exceptions—the Palestinian rabbinic tradition is more relevant than the Babylonian one for the study of the Qur'ān, even though it is chronologically more removed from the redaction of the Palestinian Amoraic texts. (Also, the two rabbinic communities stood in vivid intellectual exchange, including polemics, see Zellentin 2010: 1–5 and 95–136.). Hence, I do not think the Qur'ān is universalizing the rabbinic saying, I think the Babylonian rabbis "particularized" the more universalist Palestinian version, with which the Qur'ān is familiar—without the restriction that only Israelites are concerned. As already noted by Rippin, the Qur'ān applies the saying in a general sense, and apparently even to its own community, clearly with a polemical aside is since the Jews themselves elsewhere are accused of *fasād*, as Pregill correctly states (see especially the *fasād*, "violence," in Q 2:60).