

# Abraham

*in the  
Three Monotheistic Faiths*

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PASSIA

Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs

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# Introduction

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The legend of Abraham in religious history has been a controversial issue for many years. This fact was emphasized long ago in 1926, when the late Taha Hussein, the famous Egyptian intellectual and author of many studies on the prophets, accused those who were referring to the story of Abraham in different holy books of intending to build a connection between Jews and Arabs, since their holy books refer to the same story of Abraham with different interpretations.

In the early 1990s, the Western media started examining the common grounds or issues between Arabs and Jews, in particular the Abrahamic faith, and I remember quite clearly the answer given by an old Palestinian woman to a question posed to her by a foreign journalist: “What do you know about Abraham?” The woman replied, “I pray for him, I mention him in my five daily prayers when I ask God to bless Prophet Mohammed as God has blessed Prophet Abraham.” But the woman then added that the Holy Qur’an taught her that Abraham was “neither Jew, nor Christian, but a believer in one God and a Moslem.” When I tried to understand her words according to the current political dictionary of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, I heard her saying that Abraham is part of my faith, is mine, and – by adding the Qur’anic verses to stress her point – denying Abraham’s affiliation with others.



What I heard was enough for me to ask a colleague of mine to write a paper on Abraham as a prophet and his descendents, family, marriage, relation to the land of Canaan, as well as the idea of monotheism in order to enrich the Palestinian library with a current study on the issue. PASSIA consequently published, in November 1991, a paper titled "Ibrahim in the Torah, Bible and the Qur'an" by Dr. Abdel Sattar Kassim of An-Najah University, followed by a second edition in July 1994.

My interest in the story of Abraham and where the people of the three books meet and differ on the issue did not, however, stop there. In 1996, Bishop Samir Kaftey of the Anglican Church in Jerusalem invited me to meet Dr. Shimon Shetreet, the former Israeli Minister of Religious Affairs, who was carrying a huge basket of ideas and projects, starting with a joint prayer for peace and ending with an international religious conference in one of the Arab capitals. My opinion was that the interfaith dialogue should take place alongside the political negotiations, but that it should in no way be regarded as a substitute, and that we should refrain from beginning by politicizing religion. I believed then - as I believe today - that whereas the battle to reach a political settlement promised to be lengthy and difficult, the blessing of the religious people and their leaders for the idea of tolerance and coexistence would precede and even perhaps facilitate the reaching of this settlement.

The challenge we are facing is one whereby we need to read and see the 'other' as he wishes to be read and seen, and not the way we are accustomed to reading or seeing him. The blessing of the true believers from the three great monotheistic religions will, in my opinion, light the way to our overcoming the challenge and lead the negotiations to a just solution.

As part of our efforts to meet this challenge, the three of us agreed - the bishop, the former minister and myself - to hold one or two meetings on interfaith dialogue, during which Moslems, Christians and Jews would be invited to discuss their affiliation to Abraham. PASSIA held two meetings: the first on 15 December 1997, and the second on 15 October 1998, during which three papers covering the way in which Abraham is perceived by the authors according to the perspective of their respective religions were presented by Dr. Mustafa Abu Sway, Father Maroum Lahham, and Professor Avigdor Shinan.

As expected, the discussions in the two meetings reflected the absolute faith of the three speakers in the way in which their respective religions perceive Abraham. The participants were not trying to convince each other to accept what is written, understood, and interpreted in their holy books, nor did they attempt to compare names, places and facts; their only aim in making their presentations was to enable the other participants to formulate a better idea of what Abraham means to them as a Moslem, Christian or Jew. As I observed at the beginning of the first meeting: in order to see and hear the 'other', one must first acknowledge his presence, even if one does not accept what he has to say, and because the dialogue that followed each presentation reflected personal positions only, not those of the institutions represented by the individuals involved, I found myself restricted, bound by the confidential nature of the dialogue, to publishing only the papers.

In spite of the numerous aspects of our political conflict, all of which require comprehensive solutions, I still believe that the best road the Palestinians can take on their way to freedom and independence is one that arrives at the venue of building the culture of justice and peace, which is the cornerstone of the three monotheistic religions. Therefore, the inter-faith dialogue on freedom of religion and faith, as well as bringing people of the book to meet, talk and understand each other, is of great importance for all the Moslems, Jews and Christians of the region, especially here in Jerusalem.

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Jerusalem,  
December 1998

# The Various Faces of Abraham in Ancient Judaism

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Judaism – with its more than 3,000 years of documented history and culture- is based in many ways on the Bible and its figures. The great figures of the Book of Books, such as Abraham, Jacob and Moses, David, Solomon, and Ezra, were almost always the focus of lively literary activity and served as models for shaping attitudes and actions. In this context, the Jewish literature knows of many ways in which Abraham was portrayed: Abraham of the Torah (especially its first book, Genesis) and in the rest of the Bible; Abraham of the Second Temple Period (ca 500 BCE to 70 CE) and of the Rabbinical literature (ca 70-630 CE); Abraham in the Middle Ages (till 1750) and in the modern era.

Abraham is found in many texts that were written in Hebrew (such as the Torah), Greek (such as the writings of the first century historian Flavius Josephus), Aramaic (such as in extensive parts of the Talmud) and all other languages that Jews spoke throughout the years like Arabic and Yiddish; Abraham is mentioned in texts written in the Land of Israel, in Babylon, in Spain and the United States or in any other country around the world in which Jews settled throughout their long history; Abraham is

dealt with in commentaries on the Bible, in philosophical or theological treatises, in modern poetry and novels and in all other creations of the human mind and thought. Each generation, group or author fashioned their own Abraham to fit their needs and understanding.

The Torah devotes 14 chapters to Abraham (Genesis 12-26). In these chapters we are told about the history of Abraham, from the age of 75 plus, in which he left his homeland, Mesopotamia, and immigrated by divine command to the land of Canaan, to his death at a ripe old age. The Bible tells us as well about his wife Sarah, the mother of Isaac, and her maidservant Hagar, the mother of his first born, Ishmael. Other figures that are mentioned besides Abraham's immediate family are his nephew, Lot, whom Abraham saved from captivity, the wicked inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorra, whom Abraham tried to save from destruction through his prayers and some additional secondary figures such as the Philistine King Abimelech or Ephron of Hebron who sold Abraham a burial place for his wife Sarah.

It seems that there is some kind of an up-side-down-pyramid that was built by many generations on these 14 chapters of the Torah. One can point out many hundreds and even thousands of traditions in the post-Biblical literature dedicated to the figure of Abraham. They try to fill in gaps in the Biblical biography of Abraham (such as by telling about his birth, which is not mentioned in the Bible), by emphasizing five aspects or incidents in his life: 1) Abraham was the first monotheist who taught the belief in one God to all mankind and brought people under the wings of this God; 2) He had to go through many tests and trials posed to him by God, and passed them with great success; the command to sacrifice Isaac being the last and most difficult; 3) Abraham is the model for hospitality; 4) He was also the great worshiper who prayed to God for the sake of various people; and 5) Abraham was the first of those who practice circumcision.

The main characteristics of these descriptions of Abraham are - as expected - in terms of praise, glory, superiority, excellence, magnificence, splendor and majesty. But, to our surprise, there is also a very small group of traditions that are motivated by investigation, criticism and inspection. This group will be the focus of my short article.



I shall first cite five examples for this phenomenon and try later on to suggest an explanation for it. The five examples are found in various sources, from the Bible itself to an author who lived in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century.

## **1. The Bible**

The story about Abraham's trip to Egypt begins thus:

*"There was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land"* (Genesis 12:10).

In the previous verses we are told about Abraham who left Mesopotamia in accordance with God's promise to give him and his descendants the land of Canaan. But at the first sign of famine, he leaves the Promised Land without asking God's permission or without praying to Him. The Torah does not express here its opinion about Abraham's behavior, but later on we are told about another famine, which took place in Isaac's time. This second story opens with these words:

*"There was a famine in the land - aside from the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham - and Isaac went to Abimelech, King of Philistines, in Gerar: The Lord had appeared to him and said: 'Do not go down to Egypt, stay in the land which I point out to you'"* (Genesis 26:1-2).

Isaac, as opposed to his father, is instructed not to leave the land, and the tone of God's words, as well as the similarity in the phrases that are used in both verses ("went down to Egypt" "do not go down to Egypt"), imply God's dissatisfaction with Abraham's conduct. The fact that the Torah reminds us in the story of Isaac about the famine in the time of *Abraham* ("*aside from the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham*") is a clear sign that we are to compare the behavior of the father to the son, and in this case not in favor of Abraham.

## 2. *The Babylonian Talmud*

In this vast composition of the third-fifth centuries two rabbis see the period of the slavery in Egypt as a punishment on the children of Abraham for his misconduct. Their discussion is recorded in a tractate called in Hebrew *Nedarim* (vows) on page 32a:

“Said Rabbi Abahu... Why was our father Abraham punished and his sons decreed to be slaves in Egypt for 210 years? Because he made use of scholars (by making them join his army) as it is said: ‘*he mustered his disciples*’ (Genesis 14:14) ... and Rabbi Yohanan said: Because he refrained from bringing people under the wings of God, as it is said: ‘*Give me the persons and take the possessions*’ (ibid. 21).”

The first Rabbi accuses Abraham of detaching students from their learning, and the second sees Abraham’s consent to the King of Sodom, who asked “Give me the persons and take the possessions,” as wrong, since Abraham had to ask not for the possessions but for the persons, and than proselyte them. One can clearly see that the two rabbis read into the biblical texts their great appreciation for the study of Torah and for proselytizing – two subjects that occupied a central place in their world and thought.

## 3. *The Midrash*

The Torah tells us that God appeared to Abraham and promised him that his children will inherit the land of Canaan (Genesis 15:1-7). According to the biblical story Abraham demands that God give him a sign, a proof that He intends to fulfill His promise. A rabbinical commentary on this text from the 8<sup>th</sup> Century, the Midrash (*Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* 48), reads as follows:

“The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: Abraham, the entire world stands by my word, and you do not believe in my word, but you said ‘Whereby shall I know (*Eda*) that I shall inherit it?’ (Genesis 15:8). By your life, in two ways you will surely know, as it is said: ‘Know for certain (*Yado’a teda*)’ that



your children will be residents in a land which is not theirs (Egypt)” (ibid. 13).

This passage sees a direct connection between Abraham’s request (which includes the word *Eda’*) and God’s decree about the slavery in Egypt (which includes words from the same root - *Yado’a teda’*) and blames Abraham for losing his belief in God for a short time.

#### **4. *The Aramaic Translation of the Bible***

The Aramaic translation, which was aimed mainly at the masses who attended the public reading from Scriptures, repeats the same tradition about Abraham’s disbelief in God. On Genesis 15:13 (“*Know for certain that your children shall be residents in a land which is not theirs*”) the Targum attributed to Jonathan ben Uziel (8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> Century?) certain comments: “Know for certain that your children shall be residents in a land which is not theirs, because you did not believe.” This example teaches us that the criticism of Abraham was not limited to the circles of the learned rabbis but was taught to the general public as well.

#### **5. *Nachmanides (Ramban)***

This commentator on the Bible (who lived in Spain in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century) comments in his opening remarks on Genesis 12: “You should know, that our father Abraham sinned a great sin, although by error, when he brought his pious wife into danger, because of the fear that he feared for his life, since (he had to turn to) God Who can help and save. Leaving the country because of the famine was also a sin, since God can save us from death of hunger. And because of that it was decreed upon his children to be in exile in Egypt in the hands of Pharaoh.”

Nachmanides clearly follows the Talmud, Midrash and Targum in seeing Abraham’s conduct as wrong. This example teaches us that even in such a late period, such an attitude toward the father of the nation still existed.

It should be stressed however that there are not many traditions of this kind, but their existence needs an explanation, to which we shall now turn our attention by distinguishing between the two main ways in shaping a

great figure from the past: A perfect person - a model for *adoration* and admiration, and a great human person with small defects, deficiencies and disadvantages, side by side with advantages, merits and virtues - a model for *imitation*.

Abraham of Judaism - if we may generalize - is a model for imitation: His characteristics - obedience, hospitality, pursuing peace, praying for others, resisting temptation, accepting pain willingly - are to be imitated by all human beings, regardless of their religious belief. In order to make it possible to try and dare to follow and imitate him he has to be human, and being human means being slightly imperfect, but always striving for perfection.

Abraham is an ideal that every one of his descendants is ordered to try and follow by imitating his ways. From Abraham we learn that it is never too late to start a new way of life and that one's cultural background should not hinder one's efforts to change. From Abraham we learn the importance of merits such as hospitality, pursuing peace, sympathy for others, obedience to God, accepting with love the trials and pains of life, and resisting temptation. Abraham did all that, against a background of small and partial failures, correcting mistakes and emending failures, always moving forward, toward perfection, although with the knowledge that this goal will never be achieved.

Judaism - if one may generalize - teaches us that small deficiencies are a reminder of the fact that a human being - great as he is - is still a human being, and Abraham is no exception.



# Abraham and Christianity

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## *I. Abraham – A Relevant Model of Christian Life*

### *I. Abraham and Universal Salvation*

In order to reunite the dispersed human race, God chose Abram and called him out of his land:

*“Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you”(Gen. 12:1).*

Abram was to become Abraham:

*“No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I will make you the father of a multitude of nations” (Gen. 17:5).*

This promise given to Abraham represents the inauguration of man’s salvation, brought to completion by the Son of God himself.

God was clear about his plan for Abraham’s life:

*“And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse, and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves”* (Gen. 12,2f; Gal. 3:8).

In this promise God commits himself without yet revealing His name, thereby adding to the importance of Abraham’s act of faith:

*“For when God made a promise to Abraham, since He had no one greater by whom to swear, He swore by Himself, saying, ‘Surely I will bless you and multiply you.’ And thus Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise”* (Heb. 6:13).

According to God’s promise, the people issuing from Abraham would be the holder of the promises made to the patriarchs, the people of divine election (cf. Rom. 11:28), called to prepare the future unification of all the children of God within the unity of the Church (cf. Jn. 11:52; 10:16), the root unto which shall be grafted all those pagans who become believers (cf. Rom. 11:17-18.24); the priestly people of God (Ex. 19:6), which bears the name of the LORD (Dt. 28:10); the people to whom God has spoken first, the people who first expressed the Abrahamic faith.

This is why Abraham has always been venerated in a very special way as a Saint: first in the Holy Scripture –

*“The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried; and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus in his bosom. And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame”*”(Lk. 16:22ff.) –

and later in all the liturgical traditions of the Church.

## 2. Abraham - 'Father of All Those Who Believe'

To obey (Latin *ob-audire*) in faith means to submit oneself voluntarily to the revealed truth, because its truthfulness is guaranteed by God Himself, the eternal truth. Now, Abraham is the model of this obedience, proposed by Holy Scripture, an example that is followed in perfection by that of the Virgin Mary.

The letter to the Hebrews, in its grand eulogy on the faith of the ancestors, emphasizes Abraham's faith:

*"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go. By faith, he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:8-10; cf Gen. 23:4).*

*"No distrust made him [Abraham] waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised. That is why his faith was 'reckoned to him as righteousness'. But the words 'it was reckoned to him' were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in Him that raised from the dead Jesus our LORD" (Rom. 4:20ff; cf Gen. 15:5).*

Hence, it is by force of this faith, that Abraham became the 'Father of all those who believe', as explained in the Letter to the Romans:

*"The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them" (Rom. 4:11)*

and

*"That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants - not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham, for he is the father of us all, as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations' - in the presence*



*of the God in whom he believed, Who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. In hope, he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, 'So shall your descendants be' (Rom. 4:16-18).*

As an eloquent illustration of the greatness of Abraham's confidence Saint Paul adds:

*"He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead because he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb" (Rom. 4:19).*

In order to grow and persevere in their supernatural faith, which is often put to the test, often lived in darkness (Cf. 2 Cor. 5:7, Cor. 13:12), jeopardized by the experience of evil and suffering, injustice and death (things that seem to contradict the message of Good News: they may even become a temptation and a serious obstruction for the act of faith), Christians are invited to turn to the great witnesses of faith: the shining example of Abraham, the man who *"in hope believed against hope"* (Rom. 4:18).

*"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1f).*

### **3. Accomplishment of Abraham's Faith**

*"But when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:4f).*

That is, God has visited His chosen people, and has accomplished the promises made to Abraham and his descendants: *"as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his posterity for ever"* (Lk. 1:55). This realization surpasses by far all human expectations - God has sent His only Son:



“*Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased*” (Mk. 1:11), and “*Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am*” (Jn. 8:58).

Furthermore, within the mystery of Christ’s infancy, his circumcision is a sign of his humble insertion into the line of the descendants of Abraham, into the people of the Covenant (Lk. 2:21).

Abraham’s life long ago pointed to the manifest establishment of a universal (‘Catholic’) Church, for he was the ‘Father of a great people’. Salvation applies to all those who recognize the Creator-God, including the Moslems, who profess the faith of Abraham, adoring with the Christians the One God, the merciful judge of mankind.

#### **4. Abraham and the Sacramental Economy**

Right from the beginning, God has blessed (Latin *bene-dicere*) the living creatures, especially man and woman. From Abraham onwards the divine benediction penetrates human history: by virtue of the faith of the ‘Father of all believers’, who receives the formal benediction from on high, the history of salvation commences. The force of this benediction is clearly apparent in such marvelous events as the birth of Isaac, the heir of the promise.

In the liturgy of the Church, Christians are sharers of divine blessings, fully revealed and communicated. They are therefore spiritually connected with their great ancestor, the receiver of the benediction *par excellence*: Abraham. Sacramentally speaking, baptism signifies not just communion with the death and resurrection of Christ, but also a special share in the history of salvation with its earliest signs (cf. Abraham’s circumcision).

Priests manifest the mystery of the Church in a more profound manner. Throughout the era of the Old Covenant, God began to shape his Church; the people issued from Abraham was destined to become a holy people, and nowadays those ordained to the sacred ministry are called to collaborate in the sanctification of this veritably Abrahamic people.

## 5. Abraham and the Universal Appeal for Prayer

The revelation of prayer in the Old Testament is related to the fall and the restoration of mankind: between the appeal, "*Where are you? What is this that you have done?*" (Gen. 3:9.13) and the response of the God-Man: "*Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God!*" (Heb. 10:7).

Yet it is particularly through our Father Abraham that prayer has been revealed: after having been called, "*Abraham went, as the LORD had told him*" (Gen. 12:4); Abraham submits to the Word and obeys, and it exactly this openness of the heart that is essential for prayer. But Abraham's prayer is expressed first of all by his actions: a man of silence, he builds at every stage of his adventurous journey an altar to the LORD. Only much later does his first verbal prayer appear: a veiled complaint that reminds God of His promises, which seem unrealistic (Gen. 15:2-3). Here we see the beginning of the dramatic aspect of human prayer: the trial of faith in divine fidelity.

Having believed in the LORD (Gen. 15:6), Abraham kept marching in his presence, and stayed in alliance with Him:

*"When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.' Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, 'Behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.'"* (Gen. 17:1f).

This is why Abraham is ready to receive the divine guest into his tent. "*My LORD, if I have found favor in Your sight, do not pass by Your servant*" (Gen. 18:3); this admirable hospitality at Mambré prefigures the annunciation of the true son of the promise (Lk. 1:26-38). From this moment onwards, Abraham's heart is tuned to the compassion of his LORD: he intercedes for his brothers with daring confidence:

*"Oh let not the LORD be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there."* He (God) answered, "*For the sake of ten I will not destroy it*" (Gen. 18:32).

The prayer of intercession, that is, asking a favor for someone else, is characteristic of a heart tuned to God's mercy, in accordance with Abraham's example.

As a last mysterious purification of his faith, Abraham is commanded to offer as a sacrifice his only son (Heb. 11:17), the offspring given to him by God. There is no vacillation in his conviction:

*"My son, God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering. So they went both of them together" (Gen. 22:8); for "he considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; hence, figuratively speaking, he did not receive him back" (Heb. 11:19).*

Thence, the 'Father of believers' is configured to the resemblance of the heavenly Father, who will not spare his only son (Rom. 8:32). Prayer restores man to the similarity of God, making him participate in the power of God's love, which saves the multitude (Rom. 4: 16-21).

## **6. Abraham and the Christian Vocation to the Beatitudes**

The beatitudes (Mt. 5:3-12) are undoubtedly at the heart of Jesus' teaching. Their announcement marks the assertion of the promises granted to the chosen people through Abraham, and complete them by adding to the terrestrial joy the bliss of the Kingdom of Heaven. The beatitudes elevate Christian hope, shaped on the model of Abraham's hope, towards Heaven:

*"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:3-5).*

*"Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed.' So then, those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith" (Gal. 3: 6-9).*

## II. Some Disputed Questions

### 1. Election

The Scripture declares that God has chosen a people to prepare for the coming of the Savior:

*“And I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, Who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians”* (Ex. 6:7).

Saint Peter addresses himself to a Jewish audience in these terms:

*“You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God gave to your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your posterity shall all the families of the earth be blessed’”* (Acts 3:25).

The idea of election, incidentally, is not alien to the Qur’an (see 44,32,2,47).

As a matter of fact, every person is the object of divine love and election: *“even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him”* (Eph. 1:4). It is God’s free gratuitous initiative to call someone, in order to make him walk according to His will and law. God calls in love and the individual is required to respond in obedience and fidelity, becoming a testimony of divine salvation for others. Here lies the personal responsibility of the chosen one: to obey God’s commandments and to make known to others the way of salvation.

As regards the reason for divine election, it is definitely not connected to the excellence of a certain people, nor its potential merits: *“Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land”* (Dt. 9:5). It has much more to do with the infinite wisdom of God and His love: *“How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”* (Rom. 11:33). God chooses in a sovereign manner in order to overcome human jealousy and envy:



*“Friend, I am doing you no wrong; I choose to give to this last as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to Me? Or do you begrudge My generosity?”*  
(Mt. 20:13.15).

This is why the election should cause neither pride in the chosen one, nor rejection on the part of the others. It is by humbly joining their forces and adopting a common vision concerning the divine action, that both parties attain love, justice and reconciliation.

## **2. Promises**

The promises make part of a more encompassing reality of divine-human relationship: the Covenant. In accordance with biblical terminology, a covenant (or testament) is an alliance between God and humanity. Through the Old Covenant God granted His law to the Israelites with the demand that they faithfully observe it. This treaty is based on a free divine election of one single people and was meant to be the preparation for another, a new covenant. This new alliance is called the New Testament, a universal covenant, concluded in the blood of Jesus Christ. It accomplishes the Old Testament: *“For Christ is the end of the law, that everyone who has faith may be justified”*(Rom. 10:4).

Now, the promises make up part of the Covenant. Initially they were related to more terrestrial goods, like the possession of land, wealth, kingship, ethnic immunity and populational strength. The promise of the land in particular has undergone a significant evolution due to the various experiences of the chosen people; the starting point can be discerned in Genesis 12:4-6: land is appropriated by a simple process of nomadization. At this stage the land was considered a divine gift and a sign of benediction:

*“I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess”* (Gen. 15:7) and *“All the land which you see I will give to you and your descendants forever. I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your descendants also can be counted”* (Gen. 13: 15f).

Following the exodus from Egypt and throughout the period of the Israelite dynasties, the promise of land was understood as an armed conquest. The possession of the land was envisaged as a tangible sign of divine fidelity, and at the same time the due fulfillment of an obligation on the part of the people and its leaders. Nonetheless, this right to possess the land is linked to a sincere and faithful compliance with the law of the Covenant (see Dt. 6:4-5; 8:11-20; 11:26-32; 12-16;28).

The prophets in their turn warn of the fact that the violation of the Covenant by idolatry and the unjust distribution of land and fruits will bring about the devastation and utter loss of the land: *“They shall not remain in the land of the LORD”* (Lev. 18:25; Os. 9:3; see also Jer. 4:27; Ez. 6: 1-7. 13; 14: 1-11; 16: 15-22, Am. 2: 9; 9:7; Mic. 6:4-5). The prophetic message during the exile is dominated by expressions of hope and encouragement: God will deliver his people and take them back to their land.

Yet a new perspective is opening up in the sense that God is about to create a new people:

*“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people”*(Jer. 31:31-34).

### 3. Status of the ‘Land’

The Holy Scripture assigns a special status to the land: it appertains to God. *“The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me”* (Lev. 25:23; 1 Chr. 29:15). Hence, Israel was not meant to become the absolute possessor of the land:

*“Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears! For I am thy passing guest, a sojourner, like all my fathers”* (Ps. 39:12).



This consciousness should prevent any disturbance in the hierarchy of values: God in his adorability is the only and irreplaceable reference point for the life of the chosen people.

Moreover, the right to possess the land is limited by a particular legal disposition: every 50 years a Jubilee is to be proclaimed. In its wake the land is supposed to be redistributed: an eloquent gesture of recognition of God's absolute supremacy as the only real owner of the land (cf. Lev. 25:10.13).

Eventually, Jesus Christ, the Chosen One *par excellence*, has come to preach the Kingdom of Heaven: *"For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ"* (Jn. 1:17). His kingship though is universal and spiritual: *"My kingship is not of this world"* (Jn. 18:36). Hence, it is the just and meek and pure of heart who will possess the land: *"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth"* (Mt. 5:4; cf. Ps. 37:29).

The process of progressive spiritualization of the idea of land-possession is accomplished by the image of the heavenly Jerusalem:

*"And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband"* (Rev. 21:2).

The earthly city of Jerusalem becomes a symbolic prefiguration of a supernatural reality: the life-communion between God and mankind for time unending. Herewith Jerusalem turns out to be a spiritual patrimony for all humanity: *"But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother"* (Gal. 4:26).

Here is therefore the supreme fulfillment of all divine covenants and promises:

*"And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the LORD God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it"* (Rev. 21:22-24).

Thus, the concept of the 'land' has developed throughout the different periods of revelation: from a physical-geographical sense to a political connotation towards its spiritual-symbolic significance, which transcends any terrestrial boundary:

*“The hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4:21, 23-24).*



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# Abraham in the Islamic Sources

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## *Introduction*

Allah (*subhanuhu wa ta'alla*) created the human being and appointed him a vicegerent on earth:

*“Behold, thy Lord said to the angels, ‘I will create a vicegerent on earth.’”<sup>1</sup>*

The purpose of creation was stated clearly in the Qur'an as the worship of the one and only God:

*“I have only created Jinns and human beings, that they may serve Me.”<sup>2</sup>*

In order for this declared *telos* of creation to be fulfilled, there was a need for continuous guidance from the very beginning. Thus, Allah (*subhanuhu wa ta'alla*) sent revelations to the prophets and messengers beginning with Adam and ending with Mohammed. The list of prophets includes many that came before Musa (i.e., Moses). To believe that mankind was left without guidance for thousands of years is contradictory to belief in the attributes of Allah (*subhanuhu wa ta'alla*), the Compassion-

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<sup>1</sup> Qur'an, 2:30.

<sup>2</sup> Qur'an, 51:56.

ate, the Merciful, the Just, etc. Allah (*subhanuhu wa ta'alla*) did not create mankind in order to abandon it!

The creation of mankind marked the beginning of animosity between Satan and the human being newcomers. He made sure that their days in the garden were numbered by luring them to eat from the prohibited tree. Thus, the newcomers' stay was cut short, and all of them found themselves reduced to leading normal lives on earth. Human beings try to lead a straight life according to the revelations, while Satan surrounds them with temptations. The Qur'an narrates that Satan pledged to relentlessly continue his attempts to misguide mankind:

*"I will lie in wait for them on Thy straight way. Then will I assault them . . ."*<sup>3</sup>

The declared aim of this assault is to bring the human being to a state of disbelief:

*"Like Satan when he says to man, 'disbelieve'..."*<sup>4</sup>

Not all of Satan's attempts were in vain, and he was successful in making whole nations deviate from the right path by convincing them to reject one wave of revelation after another:

*"Then sent We Our messengers in succession: every time there came to a people their messenger, they accused him of falsehood . . ."*<sup>5</sup>

The basic message that these messengers carried to their peoples was *tawhid* (i.e. the belief in the oneness of Allah (*subhanuhu wa ta'alla*) and the commitment to worship no one but Him). The Qur'an narrated that all messengers called their people to worship Allah (*subhanuhu wa ta'alla*) without association (*shirk*):

*"For We assuredly sent amongst every people a messenger [with the command] 'Worship Allah, and eschew evil...'"*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Qur'an, 7:16-17

<sup>4</sup> Qur'an, 59:16.

<sup>5</sup> Qur'an, 23:44.

<sup>6</sup> Qur'an, 16:36.

This was the message of Hud to Ad; Shu'aib to Madian; Salih to Thamud; Christ to the Children of Israel ...etc.<sup>7</sup> The position of Ibrahim was no different than that of his brethren:

*"And [We also saved] Ibrahim: behold, he said to his people, 'Worship Allah and fear Him: that will be best for you if ye understand!'"*<sup>8</sup>

Because the previous messages suffered from changes and heavy editing at the hands of those that followed them, it was necessary to send a revelation to remind people of the original message. Ultimately, mankind was ready for the final message and the final prophet:

*"Mohammed is not the father of any of your men, but [he is] the messenger of Allah, and the seal of the prophets . . ."*<sup>9</sup>

One might say that what happened to previous revelations could have also possibly happened to the Qur'an. However, to say that a message is final entails its protection. Allah (*subhanuhu wa ta'alla*) would not allow His final revealed book (i.e. the Qur'an) to be subject to human interference:

*"We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly guard it [from corruption]."*<sup>10</sup>

Without such protection of the final message from the 'human factor', mankind would have surely been left without indubitable guidance throughout the remainder of its history (i.e. until the Day of Judgment). It is for this reason that Allah (*subhanuhu wa ta'alla*) challenges mankind to find contradictions within the Qur'an through what we call nowadays 'textual analysis':

*"Do they not ponder on the Qur'an? Had it been from other than Allah, they would surely have found therein much discrepancy."*<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Qur'an, 5:72; 7:65,73,85.

<sup>8</sup> Qur'an, 29:16.

<sup>9</sup> Qur'an, 33:40.

<sup>10</sup> Qur'an, 15:9.

<sup>11</sup> Qur'an, 4:82.



The epistemological supremacy of the Qur'an in relation to distorted records, but not to the original scriptures, of previously revealed messages is confirmed in many other verses:

*"To thee We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the Scripture that came before it, and guarding it [muhaimin] in safety..."*<sup>12</sup>

A commentary on *muhaimin* stated the following:

*After the corruption of the older revelations, the Qur'an comes with a twofold purpose: (1) to confirm the true and original message; and (2) to guard it, or act as a means to check its interpretation. The Arabic word muhaimin is very comprehensive in meaning. It means one who safeguards, watches over, stands witness, preserves, and upholds. The Qur'an safeguards 'the Book', for it has preserved within it the teachings of all the former Books. It watches over these Books in the sense that it will not let their true teachings be lost. It supports and upholds these Books in the sense that it corroborates the Word of Allah, which has remained intact in them. It stands a witness because it bears testimony to the Word of Allah contained in these Books and helps to sort it out from the interpretations and commentaries of people that were mixed with it: what is confirmed by the Qur'an is the Word of Allah, and what is against it is that of the people.*<sup>13</sup>

Ibn Kathir (d. 774 AH) reported several interpretations of *muhaimin* before concluding as follows:

*"All of these statements are close to each other in meaning, for the muhaimin includes all of them. It [the Qur'an] is the trustee, the witness, and the judge of every Book that came before it. Allah made this great Book the last one, the seal, the most comprehensive, the greatest, and the most perfect. He included in it all the good things that were in the previous ones and He added to it perfect things that are not available in the others."*<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Qur'an, 5:48.

<sup>13</sup> *The Holy Qur'an: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary*; Revised and Edited by the Presidency of the Islamic Researches, Ifta, Call, and Guidance. (Medina: King Fahd Holy Qur'an Printing Complex, 1405 AH), p. 300

<sup>14</sup> Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* (Beirut: Dar Al-Jil, 1988) vol. 2, p. 62.



In addition, Allah's Message of Truth is guarded on all sides against those who attempt to pervert it:

*"And indeed it is a Book of exalted power. No falsehood can approach it from in front of or behind it..."*<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, the Qur'an provides proper guidance for the seekers of truth:

*"Verily this Qur'an doth guide to that which is most right..."*<sup>16</sup>

The latter verse is mentioned in the Sura of the Children of Israel<sup>17</sup> after they are reminded about unpleasant events in their past, which could be repeated if they act in the same way that resulted in these past events. This was a warning and not news about a predestined future; reconciliation is still possible. The prerequisite for and cornerstone of the sought after solution is comprehensive justice that does not exclude anyone. Security, with which many leaders are obsessed, is one of the byproducts of justice.

In the light of this introduction, it is obvious that if there is an apparent contradiction between the view of the Islamic World and other world-views, one must submit to the already established epistemological judge (i.e. the Qur'an). For this reason, and for the purpose of our topic, when similarities are drawn between the story of Ibrahim in the Qur'an and the Torah, the following verse is applied:

*"...there came to them a messenger confirming what was with them..."*<sup>18</sup>

And where there is contradiction, the following verse is applied:

*"But the transgressors changed the word from that which had been given to them..."*<sup>19</sup>

Ibn Abbas, one of the greatest scholars and a companion of the Prophet, reflected on the position of the Qur'an in this respect, saying:

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<sup>15</sup> Qur'an, 41:41-42.

<sup>16</sup> Qur'an, 17:9.

<sup>17</sup> Also called Sura Al-Isra' (Ascension)

<sup>18</sup> Qur'an, 2:101.

<sup>19</sup> Qur'an, 2:59.

*“How could you ask the People of the Book about anything while your Book, which was sent down to the Messenger of Allah (subhanuhu wa ta’alla) is newer, pure and uncorrupted? It [the Qur’an] told you that the People of the Book altered the Book of Allah and changed it. They wrote [a different] book with their own hands and said that it is from Allah so that they may make some gains. Doesn’t the knowledge you received [through revelation] prevent you from dialoguing with them? By Allah, we have never seen a man amongst them asking you about [the Book] that was sent down to you!”<sup>20</sup>*

Despite the position of the Qur’an, the Sunnah and scholars such as Ibn Abbas, the cultural contact with the People of the Book and the conversion of some of them to Islam made it possible for some notions to infiltrate the writings of some Muslim scholars. This led to the recognition of a body of literature called *Isra’iliyyat*, which is mostly influenced by the Judaic tradition. Muslim scholars who became aware of the problem began a process of ‘de-Isra’ilizing’ the Islamic corpus.

Epistemologically, the Islamic worldview calls for the deconstruction of the authority of the People of the Book’s scriptures, in the form it exists now, as a source of peremptory knowledge.

The difference in opinion between Muslims and the People of the Book concerning some of the crucial and sensitive issues raised here should not be interpreted as justification of intolerance or social injustice. It is my deep conviction that a harmonious relationship amongst the adherents of Judaism, Christianity and Islam is still achievable.

### *Was Ibrahim a Prophet?*

The Qur’an speaks in clear terms about Ibrahim as a prophet and messenger:

*“We have sent thee a revelation, as we sent it to Noah and the messengers after him: We sent a revelation to Ibrahim, Isma’il, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and to David We gave the Psalms.”<sup>21</sup>*

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<sup>20</sup> Mohammed Abu Shuhbah, *Al-Isra’iliyyat wal-Mawdu’at fi Kutub At-Tafsir* (Cairo: Maktabat As-Sunnah, 1408 AH), p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Qur’an, 4:163.

The Qur'an also speaks about the Scripture that Ibrahim received:

*“Nay [behold], ye prefer the life of this world; but the Hereafter is better and more enduring. And this is in the Books of the earliest [revelations], the Books of Ibrahim and Musa.”*<sup>22</sup>

These verses elevate the position of Ibrahim, and others too, from being considered simply as the ‘fathers’ or ‘patriarchs’, as in the Judeo-Christian tradition, to that of prophethood. According to the Book of Genesis, mankind was left approximately half of its age without messengers! Did Allah (*subhanuhu wa ta’alla*) neglect the needs of mankind? Or is it the case that prophethood is restricted to the Children of Israel *in toto*?

Paying attention to this context is necessary in order to understand the emphasis the Qur'an places on belief in all the messengers:

*“The Messenger believeth in what hath been revealed to him from his Lord, as do the men of faith, each one [of them] believeth in Allah, His angels, His books, and His messengers. We make no distinction [they say] between one and another of His messengers...”*<sup>23</sup>

Ibn Kathir emphasized, in his interpretation of this verse, the position of the Muslims as those who believe in all the prophets and messengers, and in the fact that all of them are trustworthy, good, wise, and well qualified to lead people to the good path.<sup>24</sup>

The above description of the messengers is in line with the Qur'an:

*“These were the men to whom We gave the Book, and judgment, and prophethood: if these [their descendants] reject them, behold! We shall entrust their charge to a new people who reject them not. Those were the [prophets] who received Allah’s guidance. Follow the guidance they received . . .”*<sup>25</sup>

It could never be the case that Allah (*subhanuhu wa ta’alla*) would ask people to follow the messengers and take them as their models unless they were the best in terms of personal integrity, which reflects in turn the highest standards of ethics and morality. It is really painful to find a to-

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<sup>22</sup> Qur'an, 87:16-19.

<sup>23</sup> Qur'an, 2:285.

<sup>24</sup> Ibn Kathir, vol. 1, p. 313.

<sup>25</sup> Qur'an, 6:89-90.

tally different picture painted of the prophets and messengers in the Old Testament, especially in the Book of Genesis. They are portrayed as normal human beings, or rather less than normal, for the overwhelming majority of people never did something such as what was attributed to Lot after the destruction of 'Sodom' and 'Gomorrah':

*And Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain and his two daughters with him; for he feared to dwell in Zoar, and he dwelt in a cave, he and his two daughters. And the firstborn said unto the younger, "Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in unto us after the manner of all the earth. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve the seed of our father." And they made their father drink wine that night: and the firstborn went in, and lay with her father; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose... (Genesis, 19:30-33)*

The Book of Genesis then narrates how the younger daughter also slept with her father, and that each one of the sisters gave birth to their father's child!

Would God allow this to happen? Didn't Lot, the Prophet of God, fight the sexual perversion that had spread amongst his people? Wasn't he saved along with his family with the exception of his wife because they were the only righteous people? The Qur'an emphasizes their purity:

*"But his people gave no other answer but this: They said, 'Drive out the followers of Lot from your city: these are indeed persons who want to be clean and pure.' But We saved him and his family, except his wife: her We destined to be of those who lagged behind." (Qur'an, 27:56-57)*

The background that is mentioned in the Book of Genesis to justify the incest that took place is not at all convincing. I know the area between the Dead Sea and Bethlehem well enough to say that it would not have been possible for Lot and his daughters to live in absolute seclusion. From where would they have obtained their provisions? From whence the wine? Isn't the Dead Sea area surrounded by desert? Indeed, I have covered the area between Bethlehem and the Dead Sea on foot in about four hours in the company of Catholic priests with whom I was working at Bethlehem University in the mid-1980s. I have brought up this issue in discussions with Christian and Jewish scholars who tried to defend such Biblical stories by emphasizing the fallibility of the patriarchs! Here, I



wonder how someone could deny the infallibility of prophets and messengers while at the same time maintain the infallibility of the Pope?

As for Ibrahim (*salla allah alayh wa sallam*) the problematic concerning prophecy is to be found in the concept of obedience. In the Islamic worldview, Allah (*subhanuhu wa ta'alla*) made it imperative that people obey prophets and messengers:

*"We sent not an apostle, but to be obeyed, in accordance with the will of God..."*(Qur'an, 4:64)

If we are to demonstrate the centrality of obedience to the role of the Prophet, it suffices to consider Sura Ash-Shu'ara' for it contains many examples. One of them concerns Noah, who said to his people after they had rejected him:

*"I am to you an apostle worthy of all trust: so fear God, and obey me. No reward do I ask of you for it: my reward is only from the Lord of the Worlds: So fear God and obey me."*  
(Qur'an, 26:107-108)

The same statement, demanding obedience, was repeated by Hud (26:126 and 131), Salih (26:144 and 150), Lot (26:163) and Shu'aib (26:179) to name but a few.

If we shift the focus from the Qur'an to the Book of Genesis we find that Ibrahim was asked to obey his wife:

*"...in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice ..."* (21:12)

The Arabic translation of the Old Testament uses the present tense: "In all that Sarah says to you, listen to her." This is in line with the Hebrew version of which the following is a transliteration: "*Kol asher tomar elykha Sarah shma' bkolah.*" This command from God, because it is in the present tense, demands continuous obedience on the part of Ibrahim, which is problematic from an Islamic perspective.

The context in which Ibrahim is asked to listen to Sarah is also problematic, for Sarah asks him to "cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." (Genesis, 21:10) It is rather important to say that the 'Biblical' outcome of this story has grievous political implications; it led many parties



amongst the contemporary 'children' of Isaac to believe that the contemporary 'children' of Isma'il have no rights in Palestine.

There is no doubt in my mind that this exclusive position has roots in the stories of other prophets in the Old Testament. One such story is that of Noah and his three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The setting is after Noah went forth from the ark:

*And Noah began to be a husbandman, and he planted a vineyard. And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. And he said, "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren." And he said, "Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant." (Genesis, 9:20-27)*

There are major differences between the story of Noah in the Qur'an and that in the Book of Genesis. One such difference is that in the Qur'an, not all the children of Noah were saved from the flood. Nevertheless, the criticism of the above quotation is based on textual analysis.

First I would like to ask the following question: Why didn't Japheth receive the same blessings as Shem? Certainly he was not guilty of any 'crime'! Yet the difference between Shem and Japheth is like that between citizen and resident. For Japheth was granted the right to *dwell* only in the property of Shem, which will be defined in the course of time. Isn't the cursing of Ham contrary to the will of God, for He has blessed Noah and his sons? (Genesis, 9:1)

If Canaan was destined, because of the curse, not to enjoy full human rights throughout history, then perhaps Palestinians can find comfort in being Semites. It seems that this is also not granted; I met the rector of the Hebrew Union College in Brookline, Massachusetts in 1988, and he told me that according to the results of his research, the Arabs are not Semites!

Alas, there is no way one could be granted the same right to dwell in the land because of a 'crime' that was perpetuated thousands of years ago! But who is to blame: Ham for seeing the nakedness of his father, or Noah, for exceeding the limits of 'social drinking' and getting himself into trouble? But he wouldn't be the only prophet to have a 'drinking problem' in the Book of Genesis!

Indeed, I find comfort in the Islamic worldview, which does not permit a curse to be applied to the descendents of wrongdoers. Only the doer of the action is blamed for it. In addition, the Islamic worldview does not award any special status to people of a different 'race' or rather color as the Qur'an refers to it. The Qur'an considers such differences as signs pointing in the direction of God:

*"And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colors; verily in that are signs for those who know."* (Qur'an, 30:22)

### *The Genealogy of Ibrahim*

The Qur'an is not a book of genealogy though it does specify, in a very limited way, the family relations between certain characters who are mentioned in the Qur'an. Yet, what the Qur'an contains is nothing compared to the extensive family trees that form an introduction to many chapters in the Bible. One example concerns Ibrahim, whose family tree, in the Gospel of Luke, includes 20 names, beginning with Adam and ending with him. This is one more name than exists in the lineage mentioned in the Torah! The name that shows only in the Gospel of Luke is Hinam.<sup>26</sup>

I would like to stress the fact that the Qur'an does not include any unnecessary details that are irrelevant to the subject under discussion. This is a distinctive feature of the Qur'an, which uses detail as an educational tool in order to highlight the moral lesson rather than preoccupy the reader with superfluous data. One well-known example can be found in Sura Al-Kahf, where the Qur'an categorically refuses to state the exact number of the believing young men who, along with their dog, ran away from their people for fear of persecution. They were also afraid of being forced to accept the cult of their people. They had taken refuge in a cave, where

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<sup>26</sup> Abd As-Sattar Qasim, *Ibrahim wal-Mithaq ma'Israel fi At-Torah wal-Injil wal-Qur'an* (Jerusalem: PASSIA, 1994) p.18.

God put all of them to sleep and where they awoke some 300 (solar) and nine (lunar) years later. This was a sign from God that there will be resurrection and, evidently, a Day of Judgment. Later generations forgot about the goals of the story and busied themselves with the number of those young men. The Qur'an addressed this shift in focus as follows:

*"[Some] say they were three, the dog being the fourth among them; [others] say they were five, the dog being the sixth, doubtfully guessing at the unknown; [yet others] say they were seven, the dog being their eighth. Say thou: 'My Lord knoweth best their number; it is but few that know their [real case].' Enter not, therefore, into controversies concerning them, except on a matter that is clear, nor consult any of them about [the affair of] the sleepers."* (Qur'an, 18:22)

Yet it is still possible to know limited lineage in a very few cases in the Qur'an such as that of Ibrahim and his family. Let us consider the following verses:

*"Lo! Abraham said to his father Azar: 'Takest thou idols for gods? For I see thee and thy people in manifest error.'" (Qur'an, 6:74)*

*"And his wife was standing [there], and she laughed: but We gave her glad tidings of Isaac, and after him, of Jacob."* (Qur'an, 11: 71)

*"Praise be to God, Who hath granted me in old age Isma'il and Isaac: for truly my Lord is He, the Hearer of Prayer!" (Qur'an, 14: 39)*

From these verses we can reconstruct with ease the lineage to be as follows: Azar-Ibrahim-Isma'il or Azar-Ibrahim-Isaac-Jacob.

There is only one difference between the Qur'an and the 'Torah' regarding the above-mentioned names. The name of Ibrahim's father in the 'Torah' is Terah:

*"And Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot."* (Genesis, 11:26-27)

Ibn Kathir, a reputed Muslim scholar skilled in the exegesis of the Qur'an, quoted many other scholars regarding the name of Ibrahim's father. Their positions reflect awareness of the name Terah. They have attempted to reconcile both positions, as was done by Ibn Jarir. He asserted that the name was Azar, then he quoted the genealogists who stated that the name was Terah. Ultimately, he attempted to reconcile both positions by allowing the possibility of having two names, or a name and a title. Ibn Kathir commented on the latter position stating that it is a strong one.<sup>27</sup>

The fact that Ibn Jarir asserted that the name was Azar reflects the supremacy of the Qur'an as a source of knowledge. It is obvious that the position of the genealogists depends totally on what is described in Islamic literature as *Isra'iliyyat* (i.e. positions derived from the People of the Book). It is not necessary to reconcile between the positions of the Qur'an and those adopted by other sources. This is especially true in the case of sources that the Qur'an has declared to have suffered from editing in various forms. Examples of these sources include the Torah and the Injil. The repetition and redundancy regarding the names of Terah and his children in the above quotation from the Book of Genesis reflect a poor literary style that is far from being the word of Allah (*subhanuhu wa ta'alla*) *per se*.

What is more important than the names is the nature of the relationship between Ibrahim and his father. I shall quote verses from the Qur'an at length, and then compare their contents with the Book of Genesis:

*"[Also] mention in the Book [the story of] Ibrahim: he was a man of truth, a prophet. Behold, he said to his father: 'O my father! Why worship that which heareth not and seeth not, and can profit thee nothing?'... 'O my father! To me hath come knowledge which hath not reached thee: so follow me: I will guide thee to a way that is even and straight'... 'O my father! Serve not Satan: for Satan is a rebel against [God] Most Gracious'... 'O my father! I fear lest a penalty afflict thee from [God] Most Gracious, so that thou become to Satan a friend.'"*  
(Qur'an, 19:41-45)

The same message of invitation was repeated in the following verses:

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<sup>27</sup> Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir*, vol. 2, p.142.



*“And rehearse to them [something of] Ibrahim’s story. Behold, he said to his father and his people: ‘What worship ye?’ They said: ‘We worship idols, and we remain constantly in attendance on them.’ He said: ‘Do they listen to you when ye call [on them], or do you good or harm?’ They said: ‘Nay, but we found our fathers doing thus [what we do].’ He said, ‘Do you then see whom ye have been worshipping, ye and your fathers before you? For they are enemies to me; not so the Lord and Cherisher of the Worlds; Who created me, and it is He who guides me; Who gives me food and drink, And when I am ill, it is He who cures me; Who will cause me to die, and then to live [again]; And who, I hope, will forgive me my faults on the Day of Judgment...’” (Qur’an, 26:70-82)*

The above discourse was followed by a very impressive supplication from Ibrahim.<sup>28</sup> The third text is taken from Sura Al-An’am:

*“Lo! Ibrahim said to his father Azar: ‘Takest thou idols for gods? For I see thee and thy people in manifest error.’” (Qur’an, 6:74)*

Ibrahim continued to argue against the cult of people using proofs from the cosmic order. He sounded as if he himself believed in the natural phenomena he referred to, but he was deeply rooted in the faith of *tawhid*:

*“For me, I have set my face firmly and truly towards Him Who created the heavens and the earth, and never shall I give partners to God.” (Qur’an, 6:79)*

Indeed, the arguments that Ibrahim used in his debates with his people are divinely inspired:

*“That was the reasoning about Us, which we gave to Ibrahim [to use] against his people: We raise whom We will degree after degree: for thy Lord is full of wisdom and knowledge.” (Qur’an, 6:83)*

In a forth text, Ibrahim provides his people with practical proof concerning the inability of their gods to act in any way, not even to defend themselves:

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<sup>28</sup> Qur’an, 26:83-89.



*“Verily among those who followed his [Noah’s] way was Ibrahim. Behold, he approached his Lord with a sound heart. Behold, he said to his father and to his people, ‘What is that which ye worship? Is it false gods other than God that ye desire? Then what is your idea about the Lord of the Worlds?’ Then did he cast a glance at the stars, and he said, ‘I am indeed sick [at heart]!’ So they turned away from him, and departed. Then did he turn to their gods and say, ‘Will ye not eat [of the offerings before you]? What is the matter with you that ye speak not [intelligently]?’ Then did he turn upon them, striking [them] with the right hand. Then came [the worshippers] with hurried steps, and faced [him]. He said, ‘Worship ye that which ye have [yourselves] carved? But God has created you and your handiwork!’” (Qur’an, 37:83-96)*

The fifth text repeats the scene in which Ibrahim destroys the idols, yet reflects a different angle:

*“We bestowed aforetime on Ibrahim his rectitude of conduct, and well were We acquainted with him. Behold, he said to his father and his people, ‘What are these images, to which ye are [so assiduously] devoted?’ They said: ‘We found our fathers worshipping them.’ He said, ‘Indeed ye have been in manifest error, ye and your fathers.’ They said, ‘Have you brought us the truth, or are you one of those who jest?’ He said, ‘Nay, your Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, He who created them [from nothing]: and I am a witness to this [truth]. And by God, I have a plan for your idols, after ye go away and turn your back.’ So he broke them to pieces, [all] but the biggest of them, that they might turn [and address themselves] to it. They said, ‘We heard a youth talk of them: he is called Ibrahim.’ They said, ‘Art thou the one that did this with our gods, O Ibrahim?’ He said, ‘Nay, this was done by...this is their biggest one! Ask them, if they can speak intelligently!’ So they turned to themselves and said, ‘Surely, ye are the ones in the wrong!’ Then were they confounded with shame: [They said], ‘Thou knowest full well that these [idols] do not speak!’ [Ibrahim] said, ‘Do ye then worship, besides God, things that can neither be of any good to you nor do you harm? Fie upon you, and upon the things that ye worship besides God! Have ye no sense?’” (Qur’an, 21:63).*

In the previous five quotations, Ibrahim calls either his father or his father and his people to the right path. In addition, there are verses in which he addresses his people directly as a whole without singling out his father:

*“And [We also saved] Ibrahim: behold, he said to his people, ‘Serve God and fear Him: that will be best for you, if ye understand! For ye do worship idols besides God, and ye invent falsehood. The things that ye worship besides God have no power to give you sustenance: Then seek ye sustenance from God, serve Him, and be grateful to Him: to Him will be your return.’”* (Qur’an, 29:16-17)

Ibrahim called not only ordinary people to the right path; he also addressed his call to at least one ruler:

*“Hast thou not turned thy vision to one who disputed with Ibrahim about his Lord, because God had granted him power? Ibrahim said: ‘My Lord is He Who giveth life and death.’ He said: ‘I give life and death.’ Said Ibrahim: ‘But it is God that causeth the sun to rise from the east: do thou then cause it to rise from the west?’ Thus was he confounded who [in arrogance] rejected faith. Nor doth God give guidance to an unjust people.”* (Qur’an, 2:258)

Needless to say, he who calls the ruler is in fact issuing an invitation to an entire people.

What is also remarkable about Ibrahim’s relationship with his father is that despite the rejection of his father, Ibrahim continued to address him using very compassionate language. Moreover, he used to make a supplication on his father’s behalf:

*“And Ibrahim prayed for his father’s forgiveness only because of a promise he had to him ...”* (Qur’an, 9:114)

Yet when Ibrahim was sure that his father would not abandon falsehood, he broke away from him:

*“But when it became clear to him that he was an enemy to God, he dissociated himself from him: for Ibrahim was most tenderhearted, forbearing.”* (Qur’an, 9:114)

The rationale behind these unusual lengthy quotations will now unfold. It is rather obvious that Ibrahim, in the context of the Qur'an, was very busy calling the people to the right path: the way of *tawhid*, and there are many other texts in the Qur'an that bear witness to Ibrahim's religious activities. There is, however, no mention in the Qur'an of any material interests of Ibrahim. Against this extensive background, quotations from the Book of Genesis will reflect striking differences.

The first quotation from the Book of Genesis concerns the nature of the relationship between Ibrahim and his father. The relationship was reduced to companionship while traveling from Ur to Haran, and while dwelling in the latter place, until the death of Terah. Indeed, *nothing* was going on between the two in the very few lines that described the said events:

*And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came into Haran, and dwelt there. And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran. (Genesis, 11:31-32)*

It is obvious that no attempt was made to call those of the predominant cult to monotheism. One might say that this should be expected in the light of the Book of Genesis, which portrays Ibrahim as a patriarch. I would like to state that there are some Jews who still believe in Ibrahim as a prophet of God. One of them is the Chief Rabbi of Haifa!

I would like to stress the fact that the absence of any call to *tawhid* or righteousness can be detected throughout the story of Ibrahim in the Book of Genesis. Strikingly, a total of 12 chapters<sup>29</sup> that cover the span of Ibrahim's life are devoid of any call to God.

What is remarkable is that these chapters reflect material, rather than spiritual, interests. For when Ibrahim left Haran to the land of Canaan, along with his wife and nephew, they took "*all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran.*"<sup>30</sup>

The material interest can be detected in the story of Ibrahim and Sarah's journey to Egypt. According to the Book of Genesis, there was a famine

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<sup>29</sup> See chapters 12-24 and part of chapter 25 of the Book of Genesis.

<sup>30</sup> Genesis, 12:5.

in the land, which drove Ibrahim and Sarah to sojourn in Egypt. The story goes that Ibrahim was afraid for his life because of Sarah's beauty, and that he asked her to say that she was his sister. The order of the things he was hoping to achieve reflects material priority: material gains ahead of safety:

*"Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake: and my soul shall live because of thee."*  
(Genesis, 12:13)

The result of this plan was that the Pharaoh, before he and his house were plagued by the Lord, *"treated Abram well for her sake: and he had sheep and oxen, and he-asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she-asses, and camels."*<sup>31</sup>

For reasons of comparison, I shall quote a *hadith*, which was verified by both Al-Bukhari and Muslim. They have quoted Abu Hurayrah as saying that the Messenger of Allah (*salla allah alayh wa sallam*) said:

*"Ibrahim did not lie except three times: ...and one regarding Sarah. He came to a land of a tyrant, along with Sarah and she was the most beautiful of people. He said to her: 'If this tyrant knows that you are my wife, he will defeat me and he will take you away from me. If he asks you [about the relationship between us], tell him that you are my sister, for you are my sister in Islam, for I know no Muslims in the land except you and I.' When they entered his territory, a member of the tyrant's family saw her. He went to him and said: 'A woman came to your land, and she should be for none other than you.' He sent for her, and she was brought to him. Ibrahim resorted to prayer..."*

Most certainly, the above *hadith* reflects a personality of Ibrahim other than that portrayed in the Book of Genesis, in which he seems to be concerned only for his own wellbeing. The *hadith* shows a genuine concern for Sarah. The *lie* was nothing but a play on the word *sister*. The *hadith* portrays Ibrahim as pious and not concerned with material gains.

The wealth of Ibrahim is highlighted elsewhere in the Book of Genesis. When Ibrahim's servant wanted to bring Rebecca as a wife for Isaac, he presented an account of Ibrahim's material possessions:

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<sup>31</sup> Genesis, 12:16.



*“And the Lord hath blessed my master greatly; and he is become great: and he hath given him flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold, and menservants, and maidservants, and camels, and asses.”* (Genesis, 24:35)

The material aspects include the exclusive approach towards the Holy Land, which will be discussed later.

### *The Offspring of Ibrahim*

The Qur’an narrates that Ibrahim’s sons Isma’il and Isaac, who are half brothers, were born when he was quite old:

*“Praise be to God, Who hath granted unto me in old age Isma’il and Isaac: for truly my Lord is He, the Hearer of Prayer!”* (Qur’an, 14:39)

The Qur’an mentioned Isma’il first because he was born first. The Book of Genesis confirms this fact. Furthermore, the Qur’an states that both of them were prophets:

*“Say ye: we believe in God, and the revelation given to us, and to Ibrahim, Isma’il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to [all] prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between one and another of them: and we bow to God [in Islam].”* (Qur’an, 2:136)

Though the original position regarding all prophets views them as equals, nevertheless, there are some differences that result from the nature of their role or the hardships that they endured. While both Isma’il and Isaac were prophets, only Isma’il is considered a messenger (*rasul*):

*“Also mention in the Book [the story of] Isma’il: he was [strictly] true to what he promised, and he was an apostle [and] a prophet.”* (Qur’an, 19:54)

Ibn Kathir, in his commentary on this verse, stated that it contains proof that Isma’il ranks higher than Isaac does because the latter is only a prophet.



Ibrahim was granted Isaac with a Divine promise that Isaac would be granted Jacob after Ibrahim had deserted his people along with what they worshipped:

*“When he had turned away from them and from those whom they worshipped besides God, We bestowed on him Isaac and Jacob, and each one of them We made a prophet.”* (Qur’an, 19:49)

Furthermore, the Qur’an states that these two were an extra gift granted to Ibrahim. There are different interpretations regarding the meaning of the conjunction ‘and’ in the following verse:

*“And We bestowed on him Isaac. And, as an additional gift, [a grandson], Jacob, and We made righteous men of every one [of them].”* (Qur’an, 21:72)

The above translation of the meaning of the Qur’an into English considers the first part of the verse an independent sentence. The conjunction functions here as an organizer. Therefore, the additional gift is understood to be Jacob.

Yet, there is another plausible way of reading this verse, which has been totally neglected by previous Muslim scholars. I take the conjunction to be also an equalizer between both parts of the verse. The original wording of the verse has the following order:

*“And We bestowed on him Isaac and Jacob, as an additional gift; and each one We made righteous.”*

This translation of mine reflects the new understanding. Ibrahim’s natural desire to have children was fulfilled when he was granted Isma’il, the first gift. Thus, every child beyond the first child could be considered an additional gift.

There are those scholars who considered *nafilah* (something additional) to have the meaning of grandson, rendering Jacob alone to be the addition. I think that this is a reversed order; the inclusion of ‘grandson’ as one of the meanings of *nafilah* is precisely the result of interpreting this verse to indicate that the addition is Jacob. I understand the source of the problem for the Muslim scholars who dealt with this issue to be the paradigm in which they have locked themselves. In this case, it is working with this

verse only in view. I broke away from this narrow paradigm of the verse, to concentrate on the broader paradigm that is based on the Islamic worldview as a whole. This comprises all the verses, in addition to the other sources of Islam.

To support my claim, I would like to point to the timing of these gifts. The Qur'an shows that there is a correlation between the persistence of Ibrahim during times of hardship and trial, and receiving reward from God. In the case of Isma'il, it was perseverance during the test that he had to undergo that formed the prerequisite for the arrival of Isma'il:

*"They said, 'Build him a furnace, and throw him into the blazing fire!' [This failing], they then sought a stratagem against him, but We made them the ones most humiliated! He said, 'I will go to my Lord! He will surely guide me! O my Lord! Grant me a righteous [son]!' So We gave him the good news of a boy ready to suffer and forebear." (Qur'an, 37:97-101)*

The above verses continue with yet another test, which in turn yielded another gift:

*"Then, when [the son] reached [the age of serious] work with him, he said: 'O my son! I see in vision that I offer thee in sacrifice: Now see what is thy view!' [The son] said, 'O my father! Do as thou art commanded: thou will find me, if God wills one practicing patience and constancy!' So when they had laid him prostrate on his forehead [for sacrifice], We called out to him, 'O Ibrahim! Thou hast already fulfilled the vision! Thus indeed do We reward those who do right.' For this was obviously a trial. And We ransomed him with a momentous sacrifice. And We left [this blessing] for him among generations [to come] in later time: 'Peace and salutation to Ibrahim!' Thus indeed do We reward those who do right, for he was one of Our believing servants. And We gave him the good news of Isaac, a prophet, one of the righteous. We blessed him and Isaac: But of their progeny are [some] that do right, and [some] that obviously do wrong, to their own souls." (Qur'an, 37:102-113)*

The above verses prove not only that Ibrahim's offspring came after great trials, but that the child who was about to be sacrificed was Isma'il. Another proof concerning the identity of the 'sacrifice' comes from the following verse:

“And his wife was standing [there], and she laughed: but We gave her glad tidings of Isaac, and after him, of Jacob.”  
(Qur’an, 11:71)

The glad tidings are clearly that Ibrahim and Sarah would have a child, Isaac, who, by Divine decree, would have a child, Jacob. It is impossible that Allah (*subhanuhu wa ta’alla*) would promise and grant them a child that would live to become old enough to have a child of his own, yet at the same time command that he should be sacrificed! It would not be a very serious test, or would it? Unless, of course, we use a criterion based on the ideas of Philip Davis, a scholar of the Bible, who maintains that the relationship between Yahweh and Ibrahim was not innocent, and that the gods make promises that they rarely fulfill!

The Qur’an narrates that the angels visited Ibrahim on their way to Lot, without Allah (*subhanuhu wa ta’alla*) as in the Book of Genesis. They conveyed the message to Ibrahim including the glad tidings that were directed to Sarah in one version of the story.<sup>32</sup> It was Sarah and not Ibrahim who received the glad tidings this time, because Ibrahim had become a father already.

The differences between the Book of Genesis and the Qur’an regarding the above story are many. One of them concerns the nature of the visitors of Ibrahim. In the Book of Genesis the visitors were Allah (*subhanuhu wa ta’alla*) and two angels, all of whom ate from the food that Ibrahim offered them. Later on, when the angels proceeded to Lot, he offered them food and they ate again! Neither Allah (*subhanuhu wa ta’alla*), who cannot be personified as in this story, nor the angels consume food from an Islamic perspective.

Another difference can be found in the actions of Sarah. In the Qur’an, Sarah laughed, either because she had passed the age of childbearing, or because of her joy. Some Muslim scholars interpreted *laugh* as ‘menstruating anew’. In the Book of Genesis, she laughs and denies that she laughed, while the Lord insists and reiterates His position that she did!<sup>33</sup>

Another proof regarding the identity of the sacrifice can be inferred from the attributes of both Isma’il and Isaac. When the angels were offered the food and they declined to eat, Ibrahim became afraid. They comforted

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<sup>32</sup> Qur’an, 11:71.

<sup>33</sup> Genesis, 18:12-15.

him and conveyed the glad tidings that he was going to have a child who would be knowledgeable:

*“[When they did not eat] he conceived a fear of them. They said, ‘Fear not,’ and they gave him glad tidings of a son endowed with knowledge.”* (Qur’an, 51:28)

This story was repeated in the Sura of Hud (the version in which Sarah also receives the glad tidings), therefore establishing that the knowledgeable child is Isaac.

Isma’il, on the other hand, is described as a patient child:

*“And [remember] Isma’il, Idris, and Zul-kifl, all [men] of constancy and patience.”* (Qur’an, 21:85)

Yet, we know that patience is the virtue attributed to the *sacrifice*:

*“‘O my son! I see in vision that I offer thee in sacrifice: Now see what is thy view!’ [The son] said, ‘O my father! Do as thou art commanded: thou will find me, if God wills one practicing patience and constancy!’”* (Qur’an, 37:102)

Therefore, Isma’il is once again proved to be the sacrifice.

Ibn Taymiyyah stated that the sacrifice was to take place in Makkah, which is why the offering of sacrifices in Makkah has become an essential part of the *Hajj*. Also, the other acts of worship such as walking between Safa and Marwah, and throwing the stones, commemorate Isma’il and his mother whilst ultimately reminding Muslims of Allah’s bounty. It was Isma’il and his mother who were at Makkah, without Isaac and his mother. If it were the case that the sacrifice took place in Ash-Sham (Mount Moriah), as the People of the Book claim, sacrifice and slaughtering would have taken place in Ash-Sham, not in Makkah.<sup>34</sup>

Another proof is found in the Book of Genesis itself. Isma’il was born when Ibrahim was 86 years old (Genesis, 16:15-16), whereas Isaac was born when Ibrahim was 100 years old (Genesis, 17:17). It is obvious therefore, that Isma’il was the first child and the only child for 14 years, until Isaac appeared on the world stage. It is for this reason that I cannot

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<sup>34</sup> Ibn Al-Qayyim, *Zad Al-Mi’ad*, vol. 1, pp. 28-30.



reconcile the word *only* with the name Isaac in the Book of Genesis, in which Ibrahim was asked to sacrifice his *only* child.

*And He said, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." (Genesis, 22:2)*

The fact that the sacrifice was the *only son* was repeated in line 12 and line 16 of the same chapter. Some Jewish scholars attempted to reconcile *only* with Isaac, through an interpretation of *only* (*yehidkha*) in terms of unique or special (*meyuhad*). It is obvious that such attempts cannot be justified logically; to be the *only* one does not mean to be a special one. This metaphorical interpretation is a necessity dictated by the inadequacy of the text.

The pre-Islamic Arabs held the view that Isma'il was the sacrifice, and they have documented this in their poetry, such as that of Umayyah Ibn Abi Al-Salt.<sup>35</sup>

It is also known that Prophet Mohammed (*salla allah alayh wa sallam*) was called the Son of the Two Sacrifices, the first being his great grandfather Isma'il, and the second his own father Abdallah Ibn Abdul-Muttalib. This was reported by Al-Hakim in *Al-Mustadrak*, and by Ibn Jarir in his *Tafsir*, as narrated by Abdallah Ibn Sa'id As-Sanaji. The story goes that when Abdul-Muttalib wanted to dig the well of Zam Zam in Makkah he pledged that if he found it an easy task, he would sacrifice one of his ten children for the sake of God, as was permitted in pre-Islamic Arabia. When he was done with the well, he made a lottery, and Abdallah was picked to be the sacrifice. Abdul-Muttalib wanted to sacrifice the child, but the child's uncles from the tribe of Banu Makhzum prevented him from doing so. They suggested he ransom his son, which he did with 100 she-camels.

The Muslim scholars who believe Isma'il was the sacrifice include the overwhelming majority of the Companions of the Prophet, the followers (second generation of Muslims) and the scholars of the religious sciences and of *hadith*. The names include Ali, Ibn Umar, Abu Hurayrah, Abu At-Tufayl, Sa'id Ibn Jubayr, Mujahid, Ash-Shu'abi, Al-Hassan Al-Basri, Mohammed Ibn Ka'b Al-Qurazi, Sa'id Ibn Al-Musayyib, Abu Ja'far Mo-

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<sup>35</sup> Abu Shuhbah, pp. 257-258.



ammed Al-Baqi, Abu Salih, Al-Rabi' Ibn Anas, Abu Amr Ibn Al-Ala', and Ahmad Ibn Hanbal.

The most important position for the purpose of this study is that of Ibn Abbas. It is important because of two things; the first is that he was one of the companions, a member of the family of the Prophet, and one of the most influential scholars throughout the history of Islam. The second is that there are two conflicting reports about his position regarding the sacrifice: one on each side of the argument. I have inquired as to the roots of the problem and discovered that one report was sound while the other was problematic regarding the chain of the narrators.

The chain of narrators in both cases begins with Ibn Abbas himself. The second narrator is Sa'id Ibn Jubair; his reports are sound and accepted. The third narrator is Ata' Ibn As-Sa'ib; he is the last common narrator in the chain of narrators of both reports. Ata' lived to approximately 100 years of age, and it is apparent that he suffered from a kind of memory loss. Therefore, the Muslim scholars who looked into the status of each narrator (*ulama' al-Jarh wa at-ta'dil*) differentiated between his reports, depending on whether he reported them before or after he started mixing things. The demarcation between both eras, in his case, became known as before and after he moved to live in Basrah. The report that Ibn Abbas said that the sacrifice was Isma'il, is of the first era; the report that Ibn Abbas said that the sacrifice was Isaac, is of the second era. Not knowing these details about Ata' Ibn As-Sa'ib led many to believe the report that is obviously influenced by the *Isra'iliyyat* stories.

Thus, we find no weight for any argument, either within the realm of Islam, or outside it, to support the claim that the sacrifice was Isaac. This position, if accepted, would have great impact on the political course in the Holy Land.



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