

Post Eid Community Event at St Silas Church Sat 16th sept 2017
Reflection on the verses that talk about father Abraham & prophet
Ishmael - chapter 37 Verse 99-113

By Imam Fazal

As we have come together today to commemorate the sacrifices of the founding father of three major world religions. Father Abraham – pronounced as 'Ibrahim', It is important I say few words on how he is perceived by Muslims in Islam. Prophet Abraham is considered to be one the greatest Prophet of God and a patriarch of Islam. Born in a town of Ur in modern day Iraq. A great giant in the line of prophethood who is **mentioned 67 times** in the Quran, which for Muslims is a huge testimony to his greatness and excellence.

To help you understand the special relationship between the three Abrahamic faiths I want to briefly go back in time and talk about the lineage of Prophet Abraham. & then say a few words on his sacrifices.

Prophet Abraham had 2 sons Isaac & Ishmael. Ishmael was born from Hagar at the age of 86. (Interestingly the book of Genesis in C:16 V:16 also mentions the same age). So when God says in the quran verse 100: **'So we gave him the glad tidings of a forebearing boy'** for Muslims this refers to Ishmael. And Isaac who is **mentioned 15 times** in the holy quran, was born to Sarah when Abraham was 100yrs old. So here we have two brothers Ishmael the first born and Isaac the second of the same father and different mother according to Muslim traditions.

We then know that Isaac gave birth to Jacob who then gave birth to 12 sons whom later became the 12 tribes of Israel. From this lineage came many other prophets like Moses and others like Aron, Joseph, yusha and finally Mary & Jesus PBUH (who is mentioned 25 times in the quran) also came from the same lineage according to the Muslim traditions.

On the other hand we have Ishmael the brother of Isaac from whose lineage & progeny the prophet of Islam Mohammad PBUH was born. So if you think about it, In essence both Jesus and Mohammad trace their roots back to one father. **Which is why the Prophet Mohammed once stated, I am the closest of prophets to the Son of Mary. The prophets are all paternal brothers and there is no prophet between me & the son of**

Mary. (Ref. Bukhari). We therefore find that when ever Prophet Mohammed talked about Jesus to his disciples he referred to him as my cousin Isa.

For Muslims Prophet Abraham represents a role model of unconditional compliance & submission to the will of God. In verse 103. Where God in the quran **says 'And when they both submitted'**. Here the word submission is important for Muslims. That is what was unique about him. Abraham PBUH was the bedrock of faith with total submission and compliance to Gods Will and command. Islam an Arabic word also means total submission to the Will of God.

So when ever God talks about Prophet Abraham in the Quran, there is also a mention of submission. Because what was unique about him is the fact that no matter what type of difficult and impossible tests and trials came his way, whether it was the test of him being ex-communicated by his own father Aazar for breaking the idols, or the test of him being thrown alive in to the blazing fire by king Nimrod of Babylon, or whether the test of him being ordered by God to leave his wife Hagar and new born baby Ishmael in the dessert land of arabia or the final and probably the biggest test of him being commanded to slaughter his little son Ishmael, no matter what came his way he responded with complete submission & surrender. He was tested in a way no other prophet was tested, he was given challenges in a way no one was ever given. He had this burning desire to comply to the commands of God unconditionally. And that is what made him so awesome & great.

And really that is what the Muslims celebrate at the time Eid Al Adha. Muslims celebrate the graduation ceremony of Prophet Abraham for passing that loyalty test. All nations & civilizations have festivals and all religious festivals and celebrations are tied to some major historical event which makes up part of the identity of that nation. For the entire Muslim world while they are celebrating the occasion of eid al Adha across the globe, they are meant to have in mind the legacy of Prophet Abraham's incredible & unflinching faith & reliance upon God, and to learn lessons and take heed from it. So Muslims are meant to be reminding themselves about how just incredible our father Abraham was, but also how his challenges affect them today and how they can be translated.

In verse 102 when God says in the Quran **‘And when the boy reached the age of exertion, Abraham said, O my little son indeed I have seen in a dream that I must sacrifice you. So consider it & see what you think’.** He (Ishmael said, **O my beloved father do as you have been commanded and you will find me if God wills from amongst the steadfast’.**

So this is referring to the time period when prophet Abraham after 86yrs of age is suddenly blessed with a son. Imagine the joy of being father after such a long time, but immediately after that he is commanded to go and leave his wife Hagar and baby Ishmael in the deserts of Arabia, where there was no one and no water. We know the water spring of zam zam comes later on, but that comes as a reward from God for having obeyed his command. Now God is not telling us to leave our families in the deserts of arabia, but the lesson is that God will create situations in life where you may have to be separated from your families, some of you may get a job in a different town or country & be separated from one another, some may be forced to leave as you see sadly in various countries like Syria and Burma today. We pray for God to have mercy on them and ease their suffering. These are very traumatic experiences, just like it was traumatic for Prophet Abraham. He didn't know what was to happen to his family, but what he did know was that his lord would not betray him. He never ever challenged the decree of God and showed total reliance.

In this world we may face trials, challenges & difficulties, & they may not be at that level, but the lesson for Muslims is NOT to lose faith and NOT to lose hope in the mercy of God. When we keep the faith and ask for God's mercy and grace you will indeed reap the reward. Just like Father Abraham did when he returned after several years only to see his family safe and content with water & food provision and a child that is now running and playing around.

The next part of the verse 102 talks about the next big trial where no sooner does he get to know his young boy and is enjoying his time playing with him, that he is commanded by God to sacrifice him. What a great test!. On the one hand he has lost his father, because he was ex-communicated from his home town, and now he has been told to sacrifice his own son. Despite this Father Abraham finds the courage to tell his son, in verse 102; **‘I have seen in a dream that I must sacrifice you, so consider it and see what you think’.** Now just think about it, as badly as

a father wants to submit & carry out the command of God, he is still consulting his son who is still very young and making him part of that decision.

The lesson taught to Muslims by Father Abraham here is that our children need to be consulted on matters of religion too. Their opinions matter, and their decisions need to be valued and taken into consideration to help them mature up. The reply from Ishmael was **'my beloved father'** what a loving way to respond. He says, **'I love you dad, but just do as you have been commanded & you will find me from the steadfast'**. Prophet Ishmael has already processed that if God had not ordered it, his father would not have asked. Both of them knew that God would not want to do anything that would be harmful. Today we ask a youngster to sacrifice something small, like time away from their computer games to join in a religious function or to help wash dad's car on a Sunday, and the reply would be, Come on mum are you crazy? As a family we need to help each other to be loyal to God and be happy with what ever HE decides and then reap the reward of God.

So later in verses 104 - 107 God says, **'we then called out to him o Abraham, you have fulfilled your vision and dream indeed we thus reward the doers of good. And we ransomed him with a great sacrifice'**.

God sends a ram from heaven in place of sacrificing his son, Abraham is told to sacrifice the ram and feed his family from it. And so whilst Muslims across the globe sacrifice an animal & feed the poor and needy to commemorate the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice for his faith, the bigger lesson for Muslims is that sometimes for the sake of God you will have to go through tests trials and suffering for the sake of God. We are not being asked to sacrifice our children, but we are asked to sometimes sacrifice our comforts and our child's comfort because we want to be loyal to our creator.

So to conclude God made Prophet Abraham such a great role model of unwavering faith for all nations & left such a great legacy of submission, that even Prophet Mohammad was told by God to follow the legacy of Abraham in Surah Nahl the chapter of the Bee C:16 V:123 God says **'Then we revealed to you O Mohammad to follow the religion of Abraham,**

inclining towards the truth, And he was not from those who associated anyone with God’.

In conclusion, whilst God made Father Abraham go through all these impossible tests & trials, yet his loyalty & faith did not flinch, this should teach us the lesson that no matter how big a test we are going through in life, if we remain concerned to please our creator and show our loyalty to him in the face of adversities and difficulties then God will not let us down and HE will see us through those difficult times and help us reap the rewards later.

I hope that sharing & discussing sacred text like this will aid in a greater understanding of commonality and differences between religions & in turn enhance faith relations and the wider public good..