

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

PROPHET ABRAHAM'S^(pbuh) SACRIFICIAL SON - ISHMAEL OR ISAAC?^(pbuh)

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Albeit there has been much classical debate over the identity of which son Prophet Abraham^(pbuh) was asked to sacrifice, Muslim thought today remains generally of the consensus, that the identity of the son was Prophet Ishmael.^(pbuh)

The Quran does not mention the name. However, there are strong arguments to consider for the unbiased reader that may indicate the identity of the son to actually be that of Prophet Isaac^(pbuh) as opposed to Prophet Ishmael^(pbuh) (contrary to general Muslim opinion).

The following is the Quran's account.

037.102-109

"And when he attained to working with him, he said: O my son! surely I have seen in a dream that I should sacrifice you; consider then what you see. He said: O my father! do what you are commanded; if God pleases, you will find me of the patient ones. So when they both submitted and he put him down upon his forehead, We called out to him "O Abraham! You have already fulfilled the vision. Surely thus do We reward the good. Surely! that verily was a clear test. And We ransomed him with a Feat sacrifice. And We left (this blessing) for him among generations (to come) in later times. Peace be on Abraham"

As can be noted from the above verses, there is **no mention of the identity of the son**. However, if we consult the previous verses and subsequent ones to obtain a complete context, we note some very strong indications as to the possibility of the identity of the child as being that of Prophet Isaac^(pbuh) and not Prophet Ishmael.^(pbuh)

This particular narrative initiates with an important prayer made by Prophet Abraham.^(pbuh)

037.100

"O my Lord! (Arabic: Rabbi) Grant me of the righteous (Arabic: Saliheen)"

It is significant to note that Prophet Abraham's ^(pbuh) prayer above in verse 37.100 is different from what is commonly understood within the ambits of Muslim thought. The Arabic reads "Grant me one from the righteous (**Arabic: SALIHEEN**)" (Arabic: Rabi hab li mi-nasaliheen).

There is no mention of Prophet Abraham ^(pbuh) asking for a **son** (many commentators incorrectly include this in their translations to indicate this). This is not a prayer for a child of a particular gender. **This is a prayer for a SALIHEEN (A righteous child)**. It is incorrect to assume that a 'saliheen' is only restricted to a child of male gender. In this case, the 'saliheen' happened to be of the male gender, but the gender was not the focal point of the prayer. Rather, it was the '**character**' of the child.

037.101

"So We gave him the good news (**Arabic: fabasharnahu**) of a boy ready to suffer and forbear (**Arabic: Halimin**)"

One is inclined to note the parallels and contrasts with the prayer made by the mother of Mary, who wanted to offer the child in her stomach to the Lord expecting it to be a boy. However, she was granted a female instead - Mary.

003.035

"Behold! a woman of 'Imran said: "O my Lord! I do dedicate to Thee what is in my womb for Thy special service: So accept this of me: For Thou hears and knows all things." So when she delivered her, she said: "My Lord! Surely I have delivered a female!" - And God knew best what she delivered and the male is not like the female. (She said) "And I have named her Mary, and I commend her and her offspring into Thy protection from the accursed Satan"

In contrast with Prophet Abraham's ^(pbuh) prayer, there is no mention of 'gender' but only one of 'character'.

After God confirms to Prophet Abraham ^(pbuh) that he would have a boy forbearing (Arabic Halimin), the narrative then continues with regards Prophet Abraham's ^(pbuh) dream and his call to sacrifice the same child. Again, at this stage all one can ascertain of the identity, is that the child is a boy who is forbearing. Then we proceed to read verse 37.112.

037.112

"And We gave him the good news (**Arabic: wabasharna**) of Isaac, a prophet (**Arabic: Nabiyyan**) among the righteous (**Arabic: Salihina**)"

This is the first time the name 'Isaac' is mentioned in the narrative. However many commentators make the unwarranted connection that this constitutes 'news' of the coming of a new child called 'Isaac'

However, analysing the above verse and keeping it within the context of the previous verses, the only new pieces of information that are being imparted are:

- (a) A name (Isaac)
- (b) Who happens to be a Prophet (Arabic: Nabiyyan)
- (c) Who happens to be righteous (Arabic: Saliheen)

There is no mention of the birth of a new child.

Now it can be strongly argued that Isaac^(pbuh) was not a born 'Prophet' (unlike Jesus) but acquired his wisdom in later years much like many other prophets such as Prophets Joseph, Moses, Muhammad^(pbuh) and Abraham^(pbuh) himself. Therefore, the lack of a name in verse 37.101 is firmly in keeping with the fact that no name had been given at this stage, nor had he attained to Prophethood or was 'confirmed' as being of the 'Saliheen' (righteous).

With a view to elaborate the latter point with regards 'Saliheen', if we reanalyse verse 37.101, when a male child's birth is confirmed, there is still no confirmation whether he would be of the righteous 'Saliheen'. The only confirmation that is given is that he would be a child that would be ready to suffer and forbear (**Arabic: Halimin**). Note there is a difference between 'Saliheen' (of the righteous) and 'Halimin' (that are ready to suffer, forbear, are clement or patient).

037.101

"So We gave him the good news of a boy ready to suffer and forbear (**Arabic: Halimin**)"

However, in verse 37.112 we specifically note the **confirmation** of the request made in Prophet Abraham's^(pbuh) original prayer (37.100). Not only is confirmation being given with regards a character, 'Saliheen', which was the original request Prophet Abraham^(pbuh) made, but also one of 'prophethood'. Therefore, it appears from context, that these confirmations constitute the 'Basharna' (good news) and not the coming of a new child.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The second good news (taken sequentially) does not necessarily inform the reader of the birth of a new child, but rather gives further glad tidings with regards an existing child named 'Isaac'. If both verse 37.101 and 37.112 are compared, the similarity is noted. The first being that the good news was of a boy in verse 37.101. The second good news was that of Isaac^(pbuh) (the same boy) who was now chosen to become a Prophet and was confirmed as being one of the righteous (Saliheen). The latter of course, being what Prophet Abraham^(pbuh) actually prayed for in his original prayer (i.e. a child that is righteous (Saliheen)) in verse 37.100.

Furthermore, if the contrary position is to be accepted (i.e. the sacrificial son was Prophet Ishmael^(pbuh)), it becomes difficult to reconcile why a name would be necessary in 37.112 when it is absent in 37.101, if both verses are capturing the birth of new children.

In this way and given the discussions above, the whole narrative captured in (37.100 - 113) would be with regards Prophet Isaac^(pbuh) the son that Prophet Abraham^(pbuh) saw in a dream to be sacrificed.

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