

### 3.1.2 Aṭ-Ṭabarī's account of Abraham and his son whom he was commanded to sacrifice

The reason lying behind God ordering Abraham to sacrifice his son, according to what is related, is as follows. When Abraham left his people, becoming a fugitive on account of his religion and an emigrant for his Lord, he went towards al-Sham and left Iraq. He called unto God, asking that He give him a righteous son by Sarah. He said: *O my Lord, give to me one of the righteous* (Qur'ān 37:100), that is a child who is one of the righteous, just as God mentioned about him in Qur'ān 37:99-100: *He said: I am going to my Lord; He will guide me. Oh my Lord give to me one of the righteous*. When the angelic visitors who were sent to those sinners, the community of Lot, came to him, they gave him the good news of a gentle boy as they had been ordered by God with His blessing. When Abraham was told this he said: "He will be a sacrifice for God!" When the boy was born and reached puberty, it was said to him: "Keep your vow which you made to God!"

The accounts of those who report that are as follows.

Gabriel said to Sarah: "I bring you good news of a son whose name is Isaac and after him Jacob." She struck her brow out of wonderment as God said in Qur'ān 51:29: *She struck her forehead* and she said: *Shall I give birth when I am old and this my husband is old? Indeed this is something most strange! They said: ("Do you marvel at God's command? The mercy and blessings of God are on you, O [64] people of the house. Indeed He is praiseworthy and glorious."* Sarah then said to Gabriel: "What is the sign of that?" He took a dry stick in his hand, bent it between his fingers such that it shook and turned green. Abraham said: "He will be a sacrifice for God!"

When Isaac was grown, someone appeared to Abraham in a dream and said to him: "Keep your vow which you made! God bestowed upon you a boy by Sarah so that you may sacrifice him." So he said to Isaac: "Let us go offer a sacrifice to God!" So he took a knife and some rope and went with him until they reached a place in the mountains. The boy said to him: "O father! Where is your sacrifice?" He replied: "O my son, I saw in a dream that I will slaughter you. So pay attention to what you see." He said: "O my father, do what you have been commanded; you will find me, if God wills, one of the patient." Isaac then said to him: "Make tight my bonds so that I will not struggle to pull back your clothes so that none of my blood will be shed on them for Sarah will see it and be grieved. Hurry! Pass the knife over my throat so that death will be easy for me. When you come to Sarah, greet her." Abraham began to approach him and, while crying, tied him up. Isaac too was crying such that the tears gathered by the cheek of Isaac. He then drew the knife along his throat but the knife did not cut, for God had placed a sheet of copper on the throat of Isaac. When he saw that, he turned him on his forehead and nicked him on the back of the head just as God has said in Qur'ān 37:103: *When they had both submitted and he flung him on his forehead*, that is they had submitted the affair to God. A voice called out: "O Abraham, you have fulfilled the vision!" He turned around and behold, there was a ram. He took it and released his son and he bent over his son saying: "O my son, today you have been given to me." That comes in God's saying in Qur'ān 37:107: *We ransomed him with a great sacrifice*. He returned to Sarah and told her the news. Sarah became anxious and said: "O Abraham, you set out to sacrifice my son, and you did not inform me!". . .

When Abraham was ordered to slaughter his son he said to him: "O my son, take the rope and the butcher's knife and come with me to the mountains so that your family may gather firewood there." This he said before mentioning anything about that which he had been ordered to do. When he headed off towards the mountains, he was obstructed in his path by that enemy of God, Iblīs, who was trying to prevent him from fulfilling the command of God. Iblīs, who had taken on the form of a man, said: "Where are you going, O Shaykh?" He replied: "I am going to these mountains because I must do something there." Iblīs said: "By God, I have seen that Shaytan has come to you in a dream and ordered you to slaughter this little son of yours. And you intend to do that slaughtering!" Thereupon Abraham recognized him and said: "Get away from me, enemy of God! By God, I will most certainly continue to do what my Lord has commanded." Iblīs, the enemy of God, gave up on Abraham but then he encountered Ishmael, who was behind Abraham carrying the wood and the large knife. He said to him:

“O young man, do you realize where your father is taking you?” He said: “To gather wood for our family from the mountains.” He [65] replied: “By God, his actual intention is to sacrifice you!” He said: “Why?!” Iblīs replied: “He claims that his Lord has ordered him to do so!” Ishmael replied: “He must do what his Lord commands, absolutely!” When the young man had rebuffed him, Iblīs went to Hagar, the mother of Ishmael who was still at home. Iblīs said to her: “O mother of Ishmael! Do you realize where Abraham is going with Ishmael?” She replied: “They have gone to gather wood for us in the mountains.” He said: “He has actually gone in order to sacrifice him!” She replied: “It cannot be! He is too kind and too loving towards him to do that!” Iblīs said: “He claims that God has ordered him to do that!” Hagar said: “If his Lord has ordered him to do that then he must submit to the command of God!” So the enemy of God returned exasperated at not being able to influence the family of Abraham as he wished. Abraham and his family had rebuffed him with the help of God and they agreed upon the command of God absolutely. When Abraham and his son reached the mountains (which are claimed to be the Thabir mountains), he said: “O my son! I saw in a dream that I should slaughter you!” Ishmael replied: “O my father! Do as you have been commanded! You will find me, if God wills, one of the patient.”

Ibn Hamid said that Salama said that Muḥammad ibn Ishāq said on the authority of people who know that Ishmael said to his father about that: “O my father! I welcome my being sacrificed. Fasten my bonds securely so that you will not be harmed by me and so that my recompense will not be diminished. Death is difficult. I do not believe that I will waver at that moment when I sense death’s touch. Whet your knife so that you may finish me off and thereby release me. When you lay me down to slaughter me, turn me over on my face. Do not lay me down on my side for I fear that if you gaze into my face, weakness will overtake you and that will come between you and the command of God concerning me. Indeed, I think that you should take my shirt to my mother for it may be that this will be a comfort to her from me. So do it!” Abraham said: “How wonderful a help you are, O my son, in fulfilling the command of God!” So he bound him just as Ishmael had asked, whetted his knife and flung him on his forehead, making sure that he did not look in his face. He put the knife up to his throat but God turned it around in Abraham’s hand. Abraham grasped it again in order to be finished with Ishmael but a voice cried out: “O Abraham, you have fulfilled the vision! This is your sacrificial victim, a ransom for your son. So sacrifice it, not him!” This is as God said in Qur’ān 37:103: *When the two of them submitted and he flung him on his forehead.* Instead he flung the sacrificial victims on their sides. This report is, according to us, truthful in the matter of Ishmael in his indications to his father in accordance with what was indicated when he said: “Turn me over on my face,” in God’s saying in Qur’ān 37:103-7: *And he flung him on his forehead and we called to him “O Abraham! You have fulfilled the vision.” In this way we recompense the good-doers. Indeed this certainly is the clear trial. And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice.*

‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās said that a ram was driven out for him from paradise; [66] it had grazed there for forty years prior to that. Abraham sent his son and he captured the ram. He took it to the first pile of stones at Minā and pelted it with seven rocks and he set it free. It went to the middle pile of stones. He extracted it from there and pelted it with seven more rocks and then set it free. He caught up with it at the greatest pile of stones and threw seven more rocks at it and took it out of there. Then he took it and brought it to the place of slaughter at Minā and there sacrificed it. By He who holds the soul of Ibn ‘Abbās in His midst, this was the beginning of Islam and the head of the ram was hung by its horns to the gutter of the Ka’ba.

Ibn ‘Abbās said that when Abraham was ordered concerning the rituals, Satan came to him at al-Sa’y (in Mecca) and tried to defeat him. But Abraham arrived first with Gabriel, on whom may there be peace, accompanying him, to the Jamrat al-‘Aqaba.<sup>1</sup> Satan came to him so Abraham pelted him with seven rocks until Satan left. But he met him again at the middle pile of stones so he pelted him again with seven rocks until Satan left. Then he threw Ishmael on his forehead, while he was wearing a white shirt. He said to him: “Oh my father! I do not have anything for a burial shroud except for this shirt. So take it off me and use it as my burial shroud!” So Abraham turned around and behold there was a choice, white, horned ram. So he sacrificed it.

<sup>1</sup>A stone pillar at the western end of Minā at which pilgrims throw seven pebbles.