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# A Light on the History of the Prophethood

**Wilson**: The history of the monotheistic religions shows that all their prophets came from the Semitic race and that most of them came from the descendants of the Prophet Abraham, either from the children of Isaac or from the children of Ishmael. This might be construed as a privilege by which the Israelites and the Ishmaelites were distinguished from the rest of mankind. But it is very difficult to believe that God would present only these two communities with the heavenly message. God is the Lord of all nations and His message should have been revealed to other nations as well. If the history of religion is correct, there must be some reason for confining the prophethood to these two communities.

**Chirri**: The history of the human race shows us that the human understanding, in the early times, was incapable of rising above the sensuous surroundings, or of conceiving the high and universal ideas. As for human interactions, the individual was limited to love of family and friendship of relatives. All other tribes were strange or gentile to him. National and humane concepts rarely took place in his thinking.

However, some gifted individuals had lived among those people and were capable of profound understanding and rising above the sensuous limitation and ready to take the responsibility of guiding and teaching. Knowing their unusual capacities, the Most Benevolent revealed to them the truth and commissioned them with the hardest task, the guidance of humanity.

These individuals were chosen for their own merits, not for their relation to a particular race or community. As expected, these individuals were confronted with insurmountable difficulties. People were not ready to follow or accept their teachings, and most of them were either like Noah who gained a very small number of followers, or like Abraham, who lived almost as a prophet without followers.

As society refused to change, it is presumed that a prophet like Abraham was required to try to secure the continuity of his religion through his children, Ishmael and Isaac, who faithfully followed the faith of their father and conveyed it to their children. The religious teaching continued to spread narrowly through a tribal line. Centuries elapsed, and the faith neither gained followers from outside, nor was it believed by all the descendants of Abraham.

The heavenly purpose, however, was not to confine the faith within tribal or national borders. The Most

Merciful and Compassionate planned to spread the faith throughout the world and to show all mankind the right path. The Almighty administers the universe through the usual and natural courses and subjects all the events of the world to the law of cause and effect. He preserved the revealed faith and kept it alive, though at a standstill, through a small community, which was blessed by inheriting that faith from its holy father. He caused that faith to inflame and spread when that community grew and acquired a power adequate to the great task of spreading the faith.

That small community was destined to grow through two lines, the Ishmaelite and the Israelite. Both of them were blessed and both were tested and commissioned with the great task of preserving and spreading the faith, but the two tests were not simultaneous. Though Ishmael was the first son of Abraham and acquired a heritage of faith and blessing like that of his brother Isaac, God put off the test of his descendants for many centuries. He was preparing them to continue the mission which the descendants of Isaac had started.

To begin with the line of Isaac, the Almighty God established a covenant with him. From the Old Testament:

**"As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him and make him fruitful and multiply him exceedingly; he shall be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But, I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year." Genesis, Chapter 21.**

**Wilson**: According to your statement, the heavenly purpose was not to confine the faith to one or two communities or nations but to spread the true faith throughout the world and to introduce the heavenly principles to all nations. This, however, does not seem to be the case. The Old Testament repeatedly calls the Israelites God's chosen people. It calls the other people gentiles. This shows that the Israelites were the main concern of the heavenly message.

**Chirri**: With the covenant which was established between God and Isaac, the children of Israel were supposed to embrace and follow sincerely the heavenly instructions and to lead the rest of the nations to the path of God. But the Israelites did not live up to this expectation. Only a small minority adhered to the heavenly teaching and that minority was incapable of conceiving the faith as universal or humane. As a result, the successive prophets of Israel spoke to their people according to their understanding. Under the circumstances, the faith was characterized as tribal or national; God is God of Israel, and the Israelites are His chosen people. The prophets had endeavored to make the Hebrew community adhere to the faith sincerely. All the prophets of Israel were concerned mainly with that community, and none of the gentile nations concerned them. Even the great Jesus, according to Matthew, had the same attitude:

"Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Cana–an came out of the same coasts. And cried unto him, saying, have mercy on me, O Lord, thou the son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil… But he answered and said, I am not sent

but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, it is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs." Matthew, Chapter 15

**Wilson**: The Bible informs us that God had ordered Abraham to harken to Sarah, his wife, and to cast Ishmael in the desert of Paran, where there was neither food nor water. This does not only seem to be unmerciful, but also suggests that God did not have any purpose in Ishmael and his children.

**Chirri**: The preparation of the Ishmaelites had been started since God advised His obedient servant Abraham to hearken to his wife, Sarah, by taking Ishmael and his mother Hagar away to the wilderness of Paran. The readers of the Old Testament are entitled to wonder about the wisdom of such advice which seems to be very merciless and ruthless. But when we ponder on the subsequent events which took place in history, we may understand the wisdom.

The task of spreading a true religion is the task of transforming the characters of the individuals and changing the lives of the nations. The first thing this task encounters is a disagreement between the teacher of the new ideology and those whom he attempts to influence. Such an attempt usually meets resistance, and it is not unusual for this resistance to lead to an armed conflict. In such a case, the freedom to believe, preach, and practice is threatened, and can be secured and protected only when the camp of the new ideology is ready to accept the challenge and meet violence with violence. The mission, then, needs a heavenly leader supported by a strong, brave and obedient community which is ready to make any sacrifice without hesitation.

From all nations of the Middle East, the Arab nation, for many centuries, had been distinguished and, therefore, qualified for such a performance. The Arabian Peninsula had remained inaccessible to invaders and unsubdued by any foreign power. The individual Arab had enjoyed a freedom rarely checked by rulers. He became self–confident, ready to protect himself and his freedom by his own power and to translate his will into action. A nation composed of such individuals is qualified to carry a great mission; and when it is inspired by a heavenly leader, it would be capable of performing wonders.

To impart the religion of Abraham to that strong and brave nation and to prepare that nation for its great destiny, the Almighty advised His servant Abraham to hearken to his wife, Sarah, by sending his son Ishmael away so he may dwell among the Arabs. Through intermarriage, the descendants of Ishmael were to be united with the Arabs and become a great nation that was destined to bear the great mission in the future .

**"And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her: What aileth thee, Hagar? Fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him into thine hand; for I will make him a great nation. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink. And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness...and he**

**dwelt in the wilderness of Paran." Genesis, Chapter 21.**

By placing Ishmael in the Arabian Peninsula, Abraham had planted the seed of his faith in the Arabian soil. To make the seed grow and the faith continue, he laid the foundation of the future by raising the foundation of the Sacred House, the Kaabah, in the midst of Arabia, as the first temple of God in the world. As God foretold Abraham and as Abraham expected, the House attracted the dwellers of Arabia and became the holy center of the country. The holy city of Mecca later was established around it, and since then the call of Abraham is annually responded to by a large number of pilgrims who visit the Sacred House and worship God at His temple. From the Holy Qur'an:

***"And when We pointed to Abraham the place of the House, saying: 'Associate naught with Me, and purify My House for those who make circuits and stand to pray and bow and prostrate themselves.' And proclaim to men the pilgrimage; they will come to thee on foot and every lean camel, coming from every remote path; that they may witness benefits (provided) for them, and mention the name of God on appointed days over what He has given them of the cattle quadrupeds; then eat of them and feed the distressed one, the needy." 22:26-28***

It was heart-rending to Abraham, to settle his first son in the desert of Arabia where there is neither fruit nor water nor town. But he had two goals to accomplish, and each was great enough to make Abraham willing to offer such a sacrifice and to do his utmost.

The first of the two goals was immediate, namely: to establish the Sacred House and to assign to that mosque his son as a guardian who would worship God, conduct the service according to the true religion of God, and teach his children and the people of the country the right principles. By this, Abraham not only widened the scope of his faith but also assured the continuity of that faith. Should the line of Isaac fail in its religious task, the faith may continue through the children of Ishmael in Arabia. From the Holy Qur'an:

***"My Lord, I have settled a part of my offspring in a valley unproductive of fruit near Thy Sacred House, Our Lord, that they may keep up prayer; so make the hearts of some people yearn towards them, and provide them with fruits; haply they may be grateful." 14:37***

We do not know the extent of growth of Abraham's faith on the soil of Arabia. History does not inform us clearly on the religious situation in Arabia during the long period which extends from the time of Abraham to the end of the fifth century of the Christian era. In the sixth century we find the majority of the Arabs idolaters. But in spite of this, we find, at the same time, some rites and practices which could be attributed only to the teaching of Abraham. Among these are the pilgrimage to the Sacred House in Mecca and the circumcision which was performed and practiced by all the non-Christian tribes of Arabia. Along with these rites and practices, we find a small minority among the Arabs, believing in God, worshipping Him, and rejecting idols.

The second goal for Abraham was to prepare the children of Ishmael and the nation with which they

were united, for the distant and glorious future – when the Arabic-speaking people would be privileged and honored to have the Final Prophet among them; when they would be ready to receive his great message and spread the word of God throughout the world. From the Qur'an:

***"And when Abraham and Ishmael raised the foundations of the House** (**with this prayer**)**: 'Our Lord, accept** (**this service**) ***from us; surely Thou art the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing. Our Lord, and make us both submissive to Thee, and** (**raise**) ***from our offspring, a nation submissive to Thee, and show us our way of devotion and turn to us** (**mercifully**)**; surely Thou art the oft-returning** (**to mercy**) ***the Merciful. Our Lord, and raise up in them a messenger from among them who shall recite to them Thy messages and teach them the Book and the Wisdom, and purify them. Surely Thou art the Mighty, the Wise.'" 2:127-129***

The prayer of the Prophet Abraham was graciously answered in the seventh century AD. The anticipated Prophet had arrived with an unprecedented method of presentation which is capable of supporting the truth, securing the needed freedoms and opening the way for the heavenly doctrines. It is the method of using logic as the main means for convincing and displaying strength in the face of anyone who threatened the sacred freedoms.

Yes, in the seventh century, the world was blessed by the advent of the Final and Universal Prophet Muhammad, who rose from Mecca, the center of Arabia, to shine over the East and the West.

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