

Abraham Offering His Son in the Islamic Tradition

Qur'ān 37:99-113 He [Abraham] said, "I am going to my Lord, Who will guide me. [100] My Lord! Grant me a righteous child." [101] So We gave him tidings of a gentle (ready to suffer and forbear) son. [102] Then, when (the son) had reached (the age of) working with him, he said: "O my son! I saw in a dream that I shall sacrifice you. But consider the matter. What do you think?" He said: "O, my father, do as you are commanded. You will find me, if God wills, among the patient (constant, persevering)." Then, when they had both surrendered, and he had flung him down on his face, [104] We called to him, "O Abraham! [105] You have already fulfilled the dream." Thus do We reward those who act righteously. [106] That was indeed a clear test. [107] And we ransomed him with a tremendous victim/mighty sacrifice (*dibhin 'azīmin*)" [108] And we left (this blessing) upon him among the later (generations): [109] "Peace upon Abraham!" [110] For thus do We reward those who act righteously. [111] For he was one of our believing servants. [112] And We gave him glad tidings of the birth of Isaac, a prophet of the righteous. [113] We blessed him [Abraham] and Isaac. But among their offspring there are some that do right and some that clearly do wrong to themselves.

In the account of Abraham's would-be sacrifice of his son (37:102-107), the name of the son is not mentioned, and there was a fierce controversy among Muslim scholars over the identity of the son. At first most Muslims probably considered the "sacrifice" (*dabīh*) was Isaac. This is explicitly stated of 'Umar and 'Alī Ḳuṭb ad-Dīn. A story is told of how a convert told 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz that the Jews had substituted Isaac (their ancestor) for Ishmael (the Arabs' ancestor). Actually the controversy came to be more concerned with Persian than with Jewish rivalry for the Arabs, since the Persians claimed descent through Isaac. Al-Mas'ūdī quotes a Persian poet in 290/902 who boasted that his descent from Isaac the *dabīh* was superior to that of the Arabs. Later representatives of the Isaac party were Ibn Ḳutayba and aṭ-Ṭabarī; they argued that God's perfecting his mercy on Abraham and Isaac (in 12:6) referred to his making Abraham his friend and saving him from the burning bush and to his rescuing Isaac. The other party held that the promise to Sarah followed by Jacob (11:71) excluded the possibility of a sacrifice of Isaac. Although Ibn Ḳutayba had seen Isaac mentioned in the Old Testament, Muslim opinion eventually gave full endorsement to the view that the son in question was Ishmael, the ancestor of the Arabs. In the works entitled *Ḳiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* by Tha'labī and al-Kisā'ī the story of Isaac is elaborated along line reflecting extra-biblical Jewish tradition.

Qur'ān 2:124 "And when his Lord tried Abraham with commands and he fulfilled them." (*wa'idī 'ibtalā 'Ibrāhīm rabbhu kalimāt fa'atammahunna* [IV. 'atamma (of tamma) complete, fulfill] [*kalimāt* — lit. "words"] "[Ali ibn Ibrahim al-]Qummi [d. 328/939] relates on the authority of the [Shī'ī] imāms that the trial of Abraham by God was 'what he showed him in his dream regarding the slaying of his son, and which Abraham fulfilled...'")¹

¹Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters: Volume I* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984) 154.