
IBRAHIM THE FATHER OF THE PROPHETS

DR. ALI MOHAMMAD AL-SALLABI

ENGLISH



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

*In the name of Allah
the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.*



Publication Number	80
ISBN	978-625-8336-81-8
The Name of Book	Ibrahim the Father of the Prophets إبراهيم خليل الله داعية التوحيد ودين الإسلام والأسوة الحسنة
Author	Dr. Ali Mohammad al-Sallabi
Editor	Recep Songül
Translator	Zahed Fettah
Design Office	AsaletAjans ajans@asaletyayinlari.com.tr
Page design	Furkan Çevik
Cover design	Yunus Karaaslan
Printing	1st Edition, İstanbul, June 2023
Editions	Asalet Eğitim Danışmanlık Yayın Hizmetleri İç ve Dış Ticaret Sertifika No: 40687 Balabanağa Mh. Büyük Reşit Paşa Cd. Yümni İş Hanı, 16B/16 Vezneciler, Fatih/İSTANBUL 0212 511 85 47 www.asaletyayinlari.com.tr asalet@asaletyayinlari.com.tr



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Ibrahim the Father of the Prophets

Dr. Ali Mohammad Al-Sallabi



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Translator's Note

All praise is due to Allah for the completion of the translation of another book that forms part of a series which comprehensively speaks about the lives of five of the most important prophets of Islam. Almost everything that relates to Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) has been discussed in this particular detailed work by prominent writer and historian, Dr. Ali al-Sallabi. Not only has the author covered aspects of the life and personality of Ibrahim, but he has commented on all the verses of the Qur'an that speak about Ibrahim.

This translation seeks to provide English readers with a work that is easy to read and benefit from. With the consent of the author, it is thus not a strict or literal translation of the original. Instead, I have done my best to convey everything the author wishes to convey using plain English, even if that means that sentence order is sometimes altered or some additions or subtractions are made for the sake of clarity and a better flow. I have also omitted any detailed discussions about Arabic rhetoric and linguistics, although I decided to translate those language related points which I felt were easy to understand for an English speaking audience. In any case, the language element does not make up a major part of the book.

When it comes to the translation of the verses of the Qur'an, I have generally relied upon the Clear Quran by Dr. Mustafa Khattab and Abdul Haleem's translation. However, I have also benefitted from other translations. I have taken the freedom to edit the translation as I see fit after consulting works of *tafsir*, especially when this is needed to reflect the interpretation of the verse that has been adopted by the author.

I ask Allah to reward the author for his efforts and to benefit the author, translator, and reader of this work in this life and the next.

Zahed Fattah
Translator

Author's Introduction

All praise is due to Allah. We praise him, and we seek His help and forgiveness. We seek refuge in Allah from the evil within ourselves and our evil deeds. Whoever Allah guides, there is none to misguide him, and whoever Allah leads astray, there is none to guide him. I testify that there is no true God but Allah alone, without any partners, and that Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, is His servant and His messenger.

‘O you who believe, fear Allah, as He should be feared, and let not yourself die except as Muslims.’ (al-Imran: 102)

‘Mankind! Be mindful of your Lord Who created you from a single soul, and from it He created its mate, and through both He spread countless men and women. And be mindful of Allah—in Whose Name you appeal to one another—and [honour] family ties. Surely Allah is ever Watchful over you.’ (al-Nisa:1)

‘O believers! Be mindful of Allah and say what is right. He will bless your deeds for you and forgive your sins. And whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger, has truly achieved a great triumph.’ (33:71-72)

O Allah, praise be to you as it befits the majesty of your face and the greatness of your power, and praise be to you until you are satisfied, and praise be to you if you are pleased, and praise be to you after being pleased.

This book is a continuation of a new academic project that relates to the detailed study of *Ulu al-Azm* (Messengers of Firm Resolve) and the stories of the prophets and messengers in the Qur’an. The book is part of the *Messengers of Firm Resolve* Compilation which I dream of completing. I hope from Allah that it is sincerely for His sake and beneficial for people. Mankind is in real need of knowing the lives of the prophets and messengers, an explanation of their biographies, their character, and the foundations of their message. It is in need of learning these things through the Book of Allah (the Qur’an) – that cannot be proven false from any angle, the authentic traditions of the Prophet (peace be upon him), and the statements of the great scholars, in a contemporary style that suits the phase that humanity is currently facing. A phase in which humanity is searching for convincing answers to major questions about God, the universe, life, Paradise and



Hellfire, divine decree, prophets and their messages, ancient human civilizations, when they appeared and what they eventually became, the foundations of noble character, and spiritual morals. Questions about managing the struggle between truth and falsehood; guidance and misguidance; good and evil; and faith and disbelief.

I truly thank Allah the Most High for allowing me to take an interest in these topics, and I thank Him for His blessings that cannot be enumerated. I ask Him to grant me success in writing beneficial and structured material for mankind, grant these writings acceptance amongst people, make them a reason for those searching for the major truths in this world to find the straight path – in company with the Prophets, the truthful, the martyrs, and the righteous, those on whom Allah has bestowed His Grace. How excellent these companions are! I sincerely hope from Allah that these works contribute towards enlightening the minds, cleansing the selves, and purifying the souls of humanity, so that they are able to know the truth, hold on to it, and defend it.

So far, several books have been published from the Messengers of Firm Resolve Series:

1. The Prophetic Biography:
2. The Messiah Isa Son Of Maryam: The Complete Truth
3. Nuh and the Great Flood: The Birth of the Second Human Civilization

This book is the fourth book in this series, titled, *Ibrahim: The Father of the Prophets*.

I have divided this book into four chapters:

In the first chapter, I discuss the upbringing of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) his name and lineage, his birth, his era, his migrations, and his status. It contains three topics:

The first topic deals with the name of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) his lineage, his title, and his *kunya*¹.

¹ Like a name or title that people are called by, besides their first name, beginning with Abu (father of) or Umm (mother of). The *kunya* of the Prophet Muhammad, for instance, was Abu al-Qasim. (translator)

In the second topic, I dealt with the era of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) and his migrations. I spoke about the historical period that preceded Ibrahim (peace be upon him) and the religious life and ancient beliefs in his time, such as the worship of planets, stars and idols, the worship of kings, offerings and vows, and building temples, such as the earthly temple, the High Temple, and the Sabians. I also spoke about the social and political life, and the classes of society, such as the free, middle class, and slaves. I discuss the practices of marriage, family, the customs of that society, their festivals, the educational and political aspect.

As for the third topic, it dealt with the biography of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) in the midst of the prophets and messengers. Here we speak about the difference between a Prophet (*nabi*) and the Messenger (*rasul*), prophecy and messages, and about Ulu al-Azm, the truth of prophecy, the wisdom of sending the messengers, humanity's need for them, and the establishment of the argument against humans through them. Allah has made His revelation to the prophets the way to knowing the world of the unseen. People are in need of a good role model, reforming and purifying souls, achieving great goals and major aims, such as calling people to worship God, conveying the divine law to people, explaining what was revealed to them, reforming human beings, and establishing and applying God's law among humans, the testimony of the messengers against the nations on the Day of Resurrection, benefiting from God's natural laws with individuals, nations, societies, and states, attaching the hearts and souls by having them tread the path of the blessed prophets and messengers.

In this book I mention the characteristics of the prophets and messengers, their being chosen as carriers of revelation, the fact that their eyes sleep but their hearts do not sleep, the choice they are given just before death, the fact that any prophet is buried where he dies, that they are alive in their graves, that their bodies are not eaten by the earth, that they none inherits their wealth after their death, and how God prepares them for His messages.

It also clarified that the religion of the prophets and messengers - may blessings and peace be upon them - is one, Islam. The first belief on earth is monotheism, the oneness of God Almighty, which is the original message of all the prophets and messengers. The message of all the prophets is



one and they agree upon the pillars and foundations of faith, though they differ in some branches of the law. Some light was shed on the importance of the cause of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) in the Noble Qur'an and that he is a supreme example for humanity, his call for pure monotheism, and the depth of the relationship between Ibrahim (peace be upon him) and the Muslims.

I explained the wisdom of distributing the scenes of the story of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) in more than one surah, and that each scene in the story of Ibrahim is suitable as a story itself, providing appropriate lessons. For this reason, these scenes are distributed throughout the Holy Qur'an in this way. While we find scenes of the story of Joseph (peace be upon him) all collected in one chapter, because the scenes are interconnected and cannot be separated from one another in order to preserve the unified objective of the chapter. On the other hand, each scene of the story of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) came in its relevant place in the surah, is consistent with the overall subject of the surah and the time of its revelation, as we will see later, insha'Allah.

The scattering of the scenes of the story of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) is a symbol of the call to monotheism (*tawhid*), singling out God in worship, and a landmark of the true path. This symbol of *tawhid*, worshipping God, and tackling polytheism and disbelief should remain present in the mind of a Muslim, because this is his guide and main value. This meaning was intended by the Noble Qur'an, when the Almighty said: 'And mention in the Book Ibrahim. He was a righteous prophet.' (Maryam: 41). This shows that the sound truth about Ibrahim is that which is found in the Qur'an. Our Prophet Muhammad - peace be upon him - in the authentic reports narrated from him, also clarified interesting aspects of the story of Ibrahim, peace be upon him.

The story of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) in the Holy Qur'an is authentic. Nothing similar exists in the Torah or the Bible in terms of accuracy, correctness, and a complete truth that is far from distortion, forgery and falsehood. This authenticity only increased its purity and power in the frame of the distinct discourse of the Qur'an that cannot be approached with falsehood from any angle, but is a revelation sent down from the Wise, the Praiseworthy.' (Fussilat: 42).

Ibrahim is given an exceptional status in the Qur'anic discourse. Allah has described him with many excellent traits as we shall see.

Ibrahim is *Khalil al-Rahman* (the friend of Allah), the father of the prophets, and the one who built the sacred Ka'bah. He stands out with some excellent traits, such as sincerity, bravery, sacrifice, truthfulness, patience, serenity, and constantly turning in repentance to Allah. These traits will be discussed further in their relevant place by the Will of Allah.

Also discussed here are the places in which Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was mentioned in the Holy Qur'an in general.

The second chapter includes the story of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) in the following chapters: Surah Al-An'am, Maryam, al-Anbiya, al-Shu'ara, al-Ankabut, and al-Saffat.

The first topic in this chapter contains the story of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) in Surat Al-An'am and his dialogue with his father and his people about the worship of planets, stars, and the sun. I have truly lived with Ibrahim (peace be upon him) through the noble verses in Surat Al-An'am. I saw the kingdom of the heavens and the earth that God opened for him until he reached the level of certainty (*yaqin*), as well as the reason, logic, strength, and sound arguments used with those who worship the planets and stars. A young man who shook them in their depths and showed them the invalidity of their polytheism and rejection of pure monotheism, and how he called them to worship the One, the Almighty God after questioning their beliefs and exposing their falsehood and deviation from the straight path.

The third chapter discusses Ibrahim's dialogue with the oppressive tyrant king of Egypt. We talk about Ibrahim's request to see how Allah gives life to the dead and discuss the meaning of *Wala* and *Bara*.

The fourth chapter talks about Ibrahim's success as a leader and prophet. The tests and trials that he faced, and his great sacrifices. We also look at the supplications of Ibrahim and what they teach us about him. We also discuss Hajj, Ibrahim's traits, and the strong relationship between Ibrahim and his son Muhammad. There is also a discussion on the difference between uniting religions and cooperating upon goodness. Finally, we talk about Ibrahim towards the end of his life, his death, and grave.



This book will, insha'Allah, make you live the whole journey of Ibrahim's life. From a young age in Iraq until the end of his life, we will go through his efforts in defending the truth and calling people to guidance. We hope to learn from the struggles that he faced and take lessons from how Ibrahim used his knowledge and wisdom to make the best decision on any challenge that came in his direction.

Praise is to Allah alone. I ask Allah to accept this humble effort from me and honour me with the company of the prophets, truthful, martyrs, and righteous. I thank Allah for His endless favours upon me and admit my weakness and inability to do anything without His favour and grace. My Lord, guide me to the truth that pleases you and protect me from my whims, desires, and weakness.

'Lord, inspire me to be thankful for the blessings You have granted me and my parents, and to do good deeds that please You; admit me by Your grace into the ranks of Your righteous servants.' (al-Naml: 19)

Dr. Ali Muhammad al-Sallabi
May Allah forgive him, his parents,
and all the Muslims

Chapter 1

Ibrahim (peace be upon him)

His name, lineage, birth, era, migrations, and status amongst the prophets and messengers



Section 1: His name, lineage, and birth,

Section 2: His era and migrations

Section 3: His status amongst the prophets and messengers

Ibrahim: His name, lineage, birth, era, migrations, and status amongst the prophets and messengers

Before speaking about Ibrahim's message, his experiences in calling to the oneness (*tawhid*) of God, Lord of the worlds, the great responsibility he had towards his people, his status amongst the prophets and messengers, the suffering, torment, and rejection that he faced from his people, we must speak about his birth, lineage, origins, and the circumstances of the generation that he lived in.

The status and virtue of Ibrahim - peace be upon him – is clear to be seen through God Almighty's description of him in the Qur'an and what was mentioned about him in the Prophetic Sunnah. He is the servant who has done good, fulfilled, and thus was honoured by Allah in a manner worthy of his stature. He made pure monotheism his religion, he made those who follow his way the wise, and he is the leader of people and their role model. Allah has kept prophecy in his offspring. All the prophets were his descendants, the last of them being the master of creation, Muhammad, may God's prayers and peace be upon him, who represents God's response to Ibrahim's prayer to send in the Arab nation a messenger from themselves.

Ibrahim, peace be upon him, is the third father of mankind and the father of the prophets. This is because humanity's first father is Adam, its second father is Noah, and all the people of the earth are from his offspring. He is the pillar of the world and the leader of the *hunafa* (those who turned away from falsehood). God, glory be to Him, took him as a friend and made prophethood and the book in his offspring.. He is the friend of the Most Compassionate and the leader of the prophets (*shaykh al-anbiya*), as the Prophet called him.

Section 1:

His Name, Lineage, Kunya, and Birth

1. His Name and Lineage

a. His Name

‘Ibrahim’ is a Syriac word that means a merciful father. In Hebrew it is a compound name of two words: ‘Ab’ which means ‘father’, and ‘Raham’ which means a group or a crowd or a large number, like ‘Riham’ in Arabic.² Others said that Ibrahim is a non-Arabic name, while others said that it comes from the root ‘barhama’ which refers to an intense and perpetual gaze.³

It is also said that the name ‘Ibrahim’ is one of the names that implies a religious upbringing, because it conveys the meaning of ‘beloved of God’. ‘Ram’ means love in the Syriac language. Perhaps the change that took place in the name ‘Abram’ was so that it would hold the meaning of ‘beloved of God’, instead of ‘beloved of the god’ who used to worship his father in pagan temples.⁴

Ibn Hajar said: ‘It is said that it means merciful in Syriac.’⁵

Allah Almighty made Ibrahim, peace be upon him, the third father of humanity. He said: ‘The way of your father Ibrahim’ (22:78). After Adam and Nuh, he comes next, the friend of the Most Compassionate and the leader of the prophets (*shaykh al-anbiya*), as the Prophet (peace be upon him) called him.

Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was called the ‘shaykh of the prophets’ and the ‘father of the prophets’, because he was the pioneer of the prophetic

² Rahm and riham refers to a group of men. A woman is also called rahm. See Mu’jam Lisan al-Arab, Ibn Manzur (d. 711 AH), Dar Sader for Printing and Publishing, Beirut, Lebanon, Ed. 3, 1414 AH, Article (Rahm), vol. 12, p. 257.

³ Ibid, 12/48.

⁴ Ibrahim Abu al-Anbiya, Abbas Mahmoud Al-Akkad, Hindawi Foundation for Education and Culture, Cairo, Egypt, Ed. 1, 2012, p. 294.

⁵ Fath al-Bari Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari, Ahmed b. Ali b. Hajar al-Asqalani, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, Beirut, Lebanon, Ed. 1, 1410 AH, (6/389).

call in the entire world and the prophets that succeeded him were from his progeny. All the prophets of the Children of Israel are his descendants, because they are from the children of Ya'qub, son of Ishaq, and Ishaq is the son of Ibrahim. So from Ibrahim (peace be upon him) the tree of prophethood continues until the seal of the Messengers, may God's prayers be upon them, because Muhammad he is the son of Ismael. Allah Almighty said: 'And We granted him Isaac and Jacob, and We placed in his offspring prophecy and the Book.' (al-Ankabut: 27)

b. His Lineage

He is Ibrahim ibn Azar. The Holy Qur'an does not mention anything further than this lineage. However, Muslim historians and other researchers relied on the Torah to know Ibrahim's lineage. There are some different views about the names of his ancestors, perhaps due to the differences in translation of the ancient languages of the old editions of the Torah and other history books.⁶

The Holy Qur'an and the pure Sunnah of the Prophet both mention that Ibrahim al-Khalil (peace be upon him) is the son of Azar. Some Muslim historians reported that he is the son of Terah or Terach, as we find in the Old Testament. These scholars thus resorted to interpreting the Qur'anic verse which mentions Ibrahim as being the son of Azar in various ways. This prompted some of the enemies of Islam to raise suspicions about the name of Ibrahim's father (peace be upon him) and the truthfulness of the Qur'an. Razi points to this saying, 'Some disbelievers used this to attack the Qur'an arguing that the lineage mentioned in it is incorrect.'⁷

The Encyclopedia of Islam in the modern era then revived this claim by saying: '*Azar* is the name of Ibrahim's father in the Holy Qur'an. However, it appears that there is some confusion, because the name '*Azar*' was never mentioned as the father of Ibrahim in any other source, while Terah or Terach were mentioned in the views of some Muslim historians and commentators as the father of Ibrahim as well. They therefore resorted to skilfully reconciling between these two narrations, but this reconciliation is not of much value.'⁸

⁶ Al-Amiri, p. 29.

⁷ Al-Tafsir al-Kabir, 13\37.

⁸ Al-Amiri, p. 86.

Before listing the opinions of Muslim scholars on the name of Ibrahim's father and giving preference to what I believe to be correct, I quickly note the writer of the article in the Encyclopedia of Islam is the one who resorted to deceit for some reason by only mentioning a part of the truth that is consistent with his views; and the true feelings of most orientalis in relation to Islam is well known. The writer of the article begins to challenge the Noble Qur'an, and claims that there is some confusion in it, then accuses Muslim scholars resorting to skilful deceit, although many of them rejected the narration of the Torah and accepted the apparent meaning of what was mentioned in the Qur'an as being the truth. Alongside these scholars, other tried to reconcile the two narratives academically, not by making baseless claims about the unseen or following their desires or concealing the truth the way we see here, nor by making inappropriate and misplaced remarks. These are certainly not traits of objective scholars who are true scholars in word and deed.

The scholars of Islam differed about the name of Ibrahim's father based on their differences in the interpretation of the Almighty's saying: 'And when Ibrahim said to his father Azar...' (al-An'am: 74). Ibn al-Jawzi mentioned four opinions about Azar. The first is that it is the name of his father, the second that it is the name of an idol, the third that it is not a name, but rather an insult, which means crooked or blameworthy one, as if he blaming him for his misguidance and deviation from the truth.⁹ The fourth view claims that this was not his father's real name, but a nickname that he became more known by.¹⁰

Muhammad Murtada al-Zabidi says: 'Some said that it is the name of his uncle. Referring to one's uncle as a father was something which the Arabs would often do and we find this in the Qur'an. As for his father, then he is Terach or Terah.'¹¹

By critiquing these different opinions, it becomes clear that the view attributed to Mujahid which claims that Azar was the name of an idol is not an authentic statements of Mujahid, nor is it linguistically correct.¹²

⁹ Taj al-Arus, 3\13.

¹⁰ Al-Amiri, p. 187.

¹¹ Qamus al-Qur'an, p. 13.

¹² Al-Amiri, p. 187.

Hafidh Ibn Hajar says: ‘Al-Tabari narrated through a weak chain of transmission (*isnad*) on the authority of Mujahid that Azar is a name of an idol, which is *shadh* (odd) in terms of its *isnad*. In terms of the Arabic language, Al-Tabari said in his Tafsir: ‘It is a view that is far from being correct in terms of Arabic, because the Arabs do not say, *your brother have you spoken to*, to mean, have you spoken to your brother? As for their claim that it is an insult to his father, then this is also far off, because this is not the way a prophet behaves towards his father, especially Ibrahim - peace be upon him – the one who responds to his father’s threats of stoning by saying: ‘I will ask forgiveness for you from my Lord.’ (Maryam: 47)

Is it imaginable that someone who shows such respect for his father at times of disagreement and dispute will introduce Islam to his father by insulting him?

As for the claim that Azar is another name for Ibrahim’s father, just like Jacob and Israel, then this is a more reasonable view if it could be backed with evidence. However, there is no such evidence for this view other than an attempt to reconcile between the Qur’anic verse and the Biblical reports. Similarly, interpreting the word *father* to mean *uncle* would be a metaphorical interpretation that opposes the obvious and apparent meaning of the verse without any proof or indication that the word *father* is not meant literally. If we allowed such interpretation in this way, no words would carry any clear meanings, as they would all be open to metaphorical interpretation. Instead, all the indications imply that Ibrahim was addressing his actual father, as Allah said:

‘As for Ibrahim’s prayer for his father’s forgiveness, it was only in fulfilment of a promise he had made to him. But when it became clear to Ibrahim that his father was an enemy of Allah, he broke ties with him. Ibrahim was truly tender-hearted, forbearing.’ (al-Tawbah: 114)

The same applies to the verses in Surat Maryam, Al-Anbiya, As-Saffat, Az-Zukhruf, and Al-Mumtahinah. In all of these instances, it is clear that Ibrahim’s call (peace be upon him) was directed at his father, so what is the need to assume that in this verse it is someone other than his father when all the indications point towards this being his father.

As for those claims that there are varying readings of the word Azar, they are ‘narrations that have no support and are not established by the

scholars of recitation (*qira'ah*). Rather, they are too weak to be described as *shadh* (odd) recitations at all, and the well-known correct recitations only mention it as Azar, making clear that it is his name.’¹³ These vast differences about the name of Ibrahim’s father are due to two things: the views of genealogists and what was mentioned in biblical scripture.

It is nearly impossible to prove the validity of the views of genealogists on ancient lineages, so they should not be relied upon. There is also a lot of contradiction and confusion in their views. Ibn Saad narrated in *al-Tabaqat* with his chain of transmission on the authority of Ibn Abbas that if the Prophet (peace be upon him) mentioned his lineage, he would not exceed Ma’ad ibn Adnan ibn Adad, then he would say, ‘The genealogists have lied. God Almighty said: And many centuries in between them’ (*al-Furqan*:38). As for the Biblical scriptures, it is not correct to rely on them independently in the first place, so they can certainly not be referred to if they contradict the Qur’an and Sunnah.

Allah has described the Qur’an as being a supreme authority over the previous scriptures: ‘We have revealed to you [O Prophet] this Book with the truth, as a confirmation of previous Scriptures and a supreme authority on them.’ (*al-Ma’idah*: 48) v

In addition to this, the hadith of the Messenger of God (may God’s prayers and peace be upon him) narrated by Imam al-Bukhari in his *Sahih*, in which he declares the name of Ibrahim’s father strengthens the view that his name is Azar and not Terah. It was narrated by Abu Hurayrah, may God be pleased with him, that the Prophet - may God’s prayers and peace be upon him - said:

On the Day of Resurrection Ibrahim will meet his father Azar whose face will be dark and covered with dust. Ibrahim will say to him: ‘Didn’t I tell you not to disobey me?’ His father will reply: ‘Today I will not disobey you.’ Ibrahim will say: ‘O Lord! You promised me not to disgrace me on the Day of Resurrection; and what is more disgraceful to me than dishonouring my father?’ Then Allah will say to him: ‘I have forbidden Paradise for the disbelievers.’ Then he will be addressed, ‘O Ibrahim! Look! What

¹³ *Al-Nashr fi al-Qira’at al-Ashr* by Ibn al-Jazari, 2\350.

is underneath your feet?’ He will look and there he will see a blood-stained animal, which will be caught by the legs and thrown in the Fire.¹⁴

This view is further strengthened by what the Greek Christian historian Josephus mentioned that Ibrahim’s father was called *Athar*. The resemblance between Azar and Athar is quite clear here, and it is much different from Terah.¹⁵

2 His Nickname, His Birth and His Language

a. His Birth

Historians and scholars differed about the place of birth of Ibrahim - peace be upon him. Some said that he was born in Sus in the land of Ahwaz, others said that he was born in Babylon in Iraq, others said in Kush, and some said that he was born in Harran. Most scholars said that his birth was in the era of Nimrod, son of Cush. Some said that his birth was in Ghouta of Damascus in the village of Barzeh in Mount Qasioun. Ibn Asakir (d. 571 H) said: ‘The correct opinion is that he was born in Babylon in the city of Ur. This is the well-known correct view among the scholars of biography, history, and narrations.’¹⁶ Ibrahim lived in the period around 1940-1765 BC.¹⁷

As for the narrations of the Bible, they refer to the birth of Ibrahim as being in Ur¹⁸, whether in the lower Euphrates region or in the upper Euphrates region in the Jazirah region between the Tigris and Euphrates.¹⁹

Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was the middle son of two of his brothers: Haran and Nahor. Haran was the father of Lot (peace be upon him) and died during his father’s life in the land of Babylon. He was his father’s eldest son.²⁰

The Holy Qur’an did not mention the place of the birth of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) nor his date of his birth, and there is no legal text that defines this for us with certainty. This is why historians differed about the

¹⁴ Sahih al-Bukhari, no: 3350.

¹⁵ Al-Amiri, p. 190.

¹⁶ Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah, Ibn Kathir, 1\161.

¹⁷ Studies in Early Arab History, Biyoumi, p. 189.

¹⁸ Book of Genesis, 11.

¹⁹ Qahtani, p. 13.

²⁰ Sabuni, A. (2003), *Al-Nubuwwah wa al-Anbiya*, p. 148.

place of his birth, and we find much contradiction on the narrations that determine his exact time and place of birth. Most historians believed it to be between the nineteenth and twentieth century BC without specifying the exact year, while others gave approximate dates.

A story has been reported about of the birth of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) which historians state occurred in the days of Nimrod. In his time knowledge of astrology was common, through which people apparently knew that a child would be born who would belittle their leaders and abolish their idol worship. Upon this Nimrod, who was the ruler at the time, ordered to kill every newborn child in His kingdom. But when Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was born, he was hidden away in a cave in which he remained until he grew older and became a young man. He then came out of the cave and went to his father who was pleased to see him. He then contemplated the horizons of the earth and the worlds, and continued searching for evidence until he became guided. This story mentioned by historians in its various forms was not mentioned by the Holy Qur'an, nor the purified Sunnah, nor the Bible. It also contains contradictions that need not be mentioned due to its lack of authenticity in the first place.²¹

b. His Nicknames

Ibrahim was nicknamed *Al-Khalil* (friend or close companion). God Almighty said in His Mighty Book: 'And God made Ibrahim a friend of His' (al-Nisa: 125). In the Sunnah, the Prophet said: 'God has taken me as a Khalil, just as He took Ibrahim as a Khalil.'²² His *kunya* (peace be upon him) was Abu Al-Dayfan (father of guests), because he was known for his generosity and kindness in treating guests, as God Almighty told us about Ibrahim (peace be upon him) in several verses. For instance:

Has the story of Ibrahim's honoured guests reached you [O Prophet]? [Remember] when they entered his presence and greeted [him with], 'Peace!' He replied, 'Peace [be upon you]!' [Then he said to himself,] '[These are] an unfamiliar people.' Then he slipped off to his family and brought a fat [roasted] calf, and placed it before them, asking, 'Will you not eat?' (al-Dhariyat: 24-27)

²¹ Qahtani, p. 14.

²² Mustadrak al-Hakim, No: 4018. Translator: The Hadith is in Sahih Muslim (No: 532).

c. Did Ibrahim speak ancient Arabic?

Shaykh Muhammad Rashid Rida believes that Ibrahim spoke ancient Arabic that resembles the Arabic language of the tribe of Jurhum. He says:

‘It is known in the books of hadith and ancient Arab history that Ibrahim resided his son Ismail with his Egyptian mother Hajar (peace be upon him) in the valley that was built in Mecca after that, and that God Almighty brought to them a group of people from the tribe of Jurhum who lived with them there, where Ibrahim (peace be upon him) would visit them. He and his son Ismail then built the Sacred House of God and spread the religion of Islam in Arabia.’²³

It appears from this that ancient Arabic is the language of our master Ibrahim and Hagar. The language of Hammurabi and his people, and the language of the ancient Egyptians or the dominant language in those two countries, along with the influence of the Chaldean and Egyptian languages, seem to be similar to the Arabic of the Jurhum tribe. Hence, those who lived with Hagar and Jurhum could understand one another. It is authentically narrated in Sahih al-Bukhari that Ibrahim visited Ismail once, but did not find him, so he spoke with his wife who was from Jurhum, but he saw some negative traits in her. He then visited him again and did not find him, but found his new wife who he spoke to instead and he praised her for her good character.’²⁴

Although the evidence I mentioned above is of some academic significance, it does not, in my opinion, reach the degree of certainty and conviction, but are merely theories and rational conclusions regarding historical matters from the prehistoric era. Describing Ibrahim as an Arab depends on our definition of it. Its concept in those days is different from our understanding of it today. In any case, delving into these issues is not of great importance. They may even ignite national and racist sensitivities, or lead to some sort of conflict between Arab and non-Arab Muslims; things that we certainly could do without in a time of Muslim division and disunity.²⁵

Al-Aqqad believes that the most correct claim about Ibrahim’s lineage is that he is an Arab, though this may surprise some people. We cannot

²³ Al-Amiri, p. 32.

²⁴ Tafsir al-Manar (7/535)

²⁵ Al-Amiri, p. 33.

claim that Ibrahim is an Israelite, because Jacob is the first to be called Israel, and Jacob is Ibrahim's grandson. Ibrahim is not a Jew, because the Jews are attributed to Judah, the fourth son of Jacob, and was not attributed to him until after the territory that was given to him when dividing the land among the sons of Jacob was named after him. It can also not be said that Ibrahim is Hebrew, since Hebrew was one of the Semitic languages used by a specific group, while Ibrahim spoke a language understood by all the inhabitants of the two rivers and Canaan, and Hebrew, at that time, had not yet become distinct from the other Semitic languages.

It could be argued that he was a Semite and belonged to Shem the son of Noah, but this is an attribution to a forefather, not to a people or nation. Besides, the Semitic language was spoken by Abyssinians who are not Syrians, nor Aramaic, nor Himyarites. Therefore, by studying Ibrahim's lineage, we find that his true lineage is that he was an Arab, especially since the Arabic language existed at the time in the Arabian Peninsula and the Fertile Crescent region.

The most correct estimate is that he grew up in a family that had recently migrated from north Yemen to the southern part of the Arabian peninsula. This family was with those who came from 'the land of the sea' - as the Babylonians called the Arabs residing near the Persian Gulf - and the names of Arabs were mentioned among the royal families in southern Babylonia during a long era that included the era of Ibrahim according to earliest estimates.

Muhammad Bayoumi Mahran also supports the view of Ibrahim's Arab identity. He mentions that Ibrahim's people came out of the heart of the Arabian Peninsula, in which a group of Semites grew up. He argues that Ibrahim was a pure Arab from the lineage of the original Arabs whose lineage leads back to Sam son of Noah and that he is the father of the Adnanite Arabs who are the children of his son Ismail. This way he is considered the father of the Arabs before being the father of the Israelites.



Section 2:

Ibrahim's Era and Migration

1. The Period Before Ibrahim's Prophethood

The message of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was preceded by several divine messages, such as the message of Noah, Hud and Saleh, and before them Adam. I have already written two books on the period that preceded Ibrahim, they are: 'Noah and the Great Flood' and 'The Beginning of Creation and the Creation of Adam'. I also intend to write about the lives of Hud and Saleh (peace be upon him), by the Will of Allah. However, this does not mean that we cannot briefly speak about the Prophetic leaders of humanity who came before Ibrahim, such as Nuh, Hud, and Saleh, because the study of the lives of the prophets and messengers shows the researcher and reader the direction and development of ancient civilization, which influenced many areas of human development until the present time, particularly in the regions in which the prophets were sent.

These regions, known as the Arab East or the Middle East, are in locations with good climate and land, interspersed with the Nile, Tigris and Euphrates rivers. From the fifth millenium BC, great and pioneering civilizations flourished, including the Sumerian, Egyptian, Babylonian, and Assyrian civilizations.

It is no secret that civilizations have arisen in other distant regions, including the Chinese civilization, for example, which arose on the banks of rivers. However, due to its isolation and distance from the lands which the prophets were sent to, it was not one of the first to appear and become known.

The eastern Mediterranean region extending to the Arabian Peninsula is known as the land of civilizations and the cradle of the divine religions. The nations that established the civilizations belong to the sons of Noah, peace be upon him, most of whom were believers from the ancient Arabs, Aad, and Thamud who perished. Though they were displaced from the Arabian Peninsula with the disasters and punishment that God Almighty

afflicted their forefathers with due to their denial of the call of the Messengers and corruption.

The movement of the ancients from their homelands in search of new environments nearby, where stability, abundant water, and decent living resources are available, was only natural. They eventually found suitable places to settle on the banks of the Tigris, Euphrates and Nile rivers. This is where the search for the best of the material and structural achievements of their forefathers began. They further developed the technical and administrative systems of their time and their means of livelihood. Communities began to form, eventually developing into states and royal and imperial regimes.

In the midst of this transition to the stage of an authoritative state, after the ancients succeeded in establishing civilizations around the great rivers of the Middle East, and in establishing a system of governance on the basis of inherited leadership – as if kingship is a divine gift by which societies are ruled through laws based on the faith, morals, economics and social life of the leading class. In the midst of this, Ibrahim (peace be upon him) appeared among his people in Ur of Babylonia in southern Iraq, after people deviated from monotheism and the worship of God alone. They fell into the traps of Satan, worshipped idols, stars, planets and humans besides God, and they forgot the message of Noah, Hud and Saleh - peace be upon them - and they deviated greatly from it.

2. The Religious Life in the Era of Ibrahim

Ibrahim, peace be upon him, was born in Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq). He grew up in a society in which the worship of planets and idols prevailed; a society in which people prostrated to kings and rulers along with God Almighty. He grew up in a polytheistic family that carved idols for people and traded them, according to some narrations. Despite being brought up in this pagan environment, he remained upon his pure *fitrah* and noble nature, and his faith was not defiled by the impurities of polytheism. His sound reasoning and intellect was not mixed with the falsehood that his people grew up on. Instead, he, peace be upon him, grew up hating the false beliefs of his people.



Allah honoured Ibrahim by protecting him from idolatry from a young age, by granting him sound intellect and guiding him to the truth. ‘And indeed, We had granted Ibrahim his sound judgment early on, for We knew him well [to be worthy of it].’ (Al-Anbiya, 21:51)

Through the intelligence and a sound mind that God endowed him with, he realised that the universe has a single God, dominant and in control of all the creatures in it, and that humans must turn to worship the Creator of this universe. This purity of nature and mind made him worthy of having the insight and wonders of the universe and the signs of truth and guidance revealed to him. God Almighty said: ‘We also showed Ibrahim the wonders of the heavens and the earth, so he would be sure in faith.’ (al-An’am, 6:75)

God, the Mighty and Sublime, showed His *khalil* (close friend) Ibrahim (peace be upon him) the wonders of the heavens and the earth, and the sun, the moon, the stars, trees, animals and other things that He created in His great kingdom. He made clear to him those things that are apparent and hidden, so that he (peace be upon him) is one of those who worship God alone and know the truth of what He guided him to. He gave him understanding of His oneness and made clear to him the misguidance of his people who worship idols and take them gods besides Allah.

Through this sound nature, deep insight, strong devotion to the truth, and denial of falsehood, God - the Mighty and Sublime - showed him the reality of this kingdom, the Kingdom of the heavens and earth. He informed him of the secrets hidden in the core of the universe and revealed to him the signs of existence, so that he would go from the denial of the worship of false gods to a higher level of conscious certainty of the one true God.

The life of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) embodies his call to the oneness of God Almighty and to make worship purely for Him alone, initially in Mesopotamia, then the Levant, Egypt, and Hijaz.

Mesopotamia was home to many Arab tribes who migrated from the Arabian Peninsula and other places, due to the fertility of the land of Mesopotamia and the ease of life in it. Beliefs and forms of worship thus varied, since those who moved to it brought with them their false beliefs and

devotional acts of worship, such as idolatry, the worship of planets, sanctification of kings, and the worship of cosmic phenomena.

Al-Aqqad alluded to the multiplicity of beliefs and acts of worship in the era of Ibrahim peace be upon him, as he says:

‘From the third millennium to the second millennium BC, followers of every religious belief known in those ages lived in Arabia. Its largest centre was in Mesopotamia, from which nations grew, and along with that we see religions, rituals, and religious ceremonies in which planets were worshiped, kings were worshiped, and the local gods were worshipped. Each region had their own local gods that were specific to that region. Different rituals and festivals appeared for each different religion, so people became aware of human sacrifices and offerings from the yields of agriculture in its seasons. They became aware of prayers in temples led by the priests and prayers in the houses or cemeteries attached to them.’²⁶

We can thus say that the beliefs and rituals that were widespread at the time of Ibrahim were as follows:

1. The Worship of Planets and Stars

The people of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) worshipped stars, planets and celestial bodies, as the Sabians believed in sanctifying and worshipping planets and stars. In their temples they placed idols who symbolised those heavenly planets, and they would perform religious rituals in front of them, such as prayers, sacrifices, vows, and other rituals.²⁷

Ibn Kathir says about the beliefs of the people of Ibrahim (peace be upon him):

‘They used to worship the seven planets. The people of Damascus were upon this religion. They would face the North Pole and worship the seven planets through different types of verbal and physical rituals. This is why there was an image of each planet at each door of the seven ancient gates of Damascus, each representing one of these seven planets. They hosted feasts and sacrifices for them, and this is how the people of Harran worshipped planets and idols. The people of the earth were disbelievers at that

²⁶ Aqqad, A. Ibrahim Abu al-Anbiya, p. 156

²⁷ Ibrahim fi Asfar al-Yahud, p. 56



time, except for Ibrahim, his wife, and his nephew Lot, peace be upon them.²⁸

However, their worship of the planets was not the way the grater God would be worshipped. Rather, they believed that the planets had a god who created them and placed them in their places in the sky. Al-Aqqad says about the people of Ibrahim, peace be upon him, that they believed in a great god, who created the small gods, and decreed for them their places in the sky. These smaller deities are planets and stars, such as the moon. The god of the moon was called Sin and his worship prevailed in the Semite countries, particularly amongst the early Arabs, from the valley of the two rivers to Sinai. He was known name in the valley of the two rivers as Nannar, and he is the one who they worship. He had a centre in the city of Ur - the land of Ibrahim - and a centre in northern Iraq. Alongside him there was another god they call Marduk, or Mars. They used to raise structures to monitor the planets. The most famous planet worshipped after the moon was Venus *Ishtar* and Mars *Marduk*. They claim that Venus is the goddess of love, because of its beauty, attractiveness, and volatile nature. They claim that Mars is the god of war due to its redness which resembles the colour of blood. While previously they worshipped the sun in the past under the name of Shamash, although this was not as widespread as the worship of the moon.

These planets each represented a god. The moon represented Sin, the sun represented Shamash, Venus symbolised a god called Ishtar, and Mars represented Marduk.

2. Idol Worship

At the time of the Prophet of God Ibrahim al-Khalil (peace be upon him) people used to worship idols and statues instead of God Almighty. They used to worship and sanctify them, by performing prayers, offering sacrifices and offerings, and various rituals, believing that these idols are gods who control people's affairs, and are the source of fertility, sustenance, and life. However, despite that, they still believed that they were small gods who were subordinate to the one great God whose authority extends to the entire universe. They would allocate temples or private

²⁸ Mahmoud, A. Qasas al-Anbiya, p. 117

homes for these idols to present rituals and acts of worship or individually and collectively sanctify them, and each member of the family had his own idol.²⁹

Abbas al-Aqqad refers to the view of Leonard Woolley in his book *Ibrahim: Recent Discoveries and Hebrew Origins* who said that the gods among the Sumerians apparently were three levels: (1) the great gods for which state structures are allocated, (2) the gods who were underneath them for who temples are erected, and (3) the smaller personal gods of each family. The greater gods generally personified the forces of nature such as the sun, moon, water, earth, struggle, fertility, and death. Each provinces predominantly worshipped one of these gods more than another region may.³⁰

The people of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) attributed human attributes to their deities, not too different humans except that they are more complete and perfect. Similarly, the clothes of the gods were like the clothes of humans, but the clothes of the gods would be more beautiful and attractive than the clothes of princes. These gods also have families and weapons, and were involved in battles just as humans are, but of course on a greater and more horrific scale. They also distinguished their gods from humans by claiming their immortality, and that they were always good. The evil that we see is not from their doings, but from evil spirits that are greater than humans, but not as great as the gods.

Among the most famous deities that were worshiped by the people of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) is what is known as the Trinity of Deities, which consists of: Anu, Enlil, and Ea.³¹

3. The Worship of Kings

Among the worship that was prevalent in the people of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was the worship and sanctification of kings. They believed that their kings had the ability to create, take life, and that benefit and harm, happiness and misery, was under their control. One of the reasons behind such beliefs is that they believed the early kings who ruled after the Great Flood may have descended from heaven to earth. Some of the kings

²⁹ Radman, p. 59

³⁰ Aqqad, p. 161

³¹ Mehran, M. (1988), *Historical Studies from the Qur'an*, 4/105.



also claimed divinity, such the tyrannical king whom Ibrahim, peace be upon him, debated.

Their veneration and glorification of their kings reached the extent of burying their entourage and ministers with the king if he died, as evidenced by the fossils. This is why Woolley in his book *Ur of the Chaldees* said that they would willingly drink a poisonous drug that lead to their death, because they believed that they would be departing with their divine kings to a heavenly state that resembled earthly life.³²

4. Sacrifices and Offerings

Other common religious rituals in the era of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) were sacrificial offerings and vows to the idols. These were done for various reasons, such as atonement for sins and to gain the appeasement of the gods. The offerings that people made to the gods were either agricultural offerings, such as wheat, corn, barley, and sesame, or animal sacrifices, such as sheep and goats. They put them on an altar in front of their idols, then begin their religious ceremonies with supplications and prayers, along with some other rituals. The agricultural offerings that they bring to the gods were distributed among the priests of the temple, clergymen, and kings.

One of the widespread rituals in the era of our master Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was to present vows of gold, silver, grain, fabrics, and clothes to the idol gods. The priests of the temple then weighed them and recorded them in a record before keeping them in the temple store and writing a receipt on a clay tablet, and a copy given to the one who gave the vow. Some of them even used to sacrifice their sons as an offering to their gods and vowed to slaughter their sons in front of the idols.³³

Will Durant says: 'If they were faced with great problems or challengers, they sacrificed their children as an offering to their god, as the Phoenicians used to do. The parents would come to the ceremony well dressed as if it were a day of celebration. The sounds of drums and instruments covered the cries of their children as they were burning in front of the

³² Aqqad, p. 163.

³³ Radman, p. 61.

idol.³⁴ They also believed that one of the greatest offerings was to give the virginity of their girls to the priest of the temple.³⁵

A great form of sacrifice was for women to offer their bodies as offerings to the gods. Abd al-Hamid Joudeh says: 'Whoever gives herself to the temple, sacrifices her body as an offering to the gods. Her sacrifice is greater than the sacrifice of someone who sacrifices a ram or a bull. It was viewed as more than mere satisfaction of sexual pleasure. When a woman presents her body to a strange man, she presents it to the altars of the gods.'³⁶

5. Building Temples

The temples had an important place among the inhabitants of Mesopotamia, like other Canaanite and Egyptian peoples. The temple represents the centre of religious and civil life from a religious point of view. That is because the temple, in the eyes of the inhabitants of Mesopotamia and other ancient peoples, is the holiest place, since they believe that the temple is the house of their god, who lives there with his wife, children, entourage, and servants.

From a civil perspective, the temple was a centre for the judiciary and judges. Securities were kept there, and written scrolls of knowledge, literature, and the royal books were kept in it. The inhabitants of Mesopotamia therefore ensured to build their temples in the centre of the city. Upon laying the foundation of the temple they held rituals that involved placing securities containing images and charms that, according to their belief, ward off evil souls from the temple. Their temples were of two types:

a. The Ground Temple

This was built for their god to dwell in, as they believed that god lives among people, listening to their complaints, hearing their prayers, and accepting their offerings.³⁷

³⁴ Durant, 2/318-319.

³⁵ Radman, p. 62.

³⁶ Al-Sahhar, p. 21.

³⁷ Ibrahim, N. (1964), *Egypt and the ancient Near East*, 6/164.



Will Durant says: ‘Many gods lived in the temples where believers offered them money, spouses, and food, such as dates, figs, cucumbers, butter, oil, and cakes, as well as goats, sheep, doves, chickens and ducks.’³⁸

b. The High Temple

This consists of three or four layers, surrounded on the outside by an ascending road that rises gradually in each turn until it reaches the altar that is erected at the top. Such high temples were built by them because they believed that when their god descends from heaven to earth, he first descends there to rest.

Each town had a temple, let alone the major cities, and there was more than one temple in the city in addition to the high towers. Among the temples that were built by them, are the temple of the gods Enlil, the temple of Venus, the temple of Sin, the moon god, and the temple of Shamash the sun god.

These are some of the aspects of religious life in the Land of the Two Rivers in the era of Ibrahim (peace be upon him). Things were very similar to the religious life in the Levant, Egypt, and all parts of the Arabian Peninsula, since the moon, sun, Venus, and other phenomena of nature were viewed as gods that people worshipped in Iraq, Levant, Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula.³⁹

The Canaanites worshipped nature and its manifestations, so they had gods of the sky, the sun, the moon, storms and rain, as well as gods of the sea, fertility, and other things. Among the most famous gods of the Canaanites are:

- **El**

The greatest and most important of the Canaanite deities was El. He is also referred to as the Most High. He is like Anu in the religions of the inhabitants of Mesopotamia. El is believed to be the father of all gods, the creator of the heavens and the earth, the giver of fertility to humans, and the one who gives life to the earth with the rain waters and rivers. According to the Canaanites, El had a wife whose name was Asherah, the goddess of the sea. Her children include Baal Hadad and Anat.

³⁸ Durant, W. (1975), *The Story of Civilization*, 2/29.

³⁹ Radman, p. 63.

- **Baal**

The word Baal means lord. Known by the Greeks as Adonis. The Canaanites believed that the Baal was the god of fertility and rain, and that he was the organizer of the universe, and that he had the ability to bring about evil and good things at the same time.⁴⁰

- **Ashtar**

Ashtar is the goddess of fertility in Canaanite beliefs, and one of the most important deities worshipped by them. She is viewed as the counterpart of Assyro-Babylonian goddess Ishtar.

The Egyptians deified natural phenomena and symbolized them in the form of human bodies and animal heads, such as calves, rams, cats and snakes.⁴¹ This is because they believed that the spirits of the gods reside in the bodies of those animals that are sacred to them.

Historical studies of religion have concluded that the worship of the moon preceded the worship of the sun and that the god of gods in Greece is Jupiter, not the sun or the moon. Hence, the name Jupiter is derived from Greek to literally mean ‘sky father’.⁴²

The Holy Qur’an has preceded the historical studies of religion to the fact that the worship of planets, idols, and kings in the past was a reality. The Qur’an also explained how Ibrahim called the worshippers of these deities to the worship God alone with no partner. It relates a debate that took place between Ibrahim and his people in which he showed them the invalidity of their worship. Allah Almighty said:

We also showed Ibrahim the wonders of the heavens and the earth, so he would be sure in faith. When the night grew dark upon him, he saw a star and said, ‘This is my Lord!’ But when it set, he said, ‘I do not love things that set.’ Then when he saw the moon rising, he said, ‘This one is my Lord!’ But when it disappeared, he said, ‘If my Lord does not guide me, I will certainly be one of the misguided people.’ Then when he saw the sun shining, he said, ‘This must be my Lord—it is the greatest!’ But again when it set, he declared, ‘O my people! I totally reject whatever you associate [with Allah in worship]. I have turned my face towards the One

⁴⁰ Al-Arabi, M. (1995), p. 182.

⁴¹ Durant, 2/156.

⁴² Hajar al-Misriyyah Um al-Arab, p. 33.

Who has originated the heavens and the earth—being upright—and I am not one of the polytheists.’ (al-An’am: 75-79)

The Noble Qur’an also informs us how Ibrahim (peace be upon him) opposed his father and his people in their worship of idols that neither benefit nor harm. Allah says: [Remember] when he questioned his father and his people, ‘What are these statues to which you are so devoted?’ (al-Anbiya: 52)

The Qur’an also spoke about the debate that occurred between Ibrahim and the king who claimed divinity. Allah Almighty said:

‘Are you not aware of the one who argued with Ibrahim about his Lord because Allah had granted him kingship? When Ibrahim said, ‘My Lord is the One Who has power to give life and cause death.’ He argued, ‘I too have the power to give life and cause death.’ Ibrahim challenged [him], ‘Allah causes the sun to rise from the east. So make it rise from the west.’ And so the disbeliever was dumbstruck. And Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people.’ (al-Baqarah: 158)

We will discuss this further by the Will of Allah when we speak about the call of Ibrahim related in the Qur’an and the Prophetic Sunnah.

To summarise, we can say that the religious conditions at the time of Ibrahim can be described as follows:

- The society in the era of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was dominated by ideological corruption. It was a society immersed in paganism, as people deified planets and worshiped idols and kings, in addition to establishing religious rituals that include supplications, prayers, offerings, and vows to their false idols.
- The magnitude and variety of deviation in religion all brought together in a few places in the era of Ibrahim - peace be upon him – was so great. This shows the incredible effort and strength of Ibrahim in calling his people monotheism and confronting pagan and Sabian beliefs, as well as the kings who claimed divinity.
- There was a clear similarity of beliefs and religious practices in the era of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) whether in Iraq, Canaan or

Egypt, because people worshipped idols, cosmic phenomena, such as the sun, moon and stars, and people treated their kings as deities.⁴³

6. The Sabians

Scholars differed greatly about the Sabians, their history, rituals, and creed. They discovered that they are made up of multiple sects and divergent denominations that differ from each other in core teachings as well as practices, and the faith appears to have undergone some changes over time. The Holy Qur'an referred to the Sabians in three places, once after the mention of the Jews and Christians. God Almighty said:

'Indeed, the believers, Jews, Christians, and Sabians—whoever [truly] believes in Allah and the Last Day and does good will have their reward with their Lord. And there will be no fear for them, nor will they grieve.' (al-Baqarah: 62)

They were mentioned between the Jews and Christians in two places:

'Indeed, the believers, Jews, Sabians, and Christians—whoever [truly] believes in Allah and the Last Day and does good, there will be no fear for them, nor will they grieve.' (al-Ma'idah: 69)

'Indeed, the believers, Jews, Sabians, Christians, Magi, and the polytheists—Allah will judge between them [all] on Judgment Day. Surely Allah is a Witness over all things.' (al-Hajj: 17)

Historians have linked the Sabians mentioned in the Holy Qur'an with the Sabians of Harran and the Sabians of Iraq, and divided them into two sects: the early Sabians who were followers of Ibrahim and polytheist Sabians are idolators and believe in the worship of planets.⁴⁴ Some scholars believed that the Sabians mentioned in the Qur'an are believers, such as Sheikh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah⁴⁵ from the medieval scholars, and modern historian Muhammad Izzat Darwaza.⁴⁶

The study of the faith of the Sabians is important to our research for several reasons. Firstly, due to the significance of the locations in which the Sabians existed, as these are directly connected to the biography of

⁴³ Ramdan, p. 67.

⁴⁴ Ali, J. (2001), *Al-Mufasssal fi Tarikh al-Arab Qabl al-Islam*, 1/701.

⁴⁵ Ibn Taymiyyah, A. (1999), *Al-Jawab al-Sahih li man Baddala Din al-Masih (The Correct Response for Those Who Altered the Religion of Christ)*, 2/62-63

⁴⁶ Darwaza, p. 696.



Ibrahim (peace be upon him). That is the south of the Euphrates to the north, the Syriac lands, and the Nabatean lands in Hijaz.⁴⁷ Secondly, it is important in terms of its time period, because its sacred language existed at an intermediate time between the ancient languages that became extinct and modern Syriac. Since the language of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was not the modern Syriac that survived until much later, nor was it one of the extinct languages, because those languages were disconnected from the generations that followed, unlike the language of Ibrahim. The study of Sabianism thus becomes important for gaining a clearer idea of the era of Ibrahim.⁴⁸

It is similarly important because it shows us the crossroads of ancient monotheism and ancient paganism, and it sheds light on the remnants of the clashes between the two faiths. These clashes are quite apparent within the Sabian faith, with the staunch differences within. On the one hand, there is clear opposition to idolatry, paganism, and deviated beliefs regarding the planets, while on the other hand many Sabians fell into these exact things. Perhaps the Sabian faith in its later form became a mixture of both sides of the spectrum after the migration of Ibrahim and his followers from their ancient homeland.⁴⁹

Hence, the Sabian religion is important for the study of religion in general and the study of Ibrahim's religion in particular. Though its significance is not proportional to the small number of its followers, and the isolation that it imposed on itself and by life.

Nonetheless, some of the most important sects of the Sabians include:

a. The Spiritualists

The idea of the adherents of this doctrine believe that the world has a wise creator who is free from the attributes of created beings and that we must realise our inability to reach his majesty. Rather, we must draw closer to him through the mediums who are close to him, and they are the purified and holy spirits.

⁴⁷ Al-Amiri, p. 42.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 43.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

b. The Star Worshipers

When the spiritualists felt that a person needs an intermediary that can be interacted with directly and visibly seen, they turned to the seven stars, learnt about their places, movements, the way they are connected, the timings of their movements, and other things about them. Prayers and rituals were then produced based on these stars to draw closer to God through these intermediaries in the sky that bring us closer to the pure spirits in the heavens.⁵⁰

c. The Idolators

This group said that since the planets and stars appear and disappear, it is necessary to erect idols that represent them, so that they are always present. Through these idols we can draw near to the sacred stars, then through them to the holy spirits, and through them we reach God. ‘We only worship them, because they bring us closer to Allah.’ The star worshippers thus worshipped the stars directly, while the idolators worshipped idols that represented the stars. Both claimed that these are their intercessors before God. Ibrahim - peace be upon him – preached to both of them, debated them, and established the proof against them. He their physical idols and the idols of the minds.⁵¹

Will Durant argued that the people of Babylon, who were Sabians, did not study astronomy and stars to draw maps that would be helpful for convoys and ships, but this was mainly studied to help them predict the future of people, their conditions, and their destinies. They were thus astrologers more than they were astronomers. Until the search to predict the future by monitoring the motions of stars became an addiction for the Babylonians.⁵²

3. Social and Political Life

After discussing the religious circumstances that were prevalent in Ibrahim’s era, we move to a discussion on the social life that was dominant at his time, particularly focusing on Mesopotamia, the birthplace of Ibrahim (peace be upon him). We thus want to shed some light on the following aspects:

⁵⁰ Al-Shahrastani, *Al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, 2/107.

⁵¹ Al-Amiri, p. 45.

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 45.



1. Social Class

Society in Mesopotamia consisted of three social classes:

a. The Upper Class

This consists of the ruling class, led by the royal family, which occupies a sacred position and a special kind of respect. This is due to the position that the king and his family enjoyed among the people in general, since people considered the king to be God's representative on earth. This class also includes the families of notables, ambassadors, supervisors of temples, army, navy officers, tax officials, and priests.

b. The Middle Class

They consist of the middle class who compose the military and were provided with weapons in order to work in military camps. They are generally treated as equal before the law, and they enjoy rights and responsibilities, except what is stipulated otherwise by law. Although they are free from a theoretical point of view, but in reality a large percentage of them had their freedom is restricted due to their difficult economic and living conditions.

c. The Lower Class

This class consists of slaves, whether war prisoners, through slave trade, or simply looted and forcefully enslaved after being free. In some circumstances, someone from the middle class can become enslaved class, such as if they committed certain crimes, is unable to pay his debt, or if an adopted child is disowned by the parents who adopted him. Similarly, a woman may become enslaved if she denies being the wife of her husband.

This class did not constitute a large proportion of society, nor one that had much influence. However, the members of this class were not seen as normal human beings, but rather as property belonging to their owners. If they suffered harm, compensation would be paid to their owner. They would be made clearly distinct from the rest of society, either through specific haircuts or some sort of sign that they had to wear so that they would be recognised as slaves.⁵³

⁵³ Ibrahim, M. (1983), *Misr wa al-Sharq al-Adna al-Qadim* (Egypt and the Ancient Near East), p. 30.

2. Marriage and Family Life in Mesopotamia

Undoubtedly, the family is the basic building block of any society. The family consists of the father/husband, the mother/wife, and the children who are one of the fruits of a marriage.

Marriage in Mesopotamia is based on a set of foundations, including that it be under an express contract written down and certified by witnesses. Marriage was not recognized if it did not take place under such a contract in which the consent of the parents of the groom and the parents of the bride was required. Parents also played a major role in choosing the right wife for their son. When the two families agree to the marriage, the husband-to-be sends the initial dowry to the bride's father, then pays the remainder of the dowry after the marriage. If the husband-to-be changes his mind about marriage, he is not entitled to recover the dowry. However, if the decision to cancel the marriage came from the woman's family, she must return everything that the husband paid.

Before marriage, sexual relations were allowed, known in Babylon as 'sacred prostitution.' Will Durant explains that the Babylonians were quite flexible when it comes to sexual relations before marriage. It was not uncommon for men and women to have illegitimate or 'experimental' relationships, which either party could terminate if they chose to.⁵⁴

3. Celebrations and Festivals

One of the social spectacles present in the era of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was the feasts and social and religious ritual celebrations. Among the most important of these celebrations were those celebrated for each of their gods. The new year feasts were also an incredible sight attended by everyone, men, women, and children. They believed that they were being invited by all the gods to attend the new year festival. Led by the king, they perform religious rituals that include supplications, prayers, offerings, and other rituals in front of their greatest god, Marduk. These religious rituals continue for several days, and perhaps it was the feast that the people of Ibrahim attended and invited Ibrahim to, but Ibrahim refused to participate. Instead he took advantage of the opportunity and went to the temple and destroyed their idols. Almighty said:

⁵⁴ Durant, W. (2/231)



‘Then he [stealthily] advanced towards their gods, and said [mockingly], ‘Will you not eat [your offerings]? What is wrong with you that you cannot speak?’ Then he swiftly turned on them, striking [them] with his right hand.’ (al-Saffat :91-93)

4. Knowledge and Education

Education in the days of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was widespread, as schools that were part of the temples were widespread. They taught people reading, writing, and other skills. They used to write with reed pens on tablets made of wet clay. People at his time were particularly interested in teaching astronomy and built high structures help them to observe the stars and planets, through which they attempted to predict the future.⁵⁵

Among the most prevalent areas of study at the era of Ibrahim was mathematics. People were very interested studying mathematics, because it was handy for keeping track of the income of the temples, offerings, and to facilitate their commercial activities, all which necessitate some knowledge of numbers and mathematics. They kept books and their official documents in the temples and royal palaces, which indicates the importance of education and preserving history and tradition at that time. After graduating from school, people generally worked at the temples or royal palaces.⁵⁶

Through what was previously presented, we see that the social setting in Ibrahim’s time can be summarised in the following points:

- People at his time lived in an advanced and creative society. There was clear legislation and rules through which people organized their social affairs.
- We can also conclude that it was a wealthy society. They excelled in their knowledge of astronomy, built high buildings to observe planets, and also paid attention to the study of mathematics, reading, writing, and other sciences. All this indicates that the living standards were high.
- The social environment in the era was dominated by moral corruption in every form. Regression in the swamps of vice and immorali-

⁵⁵ Radman, p. 72.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 73.

ty was clear to see, and this shows the extent of the moral depravity they had reached.⁵⁷

It was a period in which morals and values were not part of religion, nor part of people's daily lives. Immoralities were in public display without any shame. Some people even went as far as making immoralities, such as fornication, a religious act through which one draws nearer to God. Will Durant says that every Babylonian woman would be expected to sit in the temple of Venus once in her life and to sleep with a strange man. This act of 'holy prostitution' remained a custom in Babylonia until Constantine abolished it around 325 BC. Besides this, casual prostitution was widespread in bars run by women, and Babylonians were generally flexible with sexual relations before marriage.⁵⁸

This is a brief summary of the social conditions at the time of Ibrahim (peace be upon him), through which we see the staunch difference between the pure faith and monotheism that he called for, and the ignorance and sin that people lived in.⁵⁹

5. The Political Conditions

Egypt and Babylon were two prosperous countries, in which the finest ancient civilizations were established. Canaan was affected by the wars and clashes that existed between the two countries, and control over Canaan was mostly for whoever had the upper hand amongst these two countries. Babylonian monuments indicate that it was the civilization that controlled Canaan in the third millennium BC. The Canaanite civilization was therefore heavily influenced by the Babylonians.⁶⁰

Some historical sources mention that Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was born during the reign of Nimrod b. (ibn, i.e. son of) Canaan b. Kush b. Sam b. Noah, a tyrannical ruler who oppressed his people and claimed divinity. They thus obeyed him in addition to worshipping idols and statues.⁶¹

It is no surprise that the ruler or king was one of the tyrants of his time, when it was so easy for him to issue an order to burn Prophet Ibrahim alive

⁵⁷ Al-Amiri, p. 46.

⁵⁸ Durant, 2/229-234.

⁵⁹ Al-Amiri, p. 46.

⁶⁰ Shilbi, A. (1990), *Muqaranat al-Adyan al-Jahudiyyah*, p.44.

⁶¹ Tarikh al-Tabari, 1/142.

and claimed to be a god. ‘They concluded, ‘Burn him up to avenge your gods, if you must act.’ (al-Anbiya: 68). ‘He argued, ‘I too have the power to give life and cause death.’ (al-Baqarah: 258).

4. The Migrations of Prophet Ibrahim

Ibrahim (peace be upon him) began his call in Iraq by preaching to his father first, then his people, then the unjust disbelieving king who tried to burning him in the fire before Allah saved him from it. After that, God ordered him to migrate from Iraq, so he left it to the blessed and holy land. He was with Lot at the time, residing in the blessed land of Palestine. He then travelled to Egypt with his faithful wife Sarah, may God be pleased with her. An incident took place there with the King of Egypt, in which they were given Hagar. The story will be mentioned in detail later on, God willing. Sarah gave Hagar, her slave girl, to Ibrahim. Hagar then gave birth to Ibrahim’s first child, Ismail (peace be upon him). God commanded him to take Hagar and Ismail to the Hijaz, so Ibrahim obeyed Allah’s command. Later, his wife Sarah gave birth to his second son, Ishaq, despite Ibrahim having reached old age and Sarah being barren at the time. Ismail and Isaac both grew in Ibrahim’s life, and we will speak about them in detail further on in the book.

Scholars and historians have discusses the migrations and travels of Ibrahim, and here is a summary of those travels:

- He went from Babylon, in Chaldea, to Harran, which is also located in Chaldea.
- He left Harran to migrate to Sham (the Levant), to the land of the Chaldeans, east of Jerusalem.
- He went from Sham to Egypt, staying there for a while, before returning to Sham.
- He left Sham to head towards Mecca, with Hagar and Ismail, to drop them off at an uncultivated valley (Mecca), as he had been commanded to do so by God. He then returned to his home in Sham.
- He went to Mecca after receiving God’s command to slaughter his son, then returned to Sham once again.

- He left Sham for Mecca for the third time to visit his son Ismail, but he did not meet him. On this trip, he advised his son to divorce his first wife, when he saw that she was an ungrateful person.
- He visited Mecca a fourth time, but again was unable to meet his son, but he advised his son to keep his second wife when he was pleased with her character and gratitude.
- He visited Mecca for the fifth time to build the Ka'bah with Ismail.

So we can conclude that Ibrahim made three important trips:

1. Migrating from Babylon to Levante, while passing by Harran.
2. His journey from Sham to Egypt, then returning to Sham.
3. His visit to Mecca.

This book will discuss these travels in some detail later on.

The life of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was entirely in the path of Allah. He called people call worship God alone and to adhere to His guidance, with pure sincerity, submission, and complete trust in Allah.



Section 3:

Ibrahim's Status Amongst the Prophets and Messengers

The Holy Qur'an presented faith led by that noble group of messengers, from Noah to Ibrahim, then to the Seal of the Prophets (Muhammad), may God's prayers and peace be upon them all. When presenting this procession of messengers, the Qur'an does not strictly pay attention to presenting them chronologically, because what is intended is to mention them collectively, not to present them in their historical sequence. Allah Almighty said:

This was the argument We gave Ibrahim against his people. We elevate in rank whoever We please. Surely your Lord is All-Wise, All-Knowing. And We blessed him with Isaac and Jacob. We guided them all as We previously guided Noah and those among his descendants: David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Musa, and Harun. This is how We reward the good-doers. Likewise, [We guided] Zachariah, Yahya, Isa, and Elias, who were all of the righteous. [We also guided] Ishmael, Al-Yasa, Jonah, and Lot, favouring each over other people [of their time]. And [We favoured] some of their forefathers, their descendants, and their brothers. We chose them and guided them to the Straight Path. This is Allah's guidance with which He guides whoever He wills of His servants. Had they associated others with Him [in worship], their [good] deeds would have been wasted. Those were the ones to whom We gave the Scripture, wisdom, and prophethood. But if these [pagans] disbelieve in this [message], then We have already entrusted it to a people who will never disbelieve in it. These [prophets] were [rightly] guided by Allah, so follow their guidance. Say, 'I ask no reward of you for this [Quran]—it is a reminder to the whole world.' (al-An'am :83-90)

In this passage of verses, the messengers were described in the following ways:

- 'This is how We reward the good-doers.'
- 'We favoured them each over other people [of their time].'

- ‘We chose them and guided them to the Straight Path.’

These descriptions confirm the nobility of this series of messengers that were chosen and rightly guided to the straight path by Allah. All this is a prelude to the statements that follow, ‘This is Allah’s guidance with which He guides whoever He wills of His servants. Had they associated others with Him [in worship], their [good] deeds would have been wasted.’ This describes the springs of guidance on earth and that God’s guidance for mankind is only represented by the messengers. They are the source of knowledge and guidance that Allah commanded His creation to follow, and He guides whoever He wills to this truth.

If these guided servants deviated from the monotheism of God in every sense of that meaning whether through associating partners with God in belief, worship, or obedience, all their good work will become meaningless.

‘Those were the ones to whom We gave the Scripture, hukm (wisdom), and prophethood. But if these [pagans] disbelieve in this [message], then We have already entrusted it to a people who will never disbelieve in it.’

The first passage describes how the source of guidance is limited to the guidance of God that was brought by the messengers. The second passage then explains that the messengers being referred to are those who God has given the Scripture, wisdom, authority, and prophethood.

The word *hukm* can mean wisdom or authority, and both meanings are feasible in this verse. Some of these messengers God were given scriptures, such as the Torah of Musa, the Psalms of David, and the Injil of Isa. While others were given power and authority, such as David and Solomon. All of them were given *hukm* (authority) to mean that they have been granted knowledge of God’s religion and rule, and that the religion that they have brought to the people is with God’s authority, for God only sent messengers for them to be obeyed, and the Scripture was only sent down to judge between people with justice. All the messengers were given prophethood and wisdom, and were entrusted by God to deliver, teach, and uphold His religion. If the ‘these’ pagans of the Arabs disbelieve in the Scripture, wisdom, and prophethood, then the religion of God is in no need for them, and these honourable men and those who believe in them are sufficient.⁶²

⁶² In the Shade of the Qur’an, Sayyid Qutb, (2/1144).

This is an ancient truth with extended roots and many branches that are all held together. It is one faith carried and followed by messenger after messenger. A religion believed in by those guided to it by God, as He knows who deserves His guidance. A truth that fills the hearts of believers with tranquility, regardless of their number. Because this body of believers is not alone as a tree cut off. Rather, it is the branch of a firmly rooted tree is firm which has its branches in the sky, guided by God and His divine guidance.

The believer remains strong in any land and in any generation, like a solid tree that has its roots in the depths of the human fitrah and in the depths of the history of humanity. He is part of the long chain of those rightly guided by Allah going back to the earliest ages.⁶³

‘These [prophets] were [rightly] guided by Allah, so follow their guidance. Say, ‘I ask no reward of you for this [Quran]—it is a reminder to the whole world.’

This is the third outcome of mentioning these honourable men who lead the procession of faith. They are the ones who have been rightly guided by God. This divine guidance is an example for the Messenger of God (Muhammad) and all those who believe in him. This path of guidance is the only one that he should be treading, ruling by, and calling others to. ‘For it is nothing but a reminder to the worlds.’ It is not specific to any people or race, but a guidance from the Lord of the world to the world, and hence there is no compensation expected, as reward in this path is expected from Allah.⁶⁴

1. The Nabi, Rasul, Nubuwwah, and Risalah

The Linguistic and Technical Definition of *Nabi*

Linguistically, *Naba* means news, the plural of which is *Anba*. So and so has a *Naba*, meaning he has information or news. The *Nabi* (prophet) is the one who delivers information about Allah. *Nabi*’ is taken from *Nabawah*, which means something high. Thus, the *Nabi* is greater and more noble than the rest of creation.⁶⁵ Fairuzabadi says in his definition of

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 2/1145.

⁶⁵ Raja Bint Saleh Muhammad Al-Bahr, *The Diversity of the Discourse of the Noble Qur’an in the*

Nubuwwah: ‘An embassy between Allah and people of intellect, to remove their shackles in relation to this life and the next.’

Raghib al-Asfahani explains the reason behind the use of the word: ‘He is called *Nabi* due to his high status above the rest of people, as indicated in the statement of Allah Almighty: ‘And We elevated him to an honourable status.’ [19:57]⁶⁶

Technically, a *Nabi* (prophet) is someone who was sent to reaffirm a preceding *Shari’ah*.⁶⁷

The Linguistic and Technical Definition of *Rasul*

Linguistically, *Al-Risl* means to send, which is where *Rasul* comes from, meaning someone who has been sent. Sometimes, this word (*Al-Risl*) can also mean gentleness. ‘*Ala Rislik*’ is used when you wish to tell someone to be gentle. *Rasul* can be used for one who is carrying anything, and at times one who is carrying words or a message.⁶⁸ The word *Rasul* (messenger) can be used as both singular and plural. Allah Almighty said: ‘There certainly has come to you a *Rasul* (messenger) from among yourselves.’ (9:128), and He said in the story of Musa and Harun: ‘And say, ‘We are *Rasul* (messengers) from the Lord of all worlds.’ (26:16)⁶⁹

However, the standard plural for the word *Rasul* is *Rusul*. Sometimes the ‘*Rusul* of Allah’ are a reference to the angels. Allah Almighty said: ‘Indeed, this [Quran] is the Word of [Allah delivered by Gabriel], a noble *Rasul* (messenger)’ [81:19]. Other times, it used to refer to the prophets. As Allah says: ‘O *Rasul* (Messenger)! Convey everything revealed to you from your Lord.’ [5:67]

The *Rasul* was called this because he holds a message. Though the word *Rasul* can refer to the message itself, as well as the person.

Technically, a *Rasul* is one who has been sent with a new *Shari’ah*.⁷⁰ Imam al-Shawkani says explaining the difference between a *Nabi* and

Meccan Era, Study of Style and Subject, Al-Mutanabbi Library, 2016, p. 244.

⁶⁶ Al-Ragheb Al-Asfahani, *Mufradat Alfadh al-Qur’an*, Dar Al-Qalam, Damascus - Al-Dar Al-Shamiya, Beirut, fourth edition, 1430 AH - 2009 AD, pg. 790.

⁶⁷ *Tafsir Al-Alusi*, Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1st Ed., 1415 AH, 17/173.

⁶⁸ Al-Bahr, p. 244.

⁶⁹ Ibn Mandhur (d. 711 AH), *Lisan al-Arab*, Dar Sader for Printing and Publishing, Beirut, Lebanon, third edition, 1993.

⁷⁰ Alusi, 17/173.



Rasul. The *Rasul* is one who has been sent with a *Shari'ah* (faith) that he is commanded to convey. The *Nabi* is someone who is commanded to convey the *Shari'ah* that came before him and no scripture was revealed to him. Although both always come with apparent miracles.⁷¹ Thus, it becomes clear that there is a difference between a *Nabi* and *Rasul*.

On this topic, some people used a Hadith narrated by Abu Dharr (Allah be pleased with him) in which the number of prophets (*Anbiya*) and messengers (*Rusul*) are mentioned. It is narrated that Abu Dharr said: O Messenger of Allah, how many prophets are there? He said: 'A hundred and twenty four thousand.' He then said: 'How many of them are messengers?' He said: 'Three hundred and thirteen. A large amount.'⁷² However, this cannot be accepted as a proof due to a weakness in the *isnad* (chain of transmission) of the Hadith.⁷³ This mention of exact numbers also contradicts Allah's statement: 'We have told you the stories of some of them, while others We have not.' (Ghafir: 78)

Ibrahim is from *Ulu al-Azm*

As well as being a prophet and messenger, Ibrahim is one of the messengers of *Ulu al-Azm* (Strong Resolve). This is a high station that only few messengers attained. Even though all the messengers are the best of creation and are Allah's chosen few, Allah has placed some of them above others. Allah Almighty said: 'We have chosen some of those messengers above others.' (al-Baqarah: 253). And He said: 'And We have surely favoured some prophets above others.' (al-Isra: 55)

At the forefront of prophets and messengers we find *Ulu al-Azm*. They are the chosen few of the messengers, men of firm resolve and patience, whose souls are purified through their consciousness of Allah. They are concerned with reforming their nation by guiding them to all that is good and warning them of all that is evil. They remain patient in facing hardships and receiving mistreatment from their people. The messengers of *Ulu al-Azm* are Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa, Isa, and Muhammad (peace be upon them). They are the ones mentioned in Allah's statement: 'And [remember] when

⁷¹ Fath al-Qadir, 3/461.

⁷² Sahih Ibn Hibban, No. 361.

⁷³ One of the narrators is Ibrahim ibn Hisham al-Ghassani, accused of being a liar by some Hadith critics.

We took a covenant from the prophets, as well as from you [O Prophet], and from Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa, and Isa, son of Mary. We did take a solemn covenant from [all of] them' (al-Sajdah: 7)

These five were specifically mentioned in the verse since they are the messengers of *Ulu al-Azm* and were given sacred books and law.⁷⁴ Regardless of whether we think that all the prophets and messengers are from *Ulu al-Azm* or whether this description is for these five messengers, there is no doubt that these five have some special virtues over other prophets and messengers. We know for sure that some prophets are greater than others, as Allah Almighty said: 'We have chosen some of those messengers above others.' (al-Baqarah: 253)

The majority of scholars, including the scholars of *tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis), are of the view that the messengers of *Ulu al-Azm* (Strong Resolve) are these five. Shaykh Abd al-Rahman al-Sa'di said when commenting on the verse mentioned above: 'The Almighty is informing us that Allah has taken a strong covenant from the prophets generally, and from *Ulu al-Azm* specifically – and they are the five mentioned in the verse – that they would establish the religion of Allah, strive in His path. He tells us that this path is one that has been tread by the previous prophets, ending with the best of them, Muhammad (peace be upon him), and that we should follow them in that path.'⁷⁵

These five prophets were also mentioned together in the verse of Surah al-Shura: 'He has ordained for you [believers] the Way which He decreed for Nuh, and what We have revealed to you [O Prophet] and what We decreed for Ibrahim, Musa, and Isa, [commanding]: 'Uphold the faith, and make no divisions in it.' (al-Shura: 13)

They were specifically named in this verse and were given this great piece of advice of establishing the faith without being divided regarding it. This itself is a clear proof of their high station that allows them to take on this huge responsibility and fulfil it in the most complete way.⁷⁶

Ibn Kathir said in the *tafsir* of this verse:

⁷⁴ Abu Muhammad Husain bin Masud al-Baghawi (d. 516 AH), *Tafsir al-Baghawi*, Dar Taiba, Riyadh, 1411 AH, 6/320.

⁷⁵ *Taysir al-Karim al-Rahman fi Tafsir Kalam al-Mannan*, Dar ibn al-Jawzi, 4th Ed. 1435 AH, 1/659.

⁷⁶ Qissat Nuh, p. 28.

‘He mentioned the first messenger after Adam, Nuh (peace be upon him), and the last of them, Muhammad (peace be upon him). Then in between he mentioned Ulu al-Azm: Ibrahim, Musa, and Isa ibn Maryam (peace be upon them). This verse mentions these five prophets, just as the verse of Surah al-Ahzab mentions them: ‘And [remember] when We took a covenant from the prophets, as well as from you [O Prophet], and from Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa, and Isa, son of Mary. We did take a solemn covenant from [all of] them’ The faith that all the messengers came with is to worship Allah alone without any partners.’⁷⁷

The Reality of Prophethood

Prophethood is an intermediary between the Creator and His creation in conveying His *Shari’ah*. An embassy between the King and His servants. They are a call from the Most Merciful to His creation to take them out of darkness into light, and from the tightness of the *dunya* (this world) to the vastness of the *akhirah* (afterlife). The sending of the prophets is thus a great blessing from Allah upon mankind.

As for the messenger himself, it is a favour upon him from Allah, a favouring of that messenger over the rest of humanity, and it is a divine choice that He gives to whoever He wills from amongst His creation. Prophethood, unlike what some ignorant people believe, is not achieved through knowledge or training, nor through righteous actions or worship, nor through fasting and starvation. Rather, it is purely a divine grace and choice. As Allah Almighty said about Himself: ‘Allah selects whoever He wills for His mercy. And Allah is the Lord of infinite bounty.’ (al-Baqarah: 105)

Prophethood is thus not obtained through the choice of a prophet, nor through requesting it. Hence, when the idolators said: ‘And they exclaimed, ‘If only this Quran was revealed to a great man from [one of] the two cities!’ Allah responded to them saying: ‘Is it they who distribute your Lord’s mercy? We [alone] have distributed their [very] livelihood among them in this worldly life and raised some of them in rank above others’ (al-Zukhruf: 31-32)

⁷⁷ *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 7/194.

It is thus Allah who distributes this amongst whoever He wills and chooses whoever He wants from His creation. There is no choice for anyone except Him.⁷⁸

Belief in prophethood is the way to knowing and loving Allah. It is the only path that leads to Allah's pleasure, His paradise, and forgiveness, and protects one from His punishment. Ibn Taymiyah says: 'Belief in prophethood is the essence of success and happiness. Whoever does not attain this belief will find confusion with regards to guidance and misguidance, belief and disbelief, and he will not be able to distinguish between what is correct and incorrect.'⁷⁹

Affirming prophethood is a need for humans greater than that of the air that they breathe, the food they eat, and the liquids they drink. That is because whoever misses out on one of these things may lose this life, but the one who fails to affirm prophethood shall face the greatest loss, because he will lose this life and the next. Undoubtedly, every person is in need of knowing Allah, believing in Him, and worshipping Him, as well as believing in His messenger and obeying him. Additionally, it is from Allah's wisdom that whenever people's need for something is greater, the easier and clearer Allah makes that thing. So since people's need for prophethood is, Allah has clarified it in His Book in great detail.⁸⁰

Ibn Taymiyah says: 'Establishing prophethood through the Qur'an is too long to be discussed in this place. It is the pillar of the faith, the root of the Prophetic message, the fountain of all forms of goodness, and the essence of all guidance.'⁸¹

Ibn Taymiyah also wonderfully summarises our previous discussion saying: 'Allah Almighty has made the messengers intermediaries between Himself and His servants. Their role is to teach mankind about what benefits and harms them in relation to this life and the next. They were all sent to call to Allah, to clarify the path that leads to Him, and what they can expect after they have reached Him.'

⁷⁸ Ibn Taymiyah, *Al-Nubuwwat*, Adwa' al-Salaf, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 1st Ed., 1420 AH - 2000 AD, Introduction of the Muhaqqiq, 1/20.

⁷⁹ *Al-Nubuwwat*, p. 447.

⁸⁰ Ibn Taymiyah, *Dar Ta'arudh al-Aql wa al-Naql*, Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, second edition, 1411 AH - 1991 AD, 9/66, 10/129.

⁸¹ *Al-Nubuwwat*, 1/21.



- The first principle relates to affirming Allah's attributes, *tawhid*, and *qadar*, the mention of Allah's ways towards His friends and enemies, and these are the stories that Allah mentions and the analogies that he strikes.
- The second principles relates to the detailed rulings, commands, prohibitions, permissions, and a clarification of what Allah loves and hates.
- The third principles relates to belief in the final day, Paradise and Hellfire, and reward and punishment.

Allah's command and creation revolves around these three key principles. Happiness and success is dependent on these principles, but there is no way of knowing them except through the Messenger because intellect alone cannot be guided to the detailed realities of these principles, though it may appreciate the need for them in a general sense. Similar to sick person who understands the need for medication and doctors, but does not know the details of his sickness and the best way to benefit from medicine. The need of humans for prophethood is far greater than his need for medicine. The most that could happen without medicine is the death of our bodies. But if one were deprived of the light of prophethood, this would lead to the death of their heart, making any life after that meaningless, and it would lead to a misery after which there is no happiness. There is certainly no success except in following the Messenger.⁸²

He also says: 'Prophethood is based on knowledge and action. Every messenger must have both. The most noble of knowledge and most noble of actions, so how can one confuse between the truthful one and the liar?'⁸³

2. The Wisdom Behind Sending the Messengers

a. Humans are in need of them.

Creation needs the messengers to inform them of what Allah likes and dislikes. Many people have gone astray and have been overcome by many shades of misguidance, despite the existence of prophet (peace be upon him). What would we expect to see if Allah did not send any messengers in the first place?

⁸² Majmu' al-Fatawa, 19/96-97.

⁸³ *Al-Nubuwwat*, 1/22.

Messengers were sent to purify people, to take them out of the worship of creation to the worship of the Lord of all creation, and to free them the shackles of the worship of creation to the freedom of worshipping the Lord of lords who created them after they had not existed, and who will also soon bring their existence to an end, send them back to live, for them to either be from the people of happiness or the people of grief.

If people had been left without any warning or admonishment, they would have lived a miserable life. A life of pure ignorance, blind misguidance, corrupt customs, and evil manners. Life would have turned into a jungle like community. The strong eat the weak, and the noble amongst people would humiliate those lower than them. Allah's wisdom thus dictated that He does not leave people without purpose. Allah Almighty said: 'Do people think they will be left without purpose?' (al-Qiyamah: 36)

From Allah's mercy with His creation, He sent to them messenger as bringers of good news and warners, reciting His verses to them, teaching them what benefits them, and guiding them to the path of success in this life and the next, for before that they had been upon clear misguidance.

b. The greatest objective for which Allah created us is to worship Him alone and to obey Him.

Allah said: 'I did not create jinn and humans except to worship Me.' (al-Dhariyat: 56)

Man cannot know what true worship is, except through the messengers that Allah sent. Messengers that He favoured over all mankind, freed from deficiencies, aided with miracles and proofs, revealed clear verses to, He taught them about Him, and commanded them to call people to worshipping Him alone.⁸⁴

c. Establishing the Proof Against Mankind Through the Sending the Messengers

Allah Almighty said:

- '[All were] messengers delivering good news and warnings so humanity should have no excuse before Allah after [the coming of] the messengers. And Allah is Almighty, All-Wise.' (al-Nisa: 165)

⁸⁴ *Al-Nubuwwat*, 1/23.



- ‘And We would never punish [a people] until We have sent a messenger [to warn them].’ (al-Isra: 15)
- ‘Had We destroyed them with a torment before this [Prophet came], they would have surely argued, ‘Our Lord! If only You had sent us a messenger, we would have followed Your revelations before being humiliated and put to shame.’ (Taha: 134)

Allah sent messengers in order to cut off the roots of the disbelievers, leaving them with no excuse for their disbelief. They are also sent so that Allah sees and makes apparent in reality who the obedient and disobedient ones are, and to establish the ultimate proof against His servants, and so that those who were to perish and those who were to survive might do so after the truth had been made clear to both.

d. People are unable to understand many matters of the unseen, so they are in need of someone to clarify that to them.

People cannot know or comprehend the unseen, such as the names and attributes of Allah, the angels, the *jinn* and devils, and knowledge of what Allah has prepared for those who obey Him and those who disobey Him. It is therefore necessary for someone to teach them these realities. Allah has praised His servants who believe in the unseen, saying:

‘Alif-Lam-Mim. This is the Book! There is no doubt about it—a guide for those mindful [of Allah], who believe in the unseen.’ (al-Baqarah: 1-3)

Had Allah not sent the messengers, people would have known these matters, nor believed in them. They would have been restricted to the material things that they can sense, so praise be to Creator who blessed His servants with the sending of the prophets and messengers.

e. People are in need of good role models. People who Allah has perfected with noble manners and protected from lowly doubts and desires.

The prophets are lanterns of guidance. People follow their way and take their lives and biographies as an example to adhere to until they settle, by their Lord, in *Dar al-Salam* (The Home of Peace, i.e. *jannah*).⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Fatawa, 19/93.

Messengers are excellent role models in worship, manners, interaction, and uprightness upon the faith of Allah. ‘Indeed, in the Messenger of Allah you have an excellent example for whoever has hope in Allah and the Last Day, and remembers Allah often.’ (al-Ahzab: 21)

In fact, in every prayer, when reciting Surat al-Fatiha, we ask Allah to guide us to the straight path. ‘Guide us to the straight path. The path of those You have blessed.’ And the first to be included in those who have been blessed are no doubt the prophets and messengers, and their inheritors, i.e. the rightly guided scholars.

There are many other verses in this regard, but the point is that those who Allah has chosen and honoured with the best qualities and traits, are most worthy of being followed. That is because Allah has protected them from deviation, and any errors they may fall into are always corrected by Allah. This way, those who follow the way of the prophets, do so with complete comfort and confidence in the fact that they are upon the path of guidance, the path which Allah wants for His creation.

f. The messengers came to reform and purify our souls, and to warn us from all that which harms them.

They were sent to guide mankind to the straight path, encouraging noble manners and warning against evil traits. Allah Almighty said:

‘He is the One Who raised for the illiterate [people] a messenger from among themselves—reciting to them His revelations, purifying them, and teaching them the Book and wisdom, for indeed they had previously been clearly astray’ (al-Jumu’ah: 2)

Imam Ibn Taymiyah clarified the need of humans for the messengers in many places in his books. One example is found in the following statement:

‘The *Risalah* (message) is a necessity for humans. Their need for it is greater than any other need. It is the spirit and life of this world, with which there is no success. This world is dark and cursed, except that which has the light of prophethood shining over it. Similarly, one whose heart does not contain the light of prophethood is in utter darkness and is counted amongst those who are in fact dead. Allah Almighty said: ‘Can those who had been dead, to whom We gave life and a light with which they

can walk among people, be compared to those in complete darkness from which they can never emerge?’ (al-An’am :122). This is the description of the believer. He was dead in the darkness of ignorance, until Allah brought him to life with the light of the *Risalah* and *Eman* (faith), and allowed him to walk amongst people upon guidance. As for the disbeliever, his heart is dead, living in darkness.’⁸⁶

Ibn Taymiyah also says:

‘The *Risalah* is necessary for the betterment of this life and the next. There can be no success in either of these worlds except through following the *Risalah* (prophetic message). Man finds himself between two actions: either bringing about benefit or preventing harm. He is therefore in need of the Shari’ah because it guides him regarding what benefits and harms him. The Shari’ah is Allah’s light on His earth, His justice between creation, and His fortress that one finds safety.

What is not meant by the Shari’ah is the ability to distinguish between what is beneficial and harmful through our senses, since that is something that even animals have the ability to do. Donkeys and camels can distinguish between barley and sand. Rather what is meant is a guide that distinguishes between beneficial and harmful in relation to our worldly lives and our afterlife. The benefit of things such as faith, *tawhid*, justice, piety, giving in charity, *ihsan* (excellence in all our actions), honesty, purity, bravery, forbearance, enjoining good, forbidding evil, keeping family ties, treating parents well, showing kindness towards slaves and neighbours, giving people their rights, keeping actions sincere to Allah, relying upon Him, seeking His help, being pleased with His decree, submitting to His laws and commands, befriending His friends, showing enmity to His enemies, fearing Him in open and in secret, seeking nearness to Him through fulfilling the obligations and avoiding prohibitions, seeking His reward, believing all that He and His messengers say, and obeying all that they have been commanded with. Things that benefit us in this life and the next, while the opposite of these things are a cause for failure in this life and the next.

Had it not been for the *Risalah*, the intellect would not have known the detailed matters that benefit and harm us in both worlds. It is therefore one

⁸⁶ Ibid, 19/100

of Allah's greatest favours upon His servants that He sent them messengers and books, and clarified for them the straight path. If not for that, they would have been like cattle and animals, in fact, even worse. Whoever accepts the *Risalah* and remains steadfast upon it is from the best of creation, while whoever rejects it is from the worst of creation.'⁸⁷

The need and necessity of humanity for the prophets is greater than any other need or necessity they have.⁸⁸ This is something that Ibn Taymiyah clarified further, saying:

'The human need for messengers is not like their need for the sun, moon, wind, and rain, nor is it like the need of the eyes for light or the body for food and drink. It is a far greater need than all that and greater than anything else that one can imagine. That is because the messengers are intermediaries between people and their Lord in delivering His commands and prohibitions.'⁸⁹

Ibn al-Qayyim says:

'There is no way one can attain happiness and success in this life or the next, except through the hands of the messengers. It is also only through them that one can do the difference between that which is pure and that which is filthy. Allah's pleasure can only be attained at their hands. Noble actions, words, and manners is nothing but their guidance and that which they brought. They are the proper scale with which words, manners, and actions are weighed. The people of guidance and misguidance are known through the extent they follow the messengers. Our desperate need for them is therefore greater than the body's need for a soul, the eye for light, and the soul for life. Any need that exists, then the need for the messengers is far greater than that. What do you think of one those who are so important that if you were to be distant from their guidance for the blink of an eye, your heart would be ruined and you would be like a fish that has been taken out of the water and placed on a fryer? The state of a person when distanced from the guidance of the messengers is like this, in fact, even greater, but only those with living hearts will feel this. 'A wound will not cause the dead pain.'⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Al-Nubuwwat, 1/27.

⁸⁹ Fatawa, 19/101.

⁹⁰ *Zad al-Ma'ad*, 1/69.

The messengers are the leaders of humanity, leading them to the path of goodness, guiding them to success, and protecting them from the paths of misguidance. They are role models for people in their manners, worship, and their way of life, hence Allah has commanded us to follow them and to tread in their footsteps. ‘These [prophets] were [rightly] guided by Allah, so follow their guidance.’ (al-An’am: 90)⁹¹

The Role of the Messengers

The messengers (peace be upon them) have several great objectives, major roles, and lofty goals. I shall summarise these in the following points:

a. Calling people to worship Allah alone and to leave worshipping anything besides Him

Allah Almighty said: ‘We surely sent a messenger to every community, saying, ‘Worship Allah and shun false gods.’ (al-Nahl: 36). And He said: ‘We never sent a messenger before you [O Prophet] without revealing to him: ‘There is no god [worthy of worship] except Me, so worship Me [alone].’ (al-Anbiya: 25)

b. Delivering the divine way (Shari’ah) to the people

Allah Almighty said: ‘O Messenger! Convey everything revealed to you from your Lord. If you do not, then you have not delivered His message. Allah will [certainly] protect you from the people. Indeed, Allah does not guide the people who disbelieve.’ (al-Ma’idah: 67)

c. To clarify the revealed faith

Allah Almighty said: ‘And We have sent down to you [O Prophet] the Reminder, so that you may explain to people what has been revealed for them, and perhaps they will reflect.’ (al-Nahl: 44)

d. Guiding people towards good, bringing them good news of the reward that awaits them if they do, and warning them of the punishment that is prepared for them if they do not.

Allah Almighty said: ‘[All were] messengers delivering good news and warnings so humanity should have no excuse before Allah after [the coming of] the messengers. And Allah is Almighty, All-Wise.’ (al-Nisa: 165)

⁹¹ Omar Ahmed Omar, *The Message of the Prophets from Shuaib to Isa*, Dar Al-Hikma, Cairo, 1997, 1/7.

e. Reforming people by setting a good example in their words and actions

Allah Almighty said:

‘These [prophets] were [rightly] guided by Allah, so follow their guidance. Say, ‘I ask no reward of you for this [Quran]—it is a reminder to the whole world.’ (al-An’am: 90). He also said: ‘Indeed, in the Messenger of Allah you have an excellent example for whoever has hope in Allah and the Last Day, and remembers Allah often.’ (al-Ahzab: 21)

f. Establishing and implementing Allah’s guidance (Shari’ah) amongst people

Allah Almighty said: ‘And judge between them [O Prophet] by what Allah has revealed, and do not follow their desires. And beware, so they do not lure you away from some of what Allah has revealed to you. If they turn away [from Allah’s judgment], then know that it is Allah’s Will to repay them for some of their sins, and that many people are indeed rebellious.’ (al-Ma’idah: 49)

g. The messengers will testify on the Day of Judgment that they have delivered the message to them as clearly as possible.

Allah Almighty said: ‘[Consider, O Prophet], the Day We will call against every faith-community a witness of their own. And We will call you to be a witness against these [people of yours]. We have revealed to you the Book as an explanation of all things, a guide, a mercy, and good news for those who [fully] submit.’ (al-Nahl: 89)

‘And so We have made you [believers] an upright community so that you may be witnesses over humanity and that the Messenger may be a witness over you.’ (al-Baqarah: 143)

These are some of the roles of the messengers. Roles that only increase them in honour and virtue. It is enough of an esteem that they are delivering the message of the Lord of the worlds. Praise be to Him who has granted them such a high station, given them this noble job, and chosen them from amongst all of mankind to fulfil this righteous duty.⁹²

⁹² *Al-Nubuwwat*, 1/28-29.

By studying the lives of the prophets, we hope to gain some motivation and sincerity in following in their footsteps. By this, we hope that Allah gathers us with them on the Day of Judgment.

‘And whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger will be in the company of those blessed by Allah: the prophets, the people of truth, the martyrs, and the righteous—what honourable company!’ (al-Nisa: 69)

3. The Distinct Traits of the Prophets

The prophets are the best of creation. They are the leaders and role models of mankind, chosen by Allah to be His messengers to humanity. They are still human beings from the children of Adam. Their superiority does not take them away from being human; they have all the traits that normal humans have. However, Allah has given them perfect guidance and support in delivering the message and they also have some distinct traits that are specific to them, while they all still remain human. Allah, Most High, said: ‘Their prophets said to them, ‘we are humans like you, but Allah favours whoever He wills of His slaves.’ (Ibrahim: 11)

Many scholars have written in detail on the distinct traits of the prophet (peace be upon him), but we will suffice with mentioning some of them. However, before that, it is worth noting that it is a great blessing from Allah that He sent human role models to teach us. How incredible are those disbelievers who were surprised at this fact and even rejected prophets on the basis that they are merely humans. Had Allah sent messengers from a different species, humans would not have been able to benefit from them and follow them the same way.

We can summarise these distinct traits in the following:

a. Revelation

Allah has singled out his prophets from amongst all of mankind by revealing to them. Allah Almighty said: ‘Say, [O Prophet], ‘I am only a man like you, [but] it has been revealed to me that your God is only One God.’ (al-Kahf: 110)

This revelation implies a number of things that make the prophets distinct. These include Allah speaking directly to some of them, communicating with the angels, and Allah granting them some of the knowledge of the

unseen. Allah Almighty said: '[He is the] Knower of the unseen, disclosing none of it to anyone, except messengers of His choice.' (al-Jinn: 26-27) Another example is the Prophet being taken on the *Isra* (Journey) to *Bayt al-Maqdis*, the descent to the upper heavens, seeing the angels and prophets, witnessing Heaven and Hell, and seeing and hearing those who were being punished in their graves. In a Hadith: 'If you were not to abandon burying the dead (in the grave), I would have supplicated to Allah to allow you to hear the torment of the grave.'⁹³

b. The eyes of the prophets sleep, but their hearts do not

One of the things that through which Allah has made the distinct is the fact that their eyes sleep, but their hearts do not. Anas, Allah be pleased with him, said in the Hadith of the *Isra*: 'The Prophet's eyes were asleep, but his heart does not, as is the case with prophets, their eyes sleep, but their hearts do not.' Even though this is a statement of Anas ibn Malik, not the Prophet, except that something such as this cannot be said based on opinion as stated by Ibn Hajar. The Prophet also said this about himself: 'My eyes sleep, but my heart does not.'⁹⁴

c. The Prophets are not inherited from

The Prophets are also distinct in that they do not leave behind inheritance. Any wealth they leave behind is charity. Aisha, Allah be pleased with her, reported that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'We do not have any heirs; what we leave behind is a charity.'⁹⁵

Abu Huraira reports that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'Us prophets are not inherited from. Whatever I leave after the wages of my workers and provision of my wives is given in charity.'⁹⁶

This is why Abu Bakr al-Siddiq did not allow anything the Prophet left behind to be given to any of his inheritors – his daughter Fatima, his wives, and his uncle Abbas (may Allah be pleaded with them). Had it not been for this Hadith, they would have inherited, but Abu Bakr used this Hadith as the basis of his decision to not allow them to inherit. Umar ibn al-Khat-tab, Uthman ibn Affan, Ali ibn Abi Talib, Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib, Abd

⁹³ Muslim, No. 2868.

⁹⁴ Fath al-Bari, 6/670.

⁹⁵ Bukhari, No. 6730; Muslim, No. 1758.

⁹⁶ Musnad Ahmad, 5/463. Also see Sahih Muslim, No. 1760.

al-Rahman ibn Awf, Talha, Zubair, Abu Huraira, and other companions all agreed with him regarding this Hadith.⁹⁷

The wisdom behind this is that Allah protected the prophets from leaving behind in inheritance anything of this *dunya* (worldly matters), so that this cannot be used against them claiming that they were after the *dunya* and were eager to leave it behind for their inheritors.⁹⁸

As for Allah's statement, 'And David was inherited (succeeded) by Solomon', then what is meant here is the inheritance of knowledge and prophethood, and other such things, not monetary inheritance. Ibn Kathir says commenting on this verse:

'He inherited him in prophethood and kingship, not financial inheritance, because he had other children besides him, so Solomon could not be singled out with inheriting wealth. As well as this, it is authentically reported from several companions that that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'We do not have any heirs; what we leave behind is a charity.' In another version: 'Us prophets are not inherited from.' The most truthful thus made it clear that the wealth of the prophets is not inherited from them the way others are, but instead that their wealth is given in charity to the poor and needy, not their relatives. That is because this world is too insignificant for them, just as it is in the eyes of the One who sent them and chose them.'⁹⁹

Similarly, Allah's statement, '...who will inherit [prophethood] from me and the family of Jacob'. What is meant once again is not financial inheritance, but the inheritance of knowledge and prophethood. In a Hadith: 'The Prophets did not leave behind a Dirham or Dinar in inheritance, but they left behind in inheritance knowledge, so whoever takes it has taken a great portion.'¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah*, Maktabat al-Ma'arif, Beirut, second edition, 1974, 2/45.

⁹⁸ Ibn Taymiyah, *Minhaj al-Sunnah*, Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University, Saudi Arabia, 1st Ed., 1986, 4/195.

⁹⁹ *Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah*, 2/17.

¹⁰⁰ Mansour bin Rashid Al-Tamimi, *Infallibility in the Creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah*, Al-Rushd Library, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 1429 AH, p. 42.

d. Given the choice at the time of death

From the things that are distinct about the prophets is that they are given the choice between this life and the next. Aisha reported that she heard the Messenger (peace be upon him) say: ‘Every *Nabi* (prophet) is given the choice between the *dunya* and *akhirah* at his time of [near-death] illness’ She said that during his final illness his voice became very husky and she heard him saying: ‘in the company of those blessed by Allah: the prophets, the people of truth, the martyrs, and the righteous’ (al-Nisa: 69). From this she came to know that he has been given the option.

e. The earth does not consume their bodies

Allah has also honoured His prophets and messengers by prohibiting the earth from consuming their bodies. Their bodies remain preserved from decay no matter how long they remain in their graves. In a Hadith: ‘Allah has prohibited the earth from consuming the bodies of prophets.’¹⁰¹

f. ‘*Ismah* (infallibility)

This is something else that Allah has granted his prophets and messengers, unlike other humans. Raghīb al-Asfahani in *Al-Mufradat* defined ‘*Ismah*’ as being: ‘The pure internal condition that Allah has protected them (the prophets and messengers) with, the physical and spiritual abilities they have been granted, as well as victory, firmness, descending tranquility upon them, preserving their hearts, and granting them success in the things that they do.’¹⁰²

Ibn Hajar also used the definition of *Raghīb* and summarised it in *Fath al-Bari*: ‘The ‘*Ismah*’ of the prophets means protecting them from deficiencies, granting them the most complete spiritual qualities, success and firmness in all affairs, and allowing tranquility to descend upon them.’¹⁰³

Shaykh Mansur ibn Rashid al-Tamimi defined it, in his academic paper, as follows: ‘Protecting the messengers from anything that outs people off accepting their prophethood, from lying, hiding the truth that has been revealed to them, as well as being saved from falling into major sins. It

¹⁰¹ Bukhari, No. 4586.

¹⁰² *Mufradat al-Qur’an*, p. 337.

¹⁰³ Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari*, Edited by: Muhammad Fuad Abd al-Baqi and Muhib al-Din al-Khatib, Dar al-Maarifa, Beirut, Lebanon, 1379 AH, 11/51.

also means that Allah grants them the success to repent and seek forgiveness if minor sins are committed, and that mistakes are pointed out by Allah if they ever fall into them.’¹⁰⁴

4. The Religion of the Prophets and Messengers is One

Belief in the Prophets and Messengers

Belief in the prophets and messengers is one of the pillars of faith (*eman*). One’s faith will not be complete until he believes in all the prophets; that Allah sent them to guide mankind and take them out of darkness into light; and that they have delivered Allah’s message clearly, fulfilled the trust, advised the *ummah*, and strove in the path of Allah. Allah Almighty said:

- *‘The Messenger [firmly] believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, and so do the believers. They [all] believe in Allah, His angels, His Books, and His messengers. [They proclaim], ‘We make no distinction between any of His messengers.’ And they say, ‘We hear and obey. [We seek] Your forgiveness, our Lord! And to You [alone] is the final return.’ (al-Baqarah: 285)*
- *‘Rather, the righteous are those who believe in Allah, the Last Day, the angels, the Books, and the prophets.’ (al-Baqarah: 177)*

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ‘Eman (faith) is to believe in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, and the final return.’¹⁰⁵

It is necessary for a believer to believe in all the messengers that Allah sent and all the books that He revealed.¹⁰⁶ One’s faith is not complete until he believes in all the prophets without specifying their number; those who Allah told us about and those He did not, because Allah has told us that there are prophets that he did not relate to us and inform us of. ‘We already sent messengers before you. We have told you the stories of some of them, while others We have not.’ (Ghafir: 78)

Ibn Taymiyah says:

¹⁰⁴ p. 51.

¹⁰⁵ Bukhari, No. 48.

¹⁰⁶ Ibn Taymiyah, *Al-Furqan*, Edited by: Abdul Qadir Al-Arnaout, Dar Al-Bayan Library, Damascus, 1st Ed., 1985, p. 117.

‘We believe in the messengers that Allah named in His book and we believe that Allah has other prophets and messengers whose names we do not know. We believe in Muhammad (peace be upon him). Though, your belief in Muhammad is not like your belief in the other prophets. Belief in the other prophets means to affirm that they were prophets, while belief in Muhammad means to accept everything that he has brought. If you follow him, then you would fulfil the obligations, permit the permissible, forbid the forbidden, avoid the doubtful matters, and race towards doing good.’¹⁰⁷

He also says:

‘Whoever obeys one messenger has obeyed them all and whoever truly believes in one of them believes in them all. Just as whoever disobeys one messenger has disobeyed them all and whoever rejects one of them has actually rejected them all. That is because every messenger commands the obedience of other messengers and affirms that they too are messengers. Therefore, whoever rejects a messenger has rejected and belied those messengers who believe in him, and whoever disobeys a messenger has too disobeyed the other messengers who commanded people to obey him.’¹⁰⁸

Islam is the religion of all the messengers

The religion that Allah Almighty has legislated is Islam, while all other religions are not recognised nor true. This matter is beyond doubt or ambiguity, because all religions other than Islam are from the invention of humans, whether paganism in its various forms, or after divine religions after being distorted, such as Judaism and Christianity.

As for the faith with which Allah Almighty sent all the Messengers (may blessings and peace be upon them), it is Islam: the worship of Allah alone¹⁰⁹ and rejecting the worship of anything else. Every one of the prophets and messengers says to his people: ‘Worship Allah [alone]. You have no god other than Him’ (al-Mu’minun: 23). They are agreed upon calling to pure monotheism and forbidding polytheism. The purpose for which they were sent is singling out worship of Allah Almighty, and forbidding all forms of transgression, including disbelief, immorality, and disobedience.

¹⁰⁷ Majmu’ al-Fatawa, 7/313.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 19/180.

¹⁰⁹ Abdul Aziz Al-Humaidi, Al-Rasa’il al-Shumuliyah, Dar Al-Da`wah and Dar Uyun Al-Ma`rifa, 1st Ed., 2000 p. 471.

All the divine religions call to this great purpose, as it is the task of all the messengers, from Nuh (peace be upon him) to our Messenger Muhammad (peace be upon him).¹¹⁰

Ibn Taymiyah says: ‘This is the religion of the first and the last among the prophets and their followers, the religion of Islam. It is the worship of God alone with no partner, and the worship of God Almighty in every time and place is through obeying His Messengers (peace be upon them). Thus, the one who worships Him in a way that is contrary to what his messengers brought, is not really worshipping Him. Such as those of whom he said about: ‘Or do they have associate-gods who have ordained for them some [polytheistic] beliefs, which Allah has not authorized?’ (al-Shura: 21). One has not truly believed in Him then, except if he believes in all his messengers and obeys the messenger that is sent to him. Every messenger is to be obeyed until the next messenger is sent, in which case he is the one that must be obeyed.’¹¹¹

The messengers (peace be upon them all) are unanimous in calling to the root of the faith, which is submission to Allah Almighty through obedience and worship.

- Allah Almighty says about Nuh: ‘And if you turn away, [remember] I have never demanded a reward from you [for delivering the message]. My reward is only from Allah. And I have been commanded to be one of those who submit [to Allah].’ (Yunus: 72)
- And He said about Ibrahim: ‘Ibrahim was neither a Jew nor a Christian; he submitted in all uprightness and was not a polytheist.’ (al-Imran: 67)
- And He Almighty said about Ibrahim and Ya’qub: ‘And who would reject the faith of Ibrahim except a fool! We certainly chose him in this life, and in the Hereafter, he will surely be among the righteous. When his Lord ordered him, ‘Submit [to My Will],’ he responded, ‘I submit to the Lord of all worlds.’ This was the advice of Ibrahim—as well as Jacob—to his children, [saying], ‘Indeed, Allah has chosen for you this faith; so do not die except in [a state of full] submission.’ (al-Baqarah :130-132)

¹¹⁰ Al-Nubuwwat, 1/39.

¹¹¹ Ibn Taymiyah, Al-Jawab al-Sahih li man Baddala Din al-Masih, Dar Al-Assimah, Saudi Arabia, second edition, 1999, 1/ 83-84.

- And He said about Yusuf: ‘You are my Guardian in this world and the Hereafter. Allow me to die as one who submits and join me with the righteous.’ (Yusuf: 101)
- And He said about Musa: ‘Musa said, ‘O my people! If you do believe in Allah and submit [to His Will], then put your trust in Him.’ (Yunus: 84)
- Allah Almighty said about the prophets of Bani Israel: ‘Indeed, We revealed the Torah, containing guidance and light, by which the prophets, who submitted themselves to Allah, made judgments for Jews. So too did the rabbis and scholars judge according to Allah’s Book’ (al-Ma’idah: 44)
- And He said about the magicians of the Pharoah who believed in Musa: ‘Your rage towards us is only because we believed in the signs of our Lord when they came to us. Our Lord! Shower us with perseverance, and let us die while submitting [to You].’ (al-A’raf: 126)

They understood that the faith that Musa called to is Islam, which shows how clear this matter is.¹¹²

- Allah Almighty said about Sulaiman’s letter to Belqis: ‘Do not be arrogant with me, but come to me, fully submitting [to Allah].’ (al-Naml: 31)
- And He said about the nation of Isa: ‘And how I inspired the disciples, ‘Believe in Me and My messenger!’ They declared, ‘We believe and bear witness that we fully submit [to Allah].’ (al-Ma’idah: 111)
- And He said about Lut: ‘But We only found one family that had submitted [to Allah].’ (al-Dharyat: 36)
- And He said about the People of the Book from the Jews and Christians: ‘[As for] those [faithful] to whom We had given the Scripture before this [Quran], they do believe in it. When it is recited to them, they declare, ‘We believe in it. This is definitely the truth from our Lord. We had already submitted [even] before this.’ (al-Qasas: 52-53)

Meaning that those who truly believed amongst them say, we were Muslims (submitters) before the Qur’an was revealed. They did not say that they were Jews or Christians.¹¹³

¹¹² Al-Rasa’il al-Shumuliyyah, p. 482.

¹¹³ Ibid.

The union of faith (dīn) and the plurality of laws (shara’i)

Allah Almighty said, ‘He has ordained for you [believers] the Way which He decreed for Nuh, and what We have revealed to you [O Prophet] and what We decreed for Ibrahim, Musa, and Isa, [commanding:] ‘Uphold the faith, and make no divisions in it.’ (al-Shura: 13)

Allah, glorified and exalted, mentioned that He has prescribed for this nation the faith that He has legislated for the previous nations, as Allah Almighty commanded the Prophets (peace be upon them) to establish a single faith, and forbade them from disunity and disagreement. This faith is the Islam that was clarified by the previous verses, which is the worship of God alone. He singled out the mention of the messengers of *Ulu al-Azm*, starting with Nuh and ending with Muhammad, for their virtue and their leadership. As for the subsidiary laws of the prophets, then they are many and varied according to the needs of each nation. Allah Almighty said: ‘To each of you We have ordained a code of law and a way of life.’ (al-Ma’idah: 48)¹¹⁴

This verse means that, to you, O Muhammad, and to the messengers before you, there is a law (*Shari’ah*) and a method (*Minhaj*), that comes under the religion that God chose for the people and is pleased with for them. While each of the parties of disbelief and polytheism too have a *Shari’ah* and a *Minhaj* in their lives, that are a religion for them invented by its leaders and adopted by its followers.

As for the Shari’ah: It is a set of foundations, core beliefs, and general principles that are like a source that you drink from. It is a path taken by a nation that has a common direction, whether upon true or false. That is, they come to it and drink from it their values, principles, beliefs and the general guidance of the faith that they are committed to.

As for the Minhaj: It is that part of the faith that relates to the detailed rulings and various etiquettes for the actions of daily life. These rulings are based on the broad foundations, core beliefs, and general principles, that are referred to in Islam as the *Shari’ah*. On this basis, we can understand the following from the statement of Allah Almighty:

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

- ‘He has ordained for you [believers] of the Way’, shows that He has clarified for us the Shari’ah part of the religion that He has chosen for His servants. That is, the foundations, core beliefs, and general principles. The letter ‘*min*’ (of) implies that it is a part of something larger.
- ‘The Way which He decreed for Nuh’, means everything of the Shari’ah that Nuh was commanded with, such as monotheism, obedience, worship, belief in the Day of Judgment, and *taqwa* and submission to Allah.
- ‘and what We have revealed to you’, that is, what we revealed to you from the Shari’ah that is in addition to what we commanded Nuh.
- ‘and what We decreed for Ibrahim, Musa, and Isa’, that is, all that we commanded Ibrahim, Musa, and Isa of the Shari’ah, what We have already informed you of in my Qur’an, and what you will learn from what We will reveal in the Qur’an. This then shows that the foundations, core beliefs, and general principles – i.e. the *Shari’ah* in the terminology of the Qur’an – that Allah commanded Nuh with and was revealed to Muhammad, Ibrahim, Musa, and Isa, have all been legislated for us as part of the general teachings of the religion.¹¹⁵

Therefore, whatever is proven from their Shari’ah is also a Shari’ah for us, because they are beliefs, facts, and principles that cannot be abrogated or modified, but there may be scope for further clarifications and detailed additions regarding them. The verses above were limited to the mention of Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa and Isa (peace be upon them), because the detailed explanation of the Shari’ah that was revealed to them encompasses what was revealed to all the messengers.¹¹⁶

- ‘Uphold the faith, and make no divisions in it.’ What is meant by upholding the religion is to always fulfil its rights, and sticking to it with uprightness in carrying its burdens and duties. Allah has prohibited division in the religion that He legislated. In other words, differing in its principles, core beliefs, and general values. That is because difference in these matters leads to this united divine *um-mah* becoming divided into groups and nations that are hostile and

¹¹⁵ Habannakah, p. 160.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

far apart from one another. This division can even lead to them excommunicating and fighting one another.

Upon tracking the content of the messages of all the messengers, represented in the old by Nuh, then by Ibrahim, who is one of his followers. Then from Bani Israel it was represented by Musa and Isa, with the most complete version of it being represented by Muhammad (peace be upon them all). We notice that its values, ideology, general principles, and intellectual foundations are the same. If the followers of all the messengers do not differ regarding what the messengers of their Lord brought, and follow it as God revealed it, not distorting, altering, adding or subtracting from it, then they are one nation, from Adam (peace be upon him) until the Seal of the Prophets.

After this, the text in the verse moved to dealing with the polytheists who disbelieved the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Allah Almighty said addressing him: ‘What you call the polytheists to is unbearable for them’ (al-Shura: 13). Meaning that it is difficult for them to accept what you are calling them to, as they see it as greater than what their souls can bear. The word ‘*kibar*’ (greatness) is used as a metaphor for something difficult on the self, because the bigger something is the heavier it is, and if it is heavy, it becomes difficult for the one being called to carry it.

The use of the verb ‘*kabur*’ (grown/become great) implies that what the Messenger calls them to is heavy on their souls, and if they had any intellectual or scientific objection, then a different metaphor would have been more appropriate to use. This indicates their uncertainty and their lack of conviction that the Prophet’s message is false. It appears that, at this stage, their motive for not accepting was not their lack of being convinced about what the messenger is calling them to, but rather that it was too heavy and burdensome for them to accept.¹¹⁷

Upon reflection, we note the following as reasons for them finding the message too heavy for them to accept:

- He is calling them to believe that he is the Messenger of God and to following him, which are two great matters that are heavy for their leaders, as they feel that they are more entitled to be messengers who are followed, not to be followers.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 163.

- He invites them to abandon their idolatry and customs, and this implies that they are misguided. If they accept what the messenger invites them to, then they are admitting that they were ignorant and misguided, and that is too difficult for them to accept.
- He calls them to abandon many of their practices that are forbidden by Islam, and this is a heavy matter for them, because their desires and passions are so deeply attached to these practises.
- He invites them to undertake religious obligations that they have not previously undertaken, which is heavy on their souls because it requires them to do that which they find difficult do.

God has convinced them to accept using two main points:

Firstly: that the message and prophethood is chosen by Allah, and that He alone, Glory be to Him, chooses whom He wills with His wisdom, since He is All-Knowing about where to keep His message. ‘Allah chooses (*yajtabi*) for Himself whoever He wills’ [42:13]. *Yajtabi* means that He gives preference and chooses one of the foundations of faith in Allah is that He is All-Wise and All-Knowing. If He wants to send a messenger, He does not follow the desires of people, nor does He consult them on this matter, but rather with His wisdom and knowledge, He chooses whoever He wants among his servants. And those He chooses are only the best of them, the most perfect, the best of them intellectually, morally, spiritually and in taqwa, those furthest away from any deficiency. In other words, it is better for you and it is in your interest that you follow those chosen by Allah through His wisdom, even if it is a burden upon you.

Secondly: people are tested in this world, and the one who is tested must believe in the truth, and he must obey God in his commands and prohibitions, so that he is considered to be upon guidance, and made amongst the guided and blessed ones in the House of Bliss (Jannah) on the Day of Judgment. Whoever is not like this, it is better for him to go back to his Lord and return to him with honest faith and sincere obedience, so that Allah guides him to Him. Whoever is guided by Allah and is judged by Him as being guided, He will be pleased with him, and will make him among the people of the House of Bliss. This return to Allah is thus in your own interest even if you find it burdensome. Allah Almighty said, ‘... and He guides to Himself whoever turns [to Him].’ That is, he rules and decides

that whoever returns to Him repentantly with faith and righteous actions has been guided. He thus increases him in aid so that he draws nearer to the Almighty with obedience and righteousness. If one is judged by Allah as being guided, this necessitates that He is pleased with him, and will make him of the blessed people of Paradise on the Day of Judgment. That truly is the greatest blessing and eternal happiness.¹¹⁸

The Prophets are paternal brothers; their mothers are different, but their religion is one, and the Islamic Shari’ah is the seal of all messages

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ‘The prophets are paternal brothers; their mothers are different, but their religion is one.’¹¹⁹

This hadith clearly indicates that the origin of the religion of the prophets is one, which is monotheism, and that their detailed laws are numerous in those things that are suitable for the previous religions that were revealed to certain people in specific places on earth. Not all those laws may be suitable as a general Shari’ah that is revealed to all people until the Day of Judgment. Allah sometimes forbids for some nations what He has permitted for others, due to their intransigence, such as the Jews, for example, but then permits it for those who come after them. As for the foundations of the religion, it does not change as nations, places and times change. Islam is thus the religion of all the Prophets, may peace and blessings be upon them all. If the word ‘Islam’ is used in a general sense, then previous laws before Islam are included in this broad meaning of Islam, because the religious obligations are the applied principles of Islam, as they are from the commands and prohibitions of God Almighty. One’s Islam is not completed without obedience to God in what He commands and avoiding what He forbade. If the religious laws differ in some details, then ultimately, they are all from the command of Allah, the Exalted.¹²⁰

The word ‘*dīn*’ (religion) was used in this Hadith to mean *tawhid* (monotheism), because the word ‘*dīn*’ comes in contrast to ‘Shari’ah’, and the general rule is that whenever ‘religion’ or ‘Islam’ are used, the Shari’ah is included as part of them, and this is understood from external factors. As

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Bukhari, No. 3443.

¹²⁰ Al-Rasa’il al-Shumuliyah, p. 483.

such, there is no such thing as ‘divine religions’, but the religion with Allah is one, that is Islam. Allah has legislated this religion since the descent of Adam (peace be upon him) to this earth, but whenever the children of Adam deviated from this religion, Allah sent messengers to guide them back to it.¹²¹

So the first messenger to humanity after Adam (peace be upon him) was Nuh (peace be upon him) and their seal was Muhammad. Every prophet was sent specifically to his own people, until Allah Almighty authorised that one ummah be formed from all of humanity, so He sent Muhammad to all people, and made him the seal of the messengers. Thus, there is no revealed book after the Qur’an, nor any messenger after Muhammad (peace be upon him). His message is the seal of messages. Allah Almighty said, ‘Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men, but is the Messenger of Allah and the seal of the prophets.’ (al-Ahzab: 40)

With the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), the building of Islam became complete. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ‘My similitude in comparison with the other prophets before me, is that of a man who has built a house nicely and beautifully, except for a place of one brick in a corner. The people go about it and wonder at its beauty, but say: ‘If only this brick be put in its place!’ So I am that brick, and I am the last of the Prophets.’¹²²

The prophets, may blessings and peace be upon them, guided their people towards guidance, with each one of them contributing by placing a brick in this building of Allah’s call. Then when revelation from the heaven stopped after Isa (peace be upon him), ignorance spread, darkness pervaded, and humanity became in need of someone who takes them towards the light of guidance, God, the Exalted, completed that building through Muhammad (peace be upon him), so he sent him to all of mankind. The Messenger of Allah was not sent to build a new palace, but only to complete the palace that was built by the prophets before him. He was not sent with a new religion, but rather sent with the monotheism of Allah Almighty that all the prophets before him called to, and this is explicit

¹²¹ Ibid, p. 484.

¹²² Bukhari, No. 3535.

in indicating the unity of the religion of all the prophets, may peace and blessings be upon them.¹²³

With the message of Muhammad (peace be upon him), Allah completed the religion for all people. He Almighty says, ‘Today I have perfected your faith for you, completed My favour upon you, and chosen Islam as your way’ (al-Ma’idah: 3). The Shari’ah of Islam that was revealed to Muhammad (peace be upon him) became a complementary heir to the Shari’ah of the messengers, starting with Nuh (peace be upon him), and it is what Allah prescribed for his servants in beliefs, worship, morals and personal dealings. It was called Shari’ah, because it is something that is sought and resorted to, as one would resort to water when they are thirsty, or because it has a known source and clear boundaries. This is shown in Allah’s statement, ‘Now We have set you [O Prophet] on the [clear] Way of faith. So follow it’ (al-Jathiya:18); and His statement, ‘To each of you We have ordained a code of law and a way of life.’ (al-Ma’idah: 5)

Its essence is to live life in light of the religion, so that a person lives in accordance with the view of the Almighty, and His objective behind the creation of people, ‘I did not create jinn and humans except to worship Me.’ *Ihsan* (excellence), as the Messenger of Allah said, is: ‘To worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you do not see Him, then [know that] He sees you.’ Your life, worship, and habits are all according to what God Almighty wills and pleases. Allah Almighty said: ‘Say, ‘Surely my prayer, my worship, my life, and my death are all for Allah—Lord of all worlds. He has no partner. So I am commanded.’ (al-An’am: 162-163)

The Shari’ah is divided into two parts: revelation and general life. To live life through the religion, the religion must be in harmony with this worldly life, otherwise it would not be suitable to live by and not fit for all times and places. The Shari’ah is thus the general laws and principles that unite the servants of God in all times and places.¹²⁴

Allah made Muhammad, the messenger of Allah and seal of prophets. In fact, the prophet of all prophets and messenger of all messengers, as per the Qur’anic verse: ‘When Allah made a covenant with the prophets,

¹²³ Al-Rasa’il al-Shumuliyyah, p. 486.

¹²⁴ Muhammad Ibrahim Al-Kettani, *Al-Da’wah ila Istiqlal al-Fikr fi al-Islam*, Dar Al-Hadith, 1st Ed. 2014, p. 36.

[saying,] ‘Now that I have given you the Book and wisdom, if there comes to you a messenger confirming what you have, you must believe in him and support him.’ He added, ‘Do you affirm this covenant and accept this commitment?’ They said, ‘Yes, we do.’ Allah said, ‘Then bear witness, and I too am a Witness.’ (al-Imran: 81)

Allah Almighty revealed to the Messenger the revelation with its two components: the Noble Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet. This necessitated that he be knowledgeable of the Holy Qur’an, knows the Sunnah, and knows what the revelation contains in terms of historical reports, knowledge, laws and secrets. That is why when Aisha, may God be pleased with her, was asked about the character of the Prophet, she said: ‘His character was the Qur’an.’¹²⁵

The Qur’an says: ‘And you are truly [a man] of outstanding character.’ It also follows that he cannot be a messenger, a legislator and a ruler when he does not understand the other part of the Sharia, which is the reality of the ummah, the customs and traditions of people, their history and their philosophies of their lives. These things are mandatory, because without it the Sharia would be a purely theoretical message that is not applied by anyone in reality. If the practitioner of Islam misapplies it due to his ignorance of the reality of life, it loses its authority and revokes its validity for all times and places, which is not legally or rationally acceptable.

It is not legally (Islamically) acceptable due to the many verses that prove the suitability of Islam for all times and places, and that Allah has commanded us to follow it in the following verses:

- ‘Whatever the Messenger gives you, take it. And whatever he forbids you from, leave it. And fear Allah.’ (al-Hashr: 7)
- ‘Say, [O Prophet,] ‘If you [sincerely] love Allah, then follow me; Allah will love you and forgive your sins. For Allah is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful.’ (al-Imran: 31)
- ‘But no! By your Lord, they will never be [true] believers until they accept you [O Prophet] as the judge in their disputes, and find no resistance within themselves against your decision and submit wholeheartedly.’ (al-Nisa: 65)

¹²⁵ Musnad Ahmad, No. 25341.

It is also rationally unacceptable because this would otherwise lead to contradiction, as a suitable Shari'ah can only be one that is reasonably applicable in reality.¹²⁶

5. The Importance of the Story of Ibrahim in the Qur'an

The story of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) is the longest Quranic story after the story of Musa (peace be upon him) and it takes up more than a whole *juzz* (a 30th of the Qur'an). Its verses were revealed in the early Meccan phase and continued until the end of the Medinan phase. This shows that the story of Ibrahim plays a major role in clarifying the goals and objectives of the Noble Qur'an. We mention some reasons for this great emphasis on Prophet Ibrahim in the Qur'an:

1. Ibrahim is a Superior Role Model for Humanity

The story of Ibrahim reveals the traits of the perfect personality that presents a model in living by the teachings of Islam. Ibrahim (peace be upon him) became one of the symbols of monotheism in his time, and until today. Allah Almighty said: 'And he left this enduring declaration among his descendants, so they may [always] turn back [to Allah].' (al-Zukhruf: 28). Ibrahim commanded his sons and his offspring with that word, the word of monotheism, so they responded to him and passed it on to the generations after him. The word of monotheism, *there is no true god, except Allah*, continued in his offspring. This continued down the long line of messengers until his last son, a descendant of Ismail, and the one who resembled him most, Muhammad (peace be upon him), the Seal of the Messengers. The final messenger to call to monotheism and fight polytheism and idolatry.¹²⁷

2. Pure Monotheism

The story of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) shows that the religion of all the prophets is pure monotheism, the true religion from Ibrahim to Muhammad. This reality deepens the confidence of Muslims in their faith and the fact that it is the true religion. Allah Almighty said: 'The religion of your father Ibrahim' (al-Hajj: 78), and He said: 'And who is better in faith

¹²⁶ Al-Kettani, p. 37.

¹²⁷ Baderin, p. 16.

than those who [fully] submit themselves to Allah, do good, and follow the Way of Ibrahim, the upright?’ (al-Nisa: 25). Allah Almighty said: ‘That is the upright religion.’ (Yusuf: 40)

The story of Ibrahim also shows that any deviation from pure monotheism causes one to lose their connection with the prophets, even if they were direct descendants of those prophets. Ibrahim (peace be upon him) himself disavows his father when he deviated from the religion of monotheism. ‘But when it became clear to Ibrahim that his father was an enemy of Allah, he broke ties with him. Ibrahim was truly tender-hearted, forbearing’ (al-Tawbah: 114). What then of those who deviated from the religion of Ibrahim in the subsequent generations?

Thus, the story of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) is a response to all those who deviate from the religion of monotheism, such as the pagan Arabs, the Jews, and Christians who deviated from the messages of Musa and Isa (peace be upon them) and exploited the religion for the sake of personal gains and control over people.

It also proves that these people are not upon the religion of Ibrahim, nor of his followers who inherited it. They have no connection with Ibrahim, other than mere claims, because the true inheritors of Ibrahim are those who inherited his religion. ‘Indeed, those who have the best claim to Ibrahim are his followers, this Prophet, and the believers.’ (al-Imran: 68)

3. The Strong Relationship Between Ibrahim and the Muslims

The story deepened the relationship between Ibrahim and the Muslims, the followers of the final prophet, our master Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him. Ibrahim was mentioned in the Qur’an sixty-nine times in twenty-five different Meccan and Medinan chapters. The scenes of his story are distributed across the Qur’an over seventeen parts (*juzz*). This means that the mention of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) is constantly present in the mind of the Muslim. This is because he is a symbol of monotheism, a symbol of Islam, and a role model for all Muslims. This is why Prophet Muhammad was commanded, in the Qur’an, to follow in Ibrahim’s footsteps. ‘These [prophets] were [rightly] guided by Allah, so follow their guidance’ (al-An’am: 90). ‘And mention in the Book [O Prophet, the story of] Ibrahim. He was surely a man of truth and a prophet.’ (Maryam: 41)

The daily prayers, both obligatory and voluntary, then come to further deepen this connection in the souls of the believers. From the beginning of the prayer we face the *qiblah*, the direction of the Ka'bah built by Ibrahim (peace be upon him). At the end, in the last sitting, we conclude our prayer with the Ibrahimic prayer. Similarly, the rituals of Hajj came to strengthen this meaning further. Firstly, after entering into a state of pilgrimage (*ihram*), one recites the Talbiyah *Labbayk-Allahumma Labbayk* (in response to You, our Lord). This is a response to the invitation of Ibrahim who called the believers to Hajj, as Allah Almighty commanded him: 'Call [all] people to the pilgrimage [O Ibrahim]' (al-Hajj: 27). One of the greatest and most regularly performed actions of pilgrimage is the *tawaf* around the Ka'bah built by Ibrahim.

This is in addition to the other rites of Hajj, which remind us of Ibrahim, his son Ismail, and his wife Hajar (peace be upon them), such as the walk between Safa and Marwa, the well of Zamzam, the Maqam of Ibrahim, and the sacrifice (*udhiyah*), which is based the story of the great sacrifice of Ibrahim and Isma'il.

Even the remembrance of Allah reminds us of Ibrahim. Abdullah b. Masud (may Allah be pleased with him) narrates that the Prophet (may Allah's prayers and peace be upon him) said: 'I met Ibrahim on the night of my ascension (*isra and mi'raj*), and he said: 'O Muhammad, pass my greetings (*salam*) to your ummah, and let them know that the soil of Jannah is pure, its water is fresh, and that it is a flat land containing no trees. But its plants are: Subhanallah (glory be to God), Alhamdulillah praise be to God, La ilaha illa Allah (there is no god, but Allah), and Allahu Akbar (God is greatest).'¹²⁸

4. The Traits and Roles of the Angels

The story of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) reveals some of the attributes of the angels and their functions, something that is part of our Islamic belief. These attributes appeared in the story of Ibrahim's guests when the messengers of God came to inform him of the knowledgeable boy Isaac that will be born, then after him, Jacob (peace be upon them). The story showed that the angels do not eat or drink, and that they have the ability

¹²⁸ Tirmidhi, No: 3462.

to appear in the form of a human being. They are honoured servants who do not disobey God's commands. These are just some of their attributes.

5. The Importance of Dialogue and Migration in Da'wah

The story of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was able to provide us with his valuable experiences in the field of dialogue, calling to God, and abiding by his commands. He was the role model from a young age until much older. It also provided us with valuable experiences by those who were brought up by Ibrahim, such as his wife and children. It presents this blessed family as a school and leading example in Islamic education and development for all Muslims. What makes these experiences so important is that they are based on pure sincerity to Allah, sound faith, and that they occurred in a variety of lands and circumstances. In this way, the story of Ibrahim provides Muslims with great knowledge and understanding in several areas of life.

6. The Connection of Muslims with Jerusalem

The story of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) deepens the Muslims' connection with Jerusalem, and makes it a part of the Muslim faith that cannot be surrendered in any way. Ibrahim migrated from Iraq to Jerusalem and its surroundings, lived and settled there, and died and was buried there. His grave lies in the city of Hebron. It was from Palestine that Ibrahim's journeys began to Egypt, the Hijaz, and other countries. His most frequent trips were between Palestine and Mecca, whether to visit his son and wife or to perform the Hajj that God commanded and clarified to him. These regular travels deepened the connection between the Sacred Mosque and the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque, such that they became a part of the Muslim faith that can never be abandoned or neglected.

The Isra and Mi'raj event of our messenger Muhammad (may God's prayers and peace be upon him) confirmed this deep connection even further. Then for several months, the Qiblah (direction of prayer) to Al-Aqsa Mosque increased the Muslims' connection with Al-Aqsa Mosque, as well as Umar's conquest of Jerusalem. Umar personally went to Jerusalem to receive the keys to Al-Aqsa, to emphasise the status of Jerusalem in the hearts of the believers. The story of Ibrahim thus proves that the Muslim

connection to Jerusalem is a very old and deeply rooted one, since the time of Ibrahim (peace be upon him).¹²⁹

7. Proving that the Qur'an is from Allah

The story of Ibrahim proves that the Noble Qur'an is from God, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. We mention some arguments to prove this:

- a. The scenes of Ibrahim's story do not contradict each other, despite the different topics of each chapter that mentioned them, and despite the different time periods in which they were revealed. This indicates that the Holy Qur'an is from Allah, as He Almighty said: 'Had it been from other than Allah, you would have found therein much contradiction.' (al-Nisa: 82)
- b. The incredible correlation between all the scenes of Ibrahim's story and the theme of the chapter that they are mentioned in confirms this reality too, because such consistency is not found in the human works.
- c. One of the last scenes of the story of Ibrahim is related in the Qur'an in the following verse: 'Call [all] people to the pilgrimage. They will come to you on foot and on every lean camel from every distant path' (al-Hajj: 27). This is one of the last things in Ibrahim's story. A powerful and impactful scene that is a fitting closure to the story. The meanings that come from the verse also confirm that the Qur'an is from Allah. Who was it that conveyed Ibrahim's voice to all the people, so that they responded to this call for Hajj and Umrah from every part of the earth? Of course it was God Almighty.¹³⁰

8. Benefitting from Allah's Ways

The story of Ibrahim showed some of the ways and laws of Allah:

- It is a consistent rule that the prophets are rejected and exposed to trials.
- Any sacrifice in the path of God is compensated in this world and in the hereafter.
- Empowerment on earth and victory only come after trials, struggles, and suffering.

¹²⁹ Baderin, p. 19.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

Finally, these eight points that show the importance of the story of Ibrahim in the Holy Qur'an are mere examples, because each scene in the Qur'an came to address specific circumstances and to achieve more than one goal.¹³¹

6. The wisdom behind distributing the scenes of the story of Ibrahim over many chapters

The scenes of the story of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) were distributed over a large number of Meccan and Medinan chapters. This is not a mere coincidence, but there is great wisdom and purpose in this.

1. Each scene from the story of Ibrahim is worth being made into a separate story that is studied individually. For this reason, the scenes of the story of Ibrahim are distributed throughout the Holy Qur'an. On the other hand, we find the scenes of the story of Joseph (peace be upon him) grouped into one chapter, because its scenes are interconnected and cannot be separated from each other.
2. Each scene of the story of Ibrahim - peace be upon him – was revealed at the place and time appropriate the condition of the Muslims. For example, in the Meccan chapters, we find scenes that have a strong relationship with the reality of Islam in Mecca, such as Ibrahim's dialogue with his father and his people to prove the invalidity of idolatry, and to prove that monotheism is the religion of all the prophets, showing that the religion of Muhammad is the same as the religion of Ibrahim. This refutes the Arabs of Mecca who claimed to be followers of Ibrahim, while at the same time worshipping idols, planets, and stars, and waging war against the religion of Muhammad who was merely the final inheritor of the message of Ibrahim.

We also find that the Medinan chapters are related to the new reality of Muslims in Medina, such as the conflict over who the true followers of Ibrahim are, building the Ka'bah, and the Hajj pilgrimage. These things show that the inheritors of Ibrahim are those who inherited him in faith, not those who inherited his kinship and blood. This is shown by the fact that Ibrahim disassociated himself from the closest people to him, his father Azar, after he insisted upon disbelief. 'But when it became clear to

¹³¹ Ibid.



Ibrahim that his father was an enemy of Allah, he broke ties with him. Ibrahim was truly tender-hearted, forbearing.’ (al-Tawbah: 114)

Ibrahim is thus free from all those who claim to follow him while opposing his teachings, whether Jews, Christians, or pagans. ‘Ibrahim was neither a Jew nor a Christian; he submitted in all uprightness and was not a polytheist.’ (Al-Imran: 67)

3. The scattered scenes of the story of Ibrahim throughout the Holy Qur’an, indicates that Ibrahim (peace be upon him) is a symbol of the call to monotheism, the oneness of God in worship, and a landmark of the true path. A Muslim must therefore never lose sight of him and his teachings, because he is a complete and ideal role model. This meaning was intended by the Noble Qur’an when Allah said, ‘And mention in the Book [O Prophet, the story of] Ibrahim. He was surely a man of truth and a prophet’ (Maryam: 41).

This indicates that the correct and authentic information about Ibrahim is that which is contained in the Holy Qur’an. Similarly, the authentic reports from the Prophet Muhammad have also clarified some areas of the life of Ibrahim.

Ibrahim (peace be upon him) has a distinguished position among the People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitab*), whether Christians or Jews. *Ahl al-Kitab* had a presence in the Arabian Peninsula in various and forms, whether through their various financial and commercial capabilities, such as the Jews, or through the presence of major Christian entities and countries near Arabia, such as Abyssinia and the Byzantine Empire. This emphasis on Ibrahim thus provided a deep-rooted link, not only for the Arabs, but also the People of the Book, who considered themselves superior to the rest of the illiterate people, including the Arabs.¹³²

We must not forget that the Arabs attribute themselves to Ibrahim, through his son Ismail, who, along with his father, built the Ka’bah, the centre of the pilgrimage for the Arabs throughout history. The importance of lineage for the Arabs cannot be over emphasised, to the extent that they considered that one cannot be an Arab if they did not have a known lineage. The Qur’an therefore stresses the biography of their grandfather

¹³² Al-Umari, p. 56.

Ibrahim (peace be upon him) to convey tawhid and calling them to the great religion of Islam.

The story of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) in the Holy Qur'an is original. You will not find anything similar in the Torah or the Biblical scriptures, in terms of accuracy, authenticity, and presenting the complete truth that is far from distortion and forgery. This increased its purity, solidity, and depth, within the themes of the distinguished Qur'anic discourse. This is the book that 'falsehood cannot approach from any angle. A revelation from the One Who is All-Wise, Praiseworthy.'

Ibrahim thus attained a distinguished position in the Qur'anic discourse, as we can see from the way in which Allah Almighty describes him throughout the Qur'an.

Ibrahim is Allah's close friend (al-Khalil), the father of the prophets, the one who build the Ka'bah, and a man of noble traits that will be clarified later on by the will of Allah.

The Chapters of the Holy Qur'an that Mention Ibrahim

The verses of the Noble Qur'an speak about the biography of Ibrahim al-Khalil (peace be upon him) and his life in many chapters. He is the leader of the people, the messenger and prophet of God. His biography contains many lessons and meanings of faith that guide us to the upright and straight path, the true religion of the Lord of the worlds.

1. The story of Ibrahim in Surat al-Baqarah

Ibrahim's story was mentioned in three places in Surat al-Baqarah (Ch. 2):

The First: 121 – 141

Verses (124-141) speak about making Ibrahim and his righteous offspring leaders for the people, about making Ibrahim's maqam (stand) by the Ka'bah a place of prayer, Ibrahim and Ismail's supplication as they build the Sacred House of God, Ibrahim submission to God, and his final advice to his children to remain steadfast and to only die upon Islam.

The verses debated and rebutted the Jews and Christians in their claim to be followers of Ibrahim, making it clear that Ibrahim, and all the messengers who came after him, are followers of the message of monotheism.

The verses made clear that Ibrahim and the messengers were not Jews or Christians, but were Muslims (i.e. submitters to God).

The Second: Verse 258

This verse speaks about the confrontation between Ibrahim (peace be upon him) and the unjust king who claimed divinity, when Ibrahim told him that God is the one who gives life and death. The king claimed that he too was able to cause life and death. Ibrahim then challenged him to change the course of the sun, and to make it rise from the west, so the king became dumbfounded.

The Third: Verse 260

Verse 260 of the chapter mentions how Ibrahim - peace be upon him – requested his Lord to show him how He revives the dead, not for any doubt about the power of God, but to further reassure his heart. He was then commanded to take four birds and place a part of them on each mountain, after which they came to life again and flew towards him.

2. The story of Ibrahim in Surat Al-Imran (Ch. 3)

Surat Al-Imran did not mention any scenes or parts from the story of Ibrahim himself, but it spoke about what it means to be a true follower of Ibrahim and the true religion that he was upon. The chapter was revealed regarding the dispute between the Jews, Christians, and the pagan Arabs, showing that none of them have a true connection with Ibrahim (peace be upon him).

- Verse 33 mentions the status of the family of Ibrahim and the family of Imran given to them by God over the rest of humanity.
- Verse 65 rejects the affiliation of Jews and Christians to Ibrahim.
- Verse 67 showed that Ibrahim was a pure Muslim who submitted to God alone, not a Jew, Christian, or polytheist.
- Verse 68 clarifies that the true followers of Ibrahim are those who believed in him from his people, then Muhammad and his nation.
- Verses 95 to 97 command the Jews and Christians to follow the religion of Ibrahim and to enter Islam. They refer to Ibrahim building the Ka’bah, the first house set up for the worship of God on earth, and mention Ibrahim’s stand (maqam) by the Sacred House, and command the Muslims to make pilgrimage to the Sacred House.

3. The story of Ibrahim in Surat al-An'am (Ch. 6)

Surat al-An'am relates some of the story of Ibrahim in verses 74 to 86.

They present part of the dialogue between Ibrahim and his father, in which Ibrahim denounces that his father worships other than God. The verses then speak of Ibrahim's dialogue and debate with his people, when he proved to them, using clear logical arguments, the falseness of worshipping planets. He announced his faith in God and that he has dissociated himself from them. The verses then referred to the prophets from his descendants, which shows that he is the father of the prophets. Finally, verse 116 clarified the true religion of Ibrahim.

4. The story of Ibrahim in Surat Hud (Ch. 11)

Surat Hud speaks about the story of Ibrahim in verses 69 to 76. The verses refer to the incident in which the angels came to visit Ibrahim in the form of human beings, though he did not recognise them. They then refused to eat from his calf that he prepared for his guests, because angels do not eat. They then gave Ibrahim and his wife Sarah the good news of the birth of their son Isaac, and their response to Sarah's astonishment. They then told Ibrahim of their mission to destroy the deviated people of Lot. The verses then told us about Ibrahim's personality that he upholds throughout. 'Truly, Ibrahim was forbearing, tender-hearted, and ever turning [to his Lord].' (Hud: 75)

5. The story of Ibrahim in Surat Ibrahim (Ch. 14)

Surat Ibrahim, named after him, speaks about a scene from his story in verses (35-41). The verses show how Ibrahim (peace be upon him) left his son and wife in an uncultivated valley in the Hijaz, supplicating to his Lord to make this location a place of gathering for people, to provide them with goods, and to protect him and his children from idolatry. The verses mention Ibrahim's gratitude to God for the blessings bestowed upon him, including the birth of Ishmael and Isaac (peace be upon them).

6. The story of Ibrahim in Surat al-Hijr (Ch. 15)

Verses 51 to 60 of Surat al-Hijr mention the incident in which the angels came to Ibrahim in human form, their giving Ibrahim and his wife Sarah the good news of the birth of their son Isaac, and then telling Ibrahim of their mission to destroy the people of Lot.

7. The story of Ibrahim in Surat Maryam (Ch. 19)

Verses 41 to 50 of Surat Maryam mention Ibrahim calling his father to abandon disbelief and to enter the religion of God, though his father rejects his call. Ibrahim then abandons his people and God gifts him his son Isaac, then Jacob.

8. The story of Ibrahim in Surat al-Anbiya (Ch. 21)

Verses 41 to 50 of Surat al-Anbiya speak of Ibrahim denouncing his father and his people's worship of other than Allah, him calling them to true faith in Allah. It mentions how Ibrahim destroyed their idols before being judged by them in public, but Ibrahim was able to overcome them and their claims with sound arguments. Allah then saved him from the fire that he was thrown into, before Ibrahim left to the blessed land of Palestine with Lot. God also grants him a son Isaac, then Jacob.

9. The story of Ibrahim in Surat al-Hajj (Ch. 22)

Verses 26 to 29 of Surat al-Hajj presented a snapshot of his story that was relevant to the theme of the chapter: Hajj, its rituals, sacrifice, and the Sacred House. The verses in Surat al-Hajj refer to Ibrahim constructing the Sacred House of God, preparing it and purifying it for the worshippers and the pilgrims, and Ibrahim's call to Hajj, inviting people to perform the pilgrimage, its rituals, and to glorify the sanctities of God.

In the last verse of the chapter, verse 78, a reminder is given to Muslims about the duty that God has imposed on them, showing them their connection to their father Ibrahim (peace be upon him) and that he is the one who called them 'Muslims'.

10. The story of Ibrahim in Surat al-Shu'ara (Ch. 26)

Verses 69 to 89 of this chapter highlight how Ibrahim rejected the disbelief of his father and people, calling them to abandon idolatry, and inviting them to accept Allah's religion. He announces his complete disassociation from their gods, instead turning to Allah, praying to Allah to save him on the Day of Judgment.

11. The story of Ibrahim in Surat al-Ankabut (Ch. 29)

Verses 16 to 27 of Surat al-Ankabut speak of Ibrahim denouncing his people's worship of other than Allah, him calling them to worship Allah

alone. He also explains some of God's attributes to them. The chapter shows how they responded to his call by threatening to kill or burn him, but was saved by Allah from their plots. Ibrahim migrated to Palestine with Lot and was blessed with a son Isaac, who was then blessed with Jacob.

12. The story of Ibrahim in Surat al-Saffat (Ch. 37)

Verses 83 to 113 of Surat al-Saffat describe Ibrahim as having a pure heart. The chapter mentions how Ibrahim denounced the idol worship of his people, destroyed their idols himself, and was then saved from the fire into which he was thrown. His son Isma'il is born and later on Ibrahim sees a dream in which he is commanded to slaughter Isma'il. God then blesses him with another son Isaac, a prophet, and blesses Ibrahim's righteous offspring.

13. The story of Ibrahim in Surat al-Dhariyat (Ch. 51)

In verses 24 to 34 of this chapter, there is mention of the incident in which the angels came to visit Ibrahim, giving Ibrahim and his wife Sarah the good news of the birth of their son Isaac, and responding to Sarah's astonishment about the news. They then told Ibrahim of their mission to destroy the people of Lot.

14. The story of Ibrahim in Surat al-Mumtahinah (Ch. 60)

Verses 4 to 6 speak about a stance of great faith by Ibrahim and his believing followers in which they announced their clear dissociation from their people who were idolators, declaring enmity and hatred towards them unless they believe in God alone. The chapter commands all believers to follow Ibrahim in this stance of his and explains Ibrahim's attitude towards his father.

We can thus say that the story of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was mentioned successively throughout the Holy Qur'an in several places, as a lesson and reminder for every believer, starting from Surat al-Baqarah, then throughout the Qur'an in many chapters.

15. The story of Ibrahim in Other Chapters of the Qur'an

There are other chapters that allude to the story of Ibrahim, including:

- Surat al-Nisa, verse 125, praises those who followed the religion of Ibrahim, and mentions God taking Ibrahim as a friend.

- Surat al-Tawbah, verse 114, states that Ibrahim (peace be upon him) sought forgiveness for his father, but then dissociating himself from his father when it became clear to him that he was an enemy of God.
- Surat al-Nahl, verse 120, describes Ibrahim as being an upright leader, obedient to God, and not a polytheist. Verse 123 commands us to follow the religion of Ibrahim.
- Surat al-Zukhruf, verse 26, mentions Ibrahim dissociating himself from his disbelieving people.
- Surat al-Hadid, verse 26, makes reference is to the prophethood of Noah and Ibrahim (peace be upon them) and that the message and prophethood will continue in their offspring.

There are also other chapters that suffice with the mention of Ibrahim in the context of mentioning God's other prophets and messengers, or in the context of praising some of their stances. Examples of this are found in Surat Yusuf, al-Ahzab, Saad, al-Shura, al-Najm, and al-A'la.¹³³

Ibrahim was mentioned in the Qur'an ninety-nine (99) times in twenty-five (25) chapters, and in sixty-three (63) verses.

The Qur'an did not mention the place or time of Ibrahim's birth, nor a description of his childhood and upbringing, so scholars have differed over the place and time of his birth. I have expanded on this elsewhere in the book.

Al-Nasafi mentioned that there were 2640 years between Noah and Ibrahim. Al-Tha'labi mentioned that the birth of Ibrahim was 1263 years after Nuh's flood and 3337 years after the creation of Adam. However, the dates mentioned in the Torah, transmitted by the ancients, do not seem so accurate, nor very consistent.¹³⁴

¹³³ Al-Khalidi, 1/311.

¹³⁴ Risalat al-Anbiya min Shu'aib ila Isa, 1\183.

Chapter 2

Ibrahim's story in the following chapters: Surat al-An'am, Maryam, al-Anbiya, al-Shu'ara, al-Ankabut, and al-Saffat.



Section 1: The story of Ibrahim in Surat al-An'am and his dialogue with his father and his people about the worship of planets and stars.

Section 2: The story of Ibrahim, peace be upon him, in Surat Maryam, peace be upon her, and his dialogue with his father.

Section 3: The story of Ibrahim, peace be upon him, in Surat Al-Anbiya, and his dialogue with his father and his idolatrous people.

Section 4: The story of Ibrahim, peace be upon him, in Surat al-Shu'ara.

Section 5: The story of Ibrahim, peace be upon him, in Surat Al-Ankabut.

Section 6: The story of Ibrahim, peace be upon him, in Surat Al-Saffat.

In this chapter, we try to shed light on the phase of calling to God Almighty, believing in Him, Ibrahim's dialogues with his father and his people, his debates, the strength of his arguments, and the trials, migrations, and tribulations to which he was subjected. At this stage, Ibrahim had sound judgment, was guided by Allah, and reached the level of certainty. His only concern was to guide his father and his people in the land of Iraq to the straight path.

Section 1:

**The story of Ibrahim in Surat al-An'am and his
dialogue with his father and his people about the
worship of planets and stars.**

Allah Almighty said:

And [remember] when Ibrahim said to his father, Âzar, 'Do you take idols as gods? It is clear to me that you and your people are entirely misguided.' We thus showed Ibrahim the wonders of the heavens and the earth, so he would be sure in faith. When the night grew dark upon him, he saw a star and said, 'This is my Lord!' But when it set, he said, 'I do not love things that set.' Then when he saw the moon rising, he said, 'This one is my Lord!' But when it disappeared, he said, 'If my Lord does not guide me, I will certainly be one of the misguided people.' Then when he saw the sun shining, he said, 'This must be my Lord—it is the greatest!' But again when it set, he declared, 'O my people! I totally reject whatever you associate [with Allah in worship]. I have turned my face towards the One Who has originated the heavens and the earth—being upright—and I am not one of the polytheists.'

And his people argued with him. He responded, 'Are you arguing with me about Allah, while He has guided me? I am not afraid of whatever [idols] you associate with Him—[none can harm me,] unless my Lord so wills. My Lord encompasses everything in [His] knowledge. Will you not be mindful? And how should I fear your associate-gods, while you have no fear in associating [others] with Allah—a practice He has never authorized? Which side has more right to security? [Tell me] if you really know!' It is [only] those who are faithful and do not tarnish their faith with falsehood who are guaranteed security and are [rightly] guided. This was the argument We gave Ibrahim against his people. We elevate in rank whoever We please. Surely your Lord is All-Wise, All-Knowing.

And We blessed him with Isaac and Jacob. We guided them all as We previously guided Noah and those among his descendants: David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Musa, and Harun. This is how We reward the good-doers.

Likewise, [We guided] Zachariah, Yahya, Isa, and Elias, who were all of the righteous. [We also guided] Ishmael, Al-Yasa, Jonah, and Lot, favouring each over other people [of their time]. And [We favoured] some of their forefathers, their descendants, and their brothers. We chose them and guided them to the Straight Path. This is Allah's guidance with which He guides whoever He wills of His servants. Had they associated others with Him [in worship], their [good] deeds would have been wasted. Those were the ones to whom We gave the Scripture, wisdom, and prophethood. But if these [pagans] disbelieve in this [message], then We have already entrusted it to a people who will never disbelieve in it. These [prophets] were [rightly] guided by Allah, so follow their guidance. Say, 'I ask no reward of you for this [Quran]—it is a reminder to the whole world.' (Al-An'am: 74-90)

The personality of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) occupies a prominent position in the Qur'anic discourse; a central figure among all the messengers mentioned in the Holy Qur'an. Perhaps this position is the result of his status among various religious groups. The Jews, Christians, and even pagans, affirm his greatness and claim to be his followers.

He is without doubt one of the most important religious figures in history. Even palaeontologists have not been more concerned about searching for the history of anyone, as much as Ibrahim.

Surat al-An'am relates some parts of the story of Ibrahim, namely his debates with the worshippers of the planets, the moon, and the sun. It is the only story in the chapter which deals with responding to misinformation and establishing the proof against the idolators and all those who negate the oneness of Allah and prophethood. It therefore comes as no surprise that Surat al-An'am does not mention the story of any prophet, except Ibrahim. His story is mentioned in a way that fits with the general themes and objectives of the chapter. That is, establishing the oneness of Allah and nullifying all things that are worshipped besides Him. So the story of Ibrahim is mentioned in Surat al-An'am to rebut those who claim to be upon the religion of Ibrahim, while worshipping idols and despising monotheism. This is how the story of Ibrahim began; denouncing his father, Azar, and his people for their clear misguidance in worshipping idols.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Abbas, p. 289.

The story of Ibrahim in Surat al-An'am is presented through events consistent with the subject of the chapter. This is because Surat al-An'am is the chapter of proofs and arguments in defence of sound creed. It contains irrefutable proof against those who deviated from the religion of Ibrahim and brought idols to the Ka'bah that he built.

In these noble verses, after mentioning the prophets, we find a clear, sufficient, and complete confirmation that they are the ones who Allah has given the scripture, wisdom, and prophecy. Though some people still refuse anything but disbelief, there are many who have been honoured and guided by God with sound faith.

We must note here that many opinions imply that these verses show that Ibrahim was genuine when he said about each of the planets, 'this is my Lord.' They claim that he actually believed what he said at the time because that was all that was known at the time. We completely reject such claims about the leader of the monotheists and the father of the prophets (peace be upon him). Unfortunately, many books mention these opinions, so we should beware of understanding these verses like this. Rather, Ibrahim made these rhetoric statements denouncing his people and showing them how illogical their beliefs are.¹³⁶

We see Ibrahim - peace be upon him – here gradually encouraging them to think about what they worship, each time claiming that something bigger is his god. His people heard him saying, 'This is my Lord', three times, first pointing to a planet, then to the moon, and finally to the sun. Each time he reveals a flaw in these so-called gods that are not ever-present, and thus not fit to be worshipped, each time contradicting what he previously stated about these gods. At the end of this dialogue, Ibrahim declares that he is free of what they associate with God and that he will not turn in worship except to God alone, the creator of the heavens and earth, the everlasting, and eternal. There is no god but Him. He has no equal or partner.

Be careful then, dear reader, of thinking that Ibrahim hesitated about his belief when God showed him the kingdom of the heavens and earth, so further strengthen the certainty of his faith, which is what was mentioned in the beginning of these verses. 'We also showed Ibrahim the wonders of the heavens and the earth, so he would be sure in faith.' (Al-An'am: 75)

¹³⁶ Abbas, p. 191.

The author of Al-Bahr al-Muhit quotes Mujahid saying: ‘The sky was opened for Ibrahim so he saw with his own eyes the lower kingdom. God showed him some of the hidden wonders of the universe that prove His lordship and oneness, so that Ibrahim’s faith settles.’¹³⁷

It is therefore not reasonable to think that the Ibrahim was confused about his belief, and that he would actually say to a planet, the moon, or sun, ‘This is my Lord.’ His saying was only a rational way of objecting to their beliefs by gradually cornering them into admitting that their beliefs are unreasonable and invalid.

There is sufficient evidence to prove that Ibrahim did make these statements out of doubt by reading what God Almighty said at the end of this incident in the same chapter:

‘This was the argument We gave Ibrahim against his people. We elevate in rank whoever We please. Surely your Lord is All-Wise, All-Knowing.’ (Al-An’am: 83)

Ibn Kathir (may Allah have mercy on him) said: ‘This scene is one of debate, not one of contemplation or research. Ibrahim (peace be upon him) is above having doubts about his Lord, when he is the father of the prophets and the leader of the Muslims.

This view is also the one supported by the majority of commentators, past and present¹³⁸, including: Al-Baghawi, Al-Zamakhshari, Al-Razi, Ibn Kathir, Abu Al-Saud, Tahir b. Ashur, Abd al-Rahman al-Sa’di, Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi, Muhammad Rashid Rida, Muhammad al-Amin al-Shanqiti, and others.

1. Al-An’am: 74

Allah, Most High, said:

‘And [remember] when Ibrahim said to his father, Azar, ‘Do you take idols as gods? It is clear to me that you and your people are entirely misguided.’ (Verse 74)

Abu Hayyan (d. 654 H/1256 CE) said: ‘When Allah mentioned their worship of that which does not benefit or harm (Al-An’am: 71), it was

¹³⁷ Al-Bahr al-Muhit, 4/165.

¹³⁸ Sindi, p. 165.

appropriate to mention the story of Ibrahim, because he is their great grandfather and to show them that Muhammad's denouncing of idol worship is exactly what Ibrahim did with his father and his people. This way, the verses allude to the importance of following those rightly guided forefathers. Similarly, the other religious groups also claimed to respect Ibrahim.¹³⁹

Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 310 H) said:

‘God Almighty says to his Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): ‘Remember, O Muhammad, the proofs and arguments that you use against your opponents, which show the falsehood of their gods and truth of the religion that you are upon. Recall that the truth that you call to is the same truth that Ibrahim called his people to, refuting the idolatry of his people and relying solely upon God as guardian and helper, not the idols. Thus take Ibrahim as your role model in this and follow his way, and make his life in your people an example for yourself, when he said to his father Azar: ‘Do you take idols as gods? It is clear to me that you and your people are entirely misguided.’

Ibrahim is renouncing his father for worshipping idols that do no harm instead of Allah who created us and perfected His creation. He informs his father that he is upon clear misguidance, along with all his people who worship idols.¹⁴⁰

Ibn Kathir similarly notes this meaning out and said that Ibrahim is pointing out to his people that they have left common sense and instead adopted a way of ignorance and doubt.¹⁴¹

Abd al-Hamid Tahmaz says that Ibrahim's question to his father is a rhetorical one intended to renounce his actions. The Arabic word *tatakhidhu* (translated here as ‘take’) implies that Ibrahim's father was involved in making idols. Some historical narrations claim that he was an idol maker.

It seems that Ibrahim became stricter and more explicit in the way he addressed his father only after his father insisted upon disbelief, because Ibrahim addressed him with a lot of kindness and gentleness throughout, as we shall see in Surat Maryam, despite the harsh ways in which his father would respond. Ibrahim was confidently able to announce, ‘it is clear to

¹³⁹ Al-Bahr al-Muhit, 4/168.

¹⁴⁰ Tafsir al-Tabari, 7/242.

¹⁴¹ Tafsir ibn Kathir, 3/283.

me that you and your people are entirely misguided’, because the certainty of his faith and strong trust in Allah gave him such certainty, despite being alone in the face of his own father and all his people.

2. Al-An’am: 75

Allah, Most High, said:

‘We thus showed Ibrahim the wonders of the heavens and the earth, so he would be sure in faith.’ (Verse 75)

The noble verse indicates that man’s contemplation of the universe, the creation of the heavens and earth, is one of the means of recognising his and their creator. He Almighty is the creator of everything; all things are created by His command. This alone is sufficient in making the leading astronomers of today claim that the universe’s vast expansiveness, detailed structure, controlled movements, and the precision of all particles show that there must be an external force or reference point. This force must be different from the universe, not limited by the dimensions of space or time, nor made up of any of the forms of matter or energy that we know. It is as if they are speaking the truth that our Lord revealed about Himself when He said: ‘There is nothing like Him, and He is the All-Hearing, All-Seeing.’ (Al-Shura: 11).¹⁴²

The Arabic word *malakut* (kingdom) contains a meaning beyond the mere kingdom of God, but refers to the hidden secrets and wonders of the universe. It is as though Allah thus showed Ibrahim the detailed secrets of the universe that lead him to certainty about the truth of the One God and that He alone is the creator of all this. Such insight is partially possible for all humans if they properly use their intellect, sight, and hearing. This is why Allah commands us to contemplate in this way in several verses.

Have they ever reflected on the wonders of the heavens and the earth, and everything Allah has created, and that perhaps their end is near? So what message after this [Quran] would they believe in? (Al-A’raf: 185)

Contemplating over the universe and thinking about their origin and creation is not specific to Ibrahim, but something that we have all been commanded to do. However, we can confidently say that Ibrahim’s insight

¹⁴² Al-Najjar, Z. (1/303)

of the kingdom of the heavens and earth is more complete than that of anyone else, due to the great intellectual abilities with which God Almighty has honoured him. The prophets (peace be upon them) have the most perfect minds and bodies, let alone Ibrahim, Allah's friend and the leader of the monotheists, who Allah has given sound judgment and perfect intellect from a young age as Allah mentions in Surat al-Anbiya (v. 51).¹⁴³

Shaykh Muhammad Mutawalli al-Sha'rawi mentioned that the word *malakut* contains a meaning beyond the word *mulk* (kingdom), like *rahamut*, which mean *rahmah* (mercy) and beyond. According to him, the *malakut* is the unseen kingdom beyond what humans can normally witness. *Mulk* is thus what appears before you, while *malakut* goes beyond that. And the greater one's sincerity in their connection to their Lord, the more insight that Allah grants a person to contemplate and understand the secrets of His universe.¹⁴⁴

Through the guidance, light of faith, sound judgment, insight, sincerity to God Almighty, and resistance to falsehood that God granted Ibrahim, he was able to witness the secrets hidden in the heart of the universe, revealing to him the signs that prove Allah's oneness and His worthiness of being worshipped alone.

Al-Tabari (may Allah have mercy on him), after quoting a number of traditions, said that the view is most correct is the view of those who said God Almighty meant his saying, 'We thus showed Ibrahim the wonders of the heavens and the earth', that Allah showed him what He created within them, such as the sun, the moon, the stars, trees, beasts, and other things that show the greatness of his authority in the heavens and earth. He showed him both apparent and hidden realities, as we mentioned earlier about the meaning of *malakut*.¹⁴⁵

Al-Bahi al-Khawli notes that Ibrahim being shown the wonders of the heavens and earth, means that he was granted a special ability and strength to do this. A deeper insight of the heart, beyond the mere ability to see with one's eyes, with the sole aim of attaining a type of certainty that the leading prophets were blessed with. Allah thus gave Ibrahim sound senses

¹⁴³ Al-Tafsir al-Mawdu'i, 2/463.

¹⁴⁴ Tafsir al-Sha'rawi, 6/3742.

¹⁴⁵ Al-Adawi, M. (2015), The Stories of the Prophets, 2/79.

and intellect through which he was able to recognise his Lord and His attributes through the universe that is before him.

We should also point out that the insight referred to here is the key to the divine knowledge in the kingdom of the heavens and earth. It is the basis of spiritual guidance by which one distinguishes between truth and falsehood, then living in accordance with this realization and understanding.¹⁴⁶

Al-Bahi then mentioned that there two meanings of the word *malakut*:

The First: The kingdom of the heaven and earth that is witnessed by our senses; the sun, moon, stars, mountains, trees, and animals, and other creatures that we perceive through our senses or by means of scientific research.

This includes the kingdom of God which contains the many wonderful creatures, their varying types and forms, their movement, composition, growth, their benefits, and all other knowledge that we are still not aware of today.

The Second: What this visible kingdom alludes to and indicates; the creator of the universe and the insight that such knowledge opens up. For when the mind ponders this great kingdom, it only looks at the inevitable link between the causer and the effect. The only thing that one sees is the creator of this vast kingdom. If one can see any material thing, the mind appreciates the competence of the maker of that thing and the excellence of its making. Similarly, and Allah has the greater, all creation appear to the sound mind as clear signs of Allah's oneness and divinity.

Though humans cannot enumerate the many creatures in this universe, each creature has its own type of greatness and contains signs of Allah's greatness. The whole universe appears as a *malakut* that is a great sign of the existence of the creator, His oneness, power, and wisdom. So when we recite, 'We thus showed Ibrahim the wonders of the heavens and the earth', we understand that Ibrahim was shown the wonders of this kingdom with both senses of sight, his physical eyes and the insight of his heart.

This verse truly does show the connection that Ibrahim had with the universe. The apparent meaning of the verse does not restrict or limit this

¹⁴⁶ Khawli, p. 46.

connection, but rather this was an intellectual and spiritual journey that started from the moment he became aware of himself, moving through the kingdom of the heavens and earth, gradually reasoning and gaining greater understanding, until eventually reaching complete certainty. The passage made certainty (*yaqin*) the goal of showing Ibrahim used in the present tense, indicating continuity and repetition, as the grammarians say.

Al-Fakhr al-Razi said: ‘Certainty is a knowledge that occurs after uncertainty and unclarity is removed by contemplation. So when the signs and arguments become many, there is a greater reason for complete certainty, since every one of these signs has a type of influence and a force. These then continue to accumulate until they lead one to the level of unhesitant certainty.’

It should also be clear that thinking and contemplating are not merely finding proofs, but they are a learning process at the same time.

It is natural that the personality of Ibrahim is largely made up of his natural traits. The spiritual entity of man only consists of the beliefs, principles, and values contained in his conscience. The kingdom referred to in the verse is the greatest source, after revelation, of supplying man with a fuel for the soul. The knowledge that a person obtains from the lessons, wisdoms, and signs of creation is the source of provision by which the soul comes to life. This is what gives humans their humanity. For instance, knowing the meaning of generosity, mercy, or kindness, is knowledge, and at the same time it is a value and moral asset with which the conscience is enriched and valued. This asset is an infinite supply of goodness spent by the individual, rising above all false values.

In light of the clarity and depth of his view of the universe, the features of his personality were clearly and characterized by specific guidelines which determined his relationship with the people and circumstances around him. These guidelines are based on clarity in distinguishing between truth and falsehood, and a pure and honourable conscience that loves the truth and defends it, and hates falsehood and renounces it. The values of truth extracted from meanings that the mind understands do not idly exist in the mind, the way we perceive a mountain, a cow, and a tree. Rather, the values of truth are associated with a deep feeling of admiration, glorification, and joy, which determines our relationship with external ideas and

actions that agree or oppose these values. We shall see the impact of this in Ibrahim when he faced. He did not view their idol worship as just a point of view that opposes his, but he viewed idolatry through that conscience that is opposed to the spread of falsehood.¹⁴⁷

‘so he would be sure in faith.’

a. Certainty (*Yaqin*)

Yaqin is certain knowledge that does not change or hesitate in the heart. It is to faith as the soul is to the body. It is *yaqin* that dictates people’s true status in the sight of Allah. The righteous compete for nothing greater than it and have no concern beyond it. When patience and certainty come together, the outcome is leadership in faith. As Allah Almighty said:

‘We raised from among them leaders, guiding by Our command, when they patiently endured and firmly believed in Our signs.’ (al-Sajdah: 24)

b. Types of *Yaqin*

- **Yaqin Khabar:** This means that the heart settles and comfortably accepts a statement that is related.
- **Yaqin Dalalah:** While believing the statement, one also has proofs to support the validity of the statement. Most verses that relate to *tawhid* and *iman* are of this category.
- **Yaqin Mushahadah:** This is when a reported statement is as certain as seeing it with their own eyes. Belief in the unseen with the heart would thus be like seeing it.

Abdullah al-Harawi spoke about *yaqin* in his book *Manazil al-Sa’irin* and explained that it is three levels:

- The First: ***ilm al-yaqin***. This is the acceptance of the truth that appears, that is hidden, and what is established by the truth.
- The Second: ***ain al-yaqin***. This is when you witnessing pierces the veil of knowledge and thus does not require to be proven in the first place.
- The Third: ***haqq al-yaqin***. This is the greatest level of certainty and is one that is beyond even that which one sees.

Shaykh Muhammad Mutawalli al-Sha’rawi said: ‘Ibrahim was one of those who had complete certainty throughout his life, because God made

¹⁴⁷ Al-Khuli, p. 52.

him aware of what is beyond the knowledge and realities that appear to everyone. An example of that certainty is when he was taken to be thrown into the fire, Gabriel came to him and said: ‘Do you have any need?’ Ibrahim replied: ‘As for from you, then no.’

He says this, knowing that fire burns, but that is only according to natural and normal rules. He knows with certainty that the one who created it gave it the power to burn and He can take that power away whenever He wants. Therefore, God did not extinguish the fire by means of natural causes, but God made it a clear sign for his opponents, making the truth clear. As if Allah said: ‘O fire, I created in you the power to burn, and I tell you now: Do not burn.’ Allah said: ‘We ordered, ‘O fire! Be cool and safe for Ibrahim!’ (al-Anbiya: 69).

Ibrahim’s faith truly was tested throughout, but he showed nothing but unhesitant certainty in Allah. He refused to seek help from Jibril when he was offered it as he was about to be thrown into the fire. Then after reaching old age and finally being blessed with a son who was so beloved to him. Knowing that humans reach a stage in life in which there are more beloved to them than themselves and parents love to see their children achieve some of the things they themselves could not achieve. After all this, he was tested with his own son when he was told to slaughter him. What a great test indeed. It was not through direct revelation, but through a dream that he was commanded by Allah to slaughter his son. However, the dreams of prophets are true, so Ibrahim knew that he had to submit to the decree of his Lord.

Therefore, if you see any person whose affliction has been prolonged in anything; sickness, misfortune, money, or otherwise, then know that he was not content with Allah’s decree. For had he been content, the affliction would have ended. So in reality it is people who prolong their own affliction. Ibrahim understood this issue, so when he was commanded to slaughter his son, he did not want to delay fulfilling his Lord’s command, nor to show any displeasure in Allah’s decree. The Qur’an relates Ibrahim as saying, ‘O my dear son! I have seen in a dream that I [must] sacrifice you.’

Through this, Ibrahim wants his son to also gain the reward of submission to Allah, which shows Ibrahim’s love for his son. Isma’il replied: ‘O

my dear father! Do as you are commanded. Allah willing, you will find me steadfast.’ (al-Saffat: 102).

The Qur’an then confirms that they both submitted to their Lord’s decree. ‘Then when they submitted [to Allah’s Will], and Ibrahim laid him on the side of his forehead [for sacrifice].’ (al-Saffat: 103). It is this submission that made them worthy of being raised. So the Qur’an says in the following verse, ‘We called out to him, ‘O Ibrahim! You have already fulfilled the vision.’ Indeed, this is how We reward the good-doers.’ (al-Saffat: 104-105).

Allah then ransomed his son with a great sacrifice, so he slaughtered a ram instead. In addition to this, Allah blessed him with another son. All because he understood the truth that was revealed to him. If a person is afflicted with a calamity, they should thus submit to Allah’s decree and say, ‘so long as this not because of my own doings, but something which Allah has decreed for me, then this is His will. He is the all-Wise and I am certain that there is a wisdom behind this, even if I do not understand it.’¹⁴⁸

Ibrahim’s test of slaughtering his son was indeed a great one, but Ibrahim’s faith and certainty in his Lord was greater. His heart settled in acceptance of his Lord’s command and he fulfilled the command with no hesitation or displeasure. Similarly, Isma’il when his father informed him of Allah’s command. They both submitted to Allah’s command, so Allah ransomed his son with a ram when Ibrahim rushed to fulfilling Allah’s decree without hesitation or delay.¹⁴⁹

3. Al-An’am: 76-79

Allah, Most High, said:

‘When the night grew dark upon him, he saw a star and said, ‘This is my Lord!’ But when it set, he said, ‘I do not love things that set.’ Then when he saw the moon rising, he said, ‘This one is my Lord!’ But when it disappeared, he said, ‘If my Lord does not guide me, I will certainly be one of the misguided people.’ Then when he saw the sun shining, he said, ‘This must be my Lord—it is the greatest!’ But again when it set, he declared, ‘O my people! I totally reject whatever you associate [with

¹⁴⁸ Tafsir al-Sha’rawi (6/3748).

¹⁴⁹ Muna b. Dawud, p. 48.

Allah in worship]. I have turned my face towards the One Who has originated the heavens and the earth—being upright—and I am not one of the polytheists.’ (al-An’am: 76-79)

These verses relates how Ibrahim debated his people to show them the invalidity of planet worship and the falsehood of their belief that they are gods that influence the events that occur on earth. It was known from Ibrahim (peace be upon him) that in his debates he would resort to using material analogies, to draw their attention to the truth that is tangible and before their eyes. So when he wanted to show his people the helplessness of the stars, that they are created beings like all other beings, and that they do not deserve to be glorified and worshipped, he waited until night for the stars to appear in the darkness.

Ibrahim made an assumption that he did not believe in and was clearly untrue, doing so to lead the opponent towards the clear truth. He sat with those who worship the planets, and perhaps this sitting took place in their temple in which they gather. When the evening came they looked at these, describing them poetically, in meditation and contemplation about these apparent, yet hidden, so clear, yet unknown beings that illuminated the sky. When the evening came and the stars and planets began to appear in the sky, Ibrahim proceeded to debate them using sound intellect, intelligence, and keenness to guide his people to the oneness of God Almighty.

1. When the night grew dark upon him, he saw a star and said, ‘This is my Lord!’ But when it set, he said, ‘I do not love things that set.’ (Verse 76)

He said to his people, ‘this is my Lord.’ He fairly and objectively relays their belief exactly as they hold it, seeking the honest truth, not merely to defend his personal opinions. This attitude makes it more likely for the opponent to accept what you say. Then after relaying their belief, he refutes it using sound arguments. Ibrahim here teaches us the ideal way of debating others. There is no doubt that by this he captured the attention of his people, drawing them to what he is about to say. He then waited until the star disappeared.

‘But when it set’, the people were again surprised to hear Ibrahim remark, ‘I do not love things that set.’ He did not want to be explicit about the reality of things yet, nor did he say, ‘I do not worship things that set’,

but instead he gradually lead them to the truth by first reminding them that these stars appear and disappear.

The one who dialogues or debates regarding faith should therefore use the best and most accurate terms, leading his opponents towards the necessary truth. In his statement, ‘I do not love things that set’, there is an indication that he neither worships them, because worship (*‘ibadah*) contains the meaning of love, for without love there is no worship.¹⁵⁰

Things that set are not ever-present, which is the trait of a weak created being. Whereas Allah is always present and always strong. Setting also implies doing so at a specific time and place, thus being bound by the forces of time and space, something that cannot be ascribed to the Creator.¹⁵¹

Some people though that Ibrahim, during his dialogue, was himself contemplating and trying to reach the truth. However, this view is inconsistent with the religious infallibility of the prophets and their being protected from disbelief and idolatry throughout their lives. Especially, when Allah has said about Ibrahim, ‘And indeed, We had granted Ibrahim his sound judgment early on, for We knew him well [to be worthy of it].’ (Al-Anbiya, 21:51)

The proponents of this view argued that it was not realistic that his people waited with him until the star disappeared. But this claim does not stand if we know that the people used to glorify and worship the stars, eagerly waiting for them to appear to perform their rituals and ceremonies. The people were completely immersed in their worship of the star.

The words of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) had an impact on them, so they began to think, doubt, and even show discomfort with their gods and with Ibrahim. Logic betrayed them in replying to him, and their worship was incapable of responding to reason and logic, so distress became apparent on their faces.

Ibrahim then surprised them and eased their minds when he saw the rising of the moon and proclaimed that it was God Almighty. The whispers of relief and voices of approval flowed among the people. They looked at the moon, fascinated by its rays and its radiant beauty. However, not so long after, they noticed it too began to set and disappear, so their hearts

¹⁵⁰ Abu Zahra, M. (2008), *Zahrat al-Tafasir*, 5/2561.

¹⁵¹ *Al-Tafsir al-Mawdu'i*, 2/466.

began to beat along with its setting, and they expected the conclusion and what Ibrahim would say.¹⁵²

2. Then when he saw the moon rising, he said, ‘This one is my Lord!’ But when it disappeared, he said, ‘If my Lord does not guide me, I will certainly be one of the misguided people.’ (Verse 77)

Here, Ibrahim became more explicit and direct with the truth, so admits that he cannot be guided to the truth without the guidance of his Lord. Man is in need of Allah’s guidance in explaining the truth first, which is the role of the messengers, then secondly Allah’s help is needed to have the ability to follow that truth, and He guides whoever He wills. Humanity will for sure remain misguided and astray without the help of the Lord of the world and the guidance of the messengers.

When Ibrahim said, ‘If my Lord does not guide me, I will certainly be one of the misguided people’, he alluded that guidance cannot be in the worship of stars or the moon. The people’s faces were filled with gloom and they remained silent, continuing to contemplate until the morning. Then the sun shines bright and beautiful, so Ibrahim (peace be upon him) repeated his same words for the third time.

3. Then when he saw the sun shining, he said, ‘This must be my Lord—it is the greatest!’ But again when it set, he declared, ‘O my people! I totally reject whatever you associate [with Allah in worship]. (Verse 78)

The sun is referred to in Arabic in the feminine form, but he addressed it here in the masculine form to avoid any feminine attribution to Allah. So Ibrahim proclaimed that this sun is bigger than the stars and moon, so it must be the true god.

Ibrahim did not suffice with only announcing his complete dissociation from all the manifestations of disbelief and idolatry that his people were upon, but rather he began to introduce them to the true God, to whom they should turn alone in worship and obedience.

Ibrahim (peace be upon him) used gradualism to call his people to Islam, proving to the star worshippers that every planet, including the sun, is destined to disappear. He used logic to have them arrive at the conclusion that worshipping planets is invalid, though initially using terms that those

¹⁵² Abd al-Halim Mahmud, p. 115.

being addressed are comfortable hearing. There are different situations in which Allah allows people to say things that appear to be false when done with a specific intention, such as the case with Ibrahim here.

Intentions and circumstances have an impact on the ruling. For example, Allah said in the Qur'an, 'but those who embrace disbelief wholeheartedly.' In other words, they are the true disbelievers. However, 'not those who are forced while their hearts are firm in faith.' (An-Nahl: 106). So if Allah has allowed a person to pronounce a word of disbelief to save his own life as an individual, then surely Ibrahim is more worthy of being allowed to this for the sake trying to guide a whole nation from star worship.¹⁵³

Ibrahim explicitly disavowed polytheism and disbelief, because he had clarified the matter and gradually led them to the conclusion that is consistent with logic and truth, so if any sane person hears his conclusion, he has no choice but to agree. As a believing person, Ibrahim would not deceive himself, nor his people, so the guided person knows that disavowing polytheism is the first step to pure monotheism, after which one enters into the greatest of righteous deeds that is affirming the oneness of God and worshipping him alone.¹⁵⁴

Ibrahim mentioned that he is the one who disavows idolatry and turns to Allah alone, so that he can be a role model and example to follow for them.

4. I have turned my face towards the One Who has originated the heavens and the earth—being upright—and I am not one of the polytheists.'

Turning the face to Allah alone is a metaphor for submitting to Allah, obeying Him, and sincerely worshipping Him alone. The face is used because it is the most honourable part of a person's body and because one turns it first towards what he intends. Ibrahim is saying that his heart, actions, and intention, is all directed to Allah and for the sake of Allah. This is the reality of *tawhid* and *ikhlas* that Ibrahim called his people to.

Verses such as this one do not need much commentary, because the God that Ibrahim is calling people to worship is the only god deserving

¹⁵³ Tafsir al-Sha'rawi (6/3751).

¹⁵⁴ Ibid (6/3753).

to be worshipped, since He is the originator of the heavens and earth; two things that are clearly magnificent in the eye of any human. He created the universe from nothing and is thus the one who controls them and dictates what happens in them and to them.

The word *hanif* used in the verse means one who has deviated from all corrupt ways and misguided paths that oppose *tawhid*, to the path of Islam, the true religion.¹⁵⁵

‘And I am not one of the polytheists.’ Ibrahim was clear with himself, his father, and his people about his belief. He was not someone who worships anyone besides god. He did not water down his belief or hide what was in his heart. He made his stance on their gods clear and announced, ‘my people, I disavow that which you associate [in worship with god].’ With total boldness and strength, he declared his disavowal and the clear divide between them. With precision and clarity, he renounces them and the gods that they sanctify. His people thus easily understood his intention and his unambiguous stance, which is the aim of his dialogue with them in the first place. He then further clarifies, ‘I have turned my face towards the One Who has originated the heavens and the earth—being upright—and I am not one of the polytheists.’ (Al-An’am:79). All this in order to ensure the clarity of his message and that it strongly enters the hearts of his people.¹⁵⁶

The Methodology of Gradualism

We extract from the previous verses the gradual method in *da’wah* that Ibrahim (peace be upon him) used with his people. He moved from the stars to the moon, then to the sun, which is the largest of them. Al-Razi confirms this by saying that beginning with the lesser and gradually making your way to that which is higher is impactful when convincing people, complete conviction does happen in any other way, so this approach was most appropriate.¹⁵⁷

The methodology of Ibrahim went through stages and he made gradual progress with his people in the following ways:

¹⁵⁵ Al-Sindi, p. 170.

¹⁵⁶ Hamad al-Saif, p. 288.

¹⁵⁷ Aminah Muhammad, p. 274.

a. Appearing to Agree With the Opposition

Ibrahim made his people's hearts incline towards him and made them feel that he was not their opponent. This way, he was able to lead his people to seeing the falsity of worshipping planets, the moon, and the sun. Since they all change from one condition to another and are impacted by external forces, they do not deserve to be worshipped.

b. Making Them Question Their Own Beliefs

Ibrahim was able to cast doubt on his people's beliefs about the worship of stars and planets through these mind-inducing questions. He questioned them about the validity of believing planets and stars to be gods. He prepared his people in this, before explicitly informing them that he worships a god other than these planets. He then began to allude that his people are misguided, before explicitly telling them this. He once again put doubts in their minds about their beliefs, then after the disappearance of the sun, he announced, 'I totally reject whatever you associate [with Allah in worship].' Here he makes it clear to them that he is completely distant from their misguidance and could never follow it, because when the lordship of the greatest planet that they worship is disproven, it is disproven from all their gods.¹⁵⁸

c. Logical Reasoning

Ibrahim used the setting and disappearance of the stars, the moon, and the sun, to show that cannot be worthy of being gods, because the true God is ever-watching and ever-present, managing all the affairs of His creation. His arguments were stronger when he began by disproving their smaller gods, the stars, because the same rule would eventually apply to the sun. And one of the best approaches to convincing the other party in a debate or dialogue is to gradually lead them to the necessary conclusion you want by having them accept its premises.

d. A Clearly Announced Conclusion

Having led his people to understand his message and leaving them no choice but to admit the truth of tawhid and the falsehood of planet worship, Ibrahim clearly states, 'I have turned my face towards the One Who has

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 273.

originated the heavens and the earth—being upright—and I am not one of the polytheists.’ (al-An’am: 79).

A Predictive, Historical, and Scientific Miracle

The previous verses are examples of predictive, historical, and scientific miracles.

- a. The precise distinction between the stars, the moon, and the sun, at a time when people did not have the ability to make such a clear and confident distinction. This was especially the case in the Arabian Peninsula in which most people were illiterate.
- b. Emphasizing that the disappearance or absence of any celestial body is evidence that it occurred at one point and has a beginning, which means they are created. These inanimate objects therefore are under the control of an external power and not worthy of being gods as the misguided people of Ibrahim believed before and after him. The occurrence of the universe necessitates that it will also end at one point. These finite beings thus require an eternal creator who is above all the attributes of his creation, such as the limits of space, time, matter, and energy, that define all inanimate and living things, such as plants, animals, humans, angels, and jinn.
- c. Indicating that God Almighty is the Creator of creation and the Creator of existence, unlike anything else before them. Knowledge and science necessitate the existence of a supreme originator for the universe in which we live, and recognize the necessity its qualities being different from those of its creation.
- d. We are given a model on how to know the Creator, Glory be to Him, through contemplation of His wonderful creation, such as the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. This is because the ability to create such great things from nothing is one of the clearest proofs for the Creator, Glory be to Him. The universe with all that is in it, its phenomena, and precise and detailed movements, all testify to the necessity of the existence of a great Creator who has the attributes of divinity, lordship, and oneness.
- e. The verses show that faith in God Almighty is implanted in humans, and that man needs to awaken this innate faith through rational

contemplation of God Almighty's creation and by listening to divine revelation. As long as the human *fitrah* (nature) is sound, it is able to discern the evidence of belief in the One God, the Eternal Creator, who has the beautiful Names and lofty Attributes, and is free from all deficiencies not worthy of His majesty. One can easily do this through contemplating how humans themselves are created so perfectly and the perfect creation of the vast universe around him.

- f. Associating others with God Almighty (*shirk*) is a contradiction to belief in Allah and a shortcoming in understanding the meaning of *tawhid al-uluhiyyah*, especially since the one who contemplates the universe sees the unity of its structure including a clear duality. This all testifies to its Creator having absolute oneness above all his creation.
- g. It is necessary to look at the universe and get to know some of Allah's great creation for further affirmation of faith in Allah through sensory perception and tangible consciousness. This supports the innate faith that Allah has already implanted in the nature of every being, then taught it to our father Adam (peace be upon him) at the moment of his creation. After this, He continued this truth down a long series of prophets and messengers, eventually preserving it in the Noble Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Seal of the Prophets and Messengers (peace be upon them all). If every sane person did this, there would not be any disbeliever, polytheist, or anyone hesitant in their belief in Allah the Most High.¹⁵⁹

These are some of the scientific and historical miracles that the Qur'an clarified in the story of one of Allah's servants, Ibrahim (peace be upon him) who grew up in a pagan environment that worships idols, stars and planets, and their own kings besides God Almighty. The verses present the position of the pure *fitrah* when Ibrahim gradually taught his people the oneness of God Almighty and worshipping Him alone. Additionally, all the historical and scientific facts mentioned in verses 75 to 79 of Surat al-An'am of the Qur'an testify that it cannot be a human act, but only the word of God the Creator, revealed to the seal of His prophets and messengers. Allah took it upon Himself to preserve this Qur'an, His final covenant

¹⁵⁹ Al-Najjar (1/320).

to mankind in the Arabic language, so that the Qur'an would remain God's ultimate proof over all of His creation until the Day of Judgment.¹⁶⁰

4. Al-An'am: 80-81

Allah, Most High, said:

And his people argued with him. He responded, 'Are you arguing with me about Allah, while He has guided me? I am not afraid of whatever [idols] you associate with Him—[none can harm me,] unless my Lord so wills. My Lord encompasses everything in [His] knowledge. Will you not be mindful? And how should I fear your associate-gods, while you have no fear in associating [others] with Allah—a practice He has never authorized? Which side has more right to security? [Tell me] if you really know!' (Verse 80-81)

Ibrahim's people argued with him after he announced his worship of one God and his disavowal of *shirk* and idolatry, so he was amazed at their arguing with him. They tried to influence him by means of psychological warfare and by threatening him with the powers of their deities. They wanted him to stop defying their idols, claiming that they fear that the gods will take revenge against him for challenging or offending them. But he answered them with complete firmness and confidence, responding to all their attempts to deceive misguide him.

1. ***And his people argued with him. He responded, 'Are you arguing with me about Allah, while He has guided me?'***

Are you arguing with me about the oneness of God Almighty, when He is the one who guided me to His oneness through the insights and proofs that He showed me and guided me to? Perhaps Ibrahim was alluding to the verse that we had previously spoken about, 'We thus showed Ibrahim the wonders of the heavens and the earth, so he would be sure in faith.' (Al-An'am: 75)

He informs them that it is Allah who guided him to worshipping Him alone and to abandoning their idols and gods that they worship besides Allah. How then could he be criticised for this? So Ibrahim was amazed at them arguing, when they should have submitted to the clear truths that he

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

had presented them. However, they were not given the success to accept guidance, but instead insisted on their idolatry and misguidance, and attempted to scare him with claims that their gods would harm him.¹⁶¹

2. ***I am not afraid of whatever [idols] you associate with Him—[none can harm me,] unless my Lord so wills. My Lord encompasses everything in [His] knowledge. Will you not be mindful?***

These false superstitions do not impact me the way they have impacted you, so I do not fear what you worship besides Allah, because I know that they cannot harm or benefit. These idols are nothing more than stones that are deaf, dumb, and blind. They need to be carried from place to place. How then can I fear something that you have created with your own hands? Ibrahim was careful with the words he used, however. If anything happened to occur to him, he made it clear to them that this would have nothing to do with their gods, but something that Allah willed, so he said: ‘unless my Lord so wills.’ This shows two things:

1. He has completely submitted himself to Allah in all affairs, pleased with whatever Allah decrees for him, for He alone is the One who does whatever He wills.
2. To refute their claim that their idols had the power to harm or benefit. He wanted to inform them that all affairs are in the hands of Allah alone. He alone harms whoever He wills and brings good to whoever He wills.

If Allah wants to send a star that destroy or burn someone, then this has nothing to do with the one who worships stars, nor the stars themselves, because the One who benefits or harms is Allah alone. Benefit and harm are dependent on His will, Glory be to Him, alone. Thus Ibrahim entrusted his affairs to God Almighty after declaring his disavowal of the idols.¹⁶²

‘My Lord encompasses everything in [His] knowledge. Will you not be mindful?’ He is aware of all things and puts all things in their appropriate place. Nothing in the heavens or earth, in the past or future, escapes His knowledge. Ibrahim says, ‘my Lord’, to show that he is always aware and conscious of his Lord who has nurtured him and will protect him from any

¹⁶¹ Al-Adawi, 2/89

¹⁶² Tafsir al-Sha’rawi (6/3755).

harm, unless His wisdom dictates otherwise. He is the All-Knowing, the Wise.¹⁶³

‘Will you not be mindful?’ If it is true that all benefit and harm comes from Allah alone, and that your gods do not benefit or harm, then will you not think and try to understand? This statement shows that the core tenets of faith can be proven and understood through the human *fitrah* (nature), but a soul that is engrossed in whims and desires is what defiles this *fitrah*. Man, as Allah’s deputy and vicegerent on earth, is thus not required to invent new beliefs, but only to ponder and to think using the divine methodology brought down to earth by his first father Adam and transmitted down to his children. However, unfortunately, the purity of thought and method can become defiled, because desires get in the way, so we turn away or ignore the *fitrah* which acts as a barrier against desires and whims, so the *fitrah* is eventually forgotten. The divine messages only came to remind us of and establish this pure origin, so Ibrahim announces:

3. *And how should I fear your associate-gods, while you have no fear in associating [others] with Allah—a practice He has never authorized? Which side has more right to security? [Tell me] if you really know!’ (Verse 80-81)*

The condition of those who followed illusions is astonishing. They try to scare the prophet of Allah claiming that he will be harmed by their stones that do not harm or benefit, as we can see and understand using reason. Yet they do not fear that anger will descend upon them from Allah Almighty, the owner of their gods and all existence. Ibrahim thus said:

‘And how should I fear your associate-gods, while you have no fear in associating [others] with Allah—a practice He has never authorized?’ Ibrahim is amazed at their threat for two reasons:

- Their idols possess neither benefit, nor harm, while God Almighty owns everything, possesses benefit and harm, and ignites the causes of harm.
- They scare Ibrahim when he has no reason to be scared, while they have every reason to fear for themselves.

¹⁶³ Abu Zahra (5/2567).

‘What He has never authorized.’ The word used in Arabic is *sultan*. This word here means divine authority. The word is also generally used to mean power and authority, so it was appropriate to use here, because their worship of idols is one that has no *sultan* (divine authority), nor do their idols have any *sultan* (power) to benefit or harm. If that is so, then the obvious conclusion follows:

‘Which side has more right to security?’ Is it the one who worships the One powerful creator or the one who worships stones and idols that have can neither benefit nor harm? Who is more worthy of feeling safe and which of us should be fearing for themselves?

‘Tell me if you really know!’ If they were to judge using sound knowledge, far from misconceptions and superstitions, then they can only come to one conclusion.

5. Al-An’am: 82

Allah, Most High, said:

It is [only] those who are faithful and do not tarnish their faith with falsehood (dhulm) who are guaranteed security and are [rightly] guided. (Verse 82)

Imam Ibn Jarir al-Tabari said:

This is Allah’s judgment between Ibrahim (peace be upon him) and his people, the people of polytheism, as Ibrahim said to them: ‘And how should I fear your associate-gods, while you have no fear in associating [others] with Allah—a practice He has never authorized? Which side has more right to security? [Tell me] if you really know!’ Allah Almighty ruled between them and said that it is those who were honest with Allah and sincerely worshipped Him, without mixing their worship with any *shirk*. They did not worship any besides Allah and then made their worship purely for Allah. They are the ones more worthy of security from His punishment than those who worship idols and should be afraid. In this life they fair Allah’s anger with them, while they await a certain painful torment in the afterlife.¹⁶⁴

Muhammad al-Tahir ibn Ashur said:

¹⁶⁴ Tafsir al-Tabari, 7/254.

This statement, according to the majority of tafsir scholars, was made by Ibrahim himself. So when he asked them, ‘Which side has more right to security? [Tell me] if you really know!’ He responded to the question himself without waiting for their response, because there is no other possible answer. Ibn Abbas said: ‘Just as a scholar asks a question, then answers it himself.’ Other similar examples have been mentioned before in this chapter.

Others said that this is not the response of Ibrahim whose words ended with, ‘if you really know.’ Rather, they said that this is what Allah says to give a verdict on Ibrahim’s question and confirming what Ibrahim said. Some said that this was the response of Ibrahim’s people, but this view is not correct, because the verse would have clarified that this was the statement of the believers from Ibrahim’s people. As for the disbelievers, then this could not have been their reply, because if it was so, they would not have gone so far after this to throw Ibrahim into the fire.¹⁶⁵

Muhammad al-Amin al-Shanqiti said:

The falsehood (*dhulm*) in this verse means shirk, as narrated in Sahih al-Bukhari, and elsewhere, from the Prophet (prayers and peace be upon him) in the Hadith of Abdullah b. Mas’ud. This is proven by Allah’s statement, ‘Indeed, shirk is a great *dhulm*.’ Allah also says, ‘the disbelievers are the *dhalimun* (wrong doers).’ (al-Baqarah: 254). Another verse says, ‘And do not invoke, instead of Allah, what can neither benefit nor harm you—for if you do, then you will certainly be one of the wrongdoers (*dhalimin*).’ (Yunus: 106).¹⁶⁶

Abd al-Rahman al-Sa’di said:

Security from fear, punishment, misery, and misguidance. If they protected their faith from all forms of *dhulm*, both shirk and sin, they would have complete security and complete guidance. However, if they protected their faith from shirk, but not from sin, they would have guidance and security, though not complete, but according to their level of faith and how far they are from sin. The verse implies that those who did not have these

¹⁶⁵ Tafsir Ibn Ashur, 7/331-332.

¹⁶⁶ Adwa al-Bayan, 2/201.

two things, will have neither guidance, nor security. Rather, their fate is only misguidance and misery.¹⁶⁷

It is narrated by Abdullah b. Mas'ud that when this verse was revealed, the people found it burdensome and they said: 'O Messenger of Allah, but who does not wrong himself?' He replied: 'It is not as you have understood. Have you not heard the words of the righteous man (Luqman): 'My son, do not associate anything with Allah, for indeed shirk is a great wrong.' (Luqman: 13). It means shirk.'¹⁶⁸

Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyah:

Fear is always with *shirk*, while security is always with *tawhid*. It is authentically narrated that the Messenger interpreted *dhulm* in this verse to mean *shirk*. He said: 'Have you not heard the words of the righteous man (Luqman): 'Indeed shirk is a great *dhulm*.' So tawhid is one of the greatest reasons for security from all forms of fear, while *shirk* is one of the greatest causes of fear. Thus, whoever fears something other than Allah, will be harmed by that thing itself. Just as whoever does not fear it and fears Allah alone, will be protected from it due to his trust in Allah. Similarly, when someone desires something instead of Allah, they will be prevented from that thing, while desiring Allah alone will be a reason for attaining it or something else more beneficial than it.¹⁶⁹

Those who believe and dedicate themselves to Allah, without mixing any shirk in their worship, nor obedience, nor intention, they will have security and serenity, and they are the truly guided ones.¹⁷⁰

6. Al-An'am: 83

Allah, Most High, said:

***'That is Our argument. We gave it to Ibrahim against his people. We elevate in rank whoever We will. Surely your Lord is All-Wise, All-Knowing.'* (Verse 83)**

Ibrahim debated and established his argument with his people regarding the stars, moon, sun, and idols. He then overcame their king when

¹⁶⁷ Tafsir al-Sa'di, p. 487.

¹⁶⁸ Sahih al-Bukhari, No: 4629.

¹⁶⁹ Miftah Dar al-Sa'adah, 3/387.

¹⁷⁰ In the Shade of the Qur'an, 2\1142.

debating him. He also made his arguments clear in his dialogue with his father. Allah described it as ‘Our argument’, referring it to Himself, to show its greatness and truthfulness.¹⁷¹

‘We gave it to Ibrahim.’

We gave it to him through the inspiration of sound instinct and pure intellect that only inclines to the truth. A strong argument through which Ibrahim overcame his people and showed them how they believe and follow something that is baseless, with no proof, but only straying from the truth. Allah chose Ibrahim (peace be upon him) to establish His argument, because people are not the same in their thinking and knowledge. Some are guided people who were chosen as messengers, others are astray, but seeking guidance, while others are engrossed in evil, their insight, hearing, and sight, have been sealed, so they do not recognize the truth, nor listen to the callers of truth.

Allah gave Ibrahim, His noble Prophet and great Messenger, the strength of character and ability to convincingly debate with sound arguments through which he attained consistent victory over the leaders of his people. He thus deserved such praise from Allah. ‘The argument’ is a reference to all the arguments that Ibrahim used. They were attributed to Allah because He is the one who guided Ibrahim to them and gave him the ability to express them in an effective way.

The reality is that all Ibrahim’s arguments were strongly convincing and effective, ending in his overcoming his opponents who had no choice but to submit and admit their fault, but their pride and stubbornness prevented them from accepting the truth. Instead they resort to aggression and violence, when logical dialogue could not work for them. Anyone who pays attention to the discussions of Ibrahim with his people recognises the different aspects of Ibrahim’s strong personality and oratory abilities.

‘We elevate in rank whoever We will.’

People have ranks in goodness, prestige, knowledge, dominion, and sustenance. The verse means that Allah raises the ranks of whoever He wants from those who had no rank or status at all. It also means that He

¹⁷¹ Abu Zahra, 5/2571.

raises the people who already have high ranks to higher ranks, placing them above others.

Theoretical knowledge is a high rank, theoretical and applied wisdom are ranks, strong discourse and rhetoric is a rank, and sovereignty and judging fairly is a rank. However, prophethood and messengerhood are higher than all these ranks, because they include these things and go beyond. These varying levels are all by the grace of God. He preferred some over others in different things. He is the one who gives some people innate qualities and facilitates for some to attain qualities that can be developed and gained. He protects them from the things that come in the way of attaining these levels. He grants the level of prophethood to whoever He wills.¹⁷² ‘We have chosen some of those messengers above others.1 Allah spoke directly to some, and raised some high in rank.’ (al-Baqarah: 253)

Shaykh Muhammad Abu Zahra said: ‘These levels are levels of guidance and success. Allah Almighty used the present tense, ‘We raise’, to show that this is a continued thing. Good will continue to exist in humanity so long as these rightly guided people are amongst them, those who say, ‘we hear and obey’. On the other hand, we have those who hear words of guidance, but they say, ‘we hear and we disobey’. This way, good and evil are in a constant battle. Allah said: ‘Allah grants wisdom to whoever He wills. And whoever is granted wisdom is certainly blessed with a great privilege. But none will be mindful [of this] except people of reason.’ (al-Baqarah: 269)

‘Surely your Lord is All-Wise, All-Knowing.’

An ending related to the content of what preceded it, showing its cause and its relation to the attributes of God Almighty. ‘Your Lord’, is a reminder from Allah to the seal of His messengers of His grace upon him and his blessing of raising him over all of His messengers. Your Lord who nurtured you, taught you, guided you, raised your remembrance out of His kindness and generosity, and made you the seal of His messengers to all of His creation. He, Almighty, is wise in all His actions and creation. He knows the affairs of His creation and what works for them, and He will show this to you in your life with your own people, as He showed you this

¹⁷² Tafsir al-Manar (7/582-584)

with Ibrahim and his people. He puts everything to scale, and He is all-wise with His commands and decisions.

This verse mentioned three of Allah's names: Al-Rabb, Al-Hakim, and Al-Alim. We explain these names below:

- a. Al-Rabb (The Lord). He is the one who nurtures His creation with His guidance and various blessings. Importantly, He nurtures His chosen servants by purifying their hearts, souls, and character. This is why most of their supplications (du'a) is using this name of His, because they are seeking a special type of *tarbiyah* from Him.¹⁷³
- b. Al-Hakim (The Wise). The All-Wise in His creation and commands, who has perfected all things He has created. 'Who could be a better judge than Allah for people of sure faith?' (al-Ma'idah: 50). Nothing is created without wisdom, nor anything legislated randomly. He is the judge in this life and the next. He alone is the judge in three areas. He judges between people in His legislation, decree, and accountability. Wisdom means to put everything in its appropriate place.
- c. Al-Alim (The Knower). His knowledge encompasses that which is hidden and apparent, secret and public, what is necessary and impossible, what is possible in this world or any other, the past, present, and future. Nothing escapes His knowledge.¹⁷⁴

7. Al-An'am: 84-86

Allah, Most High, said:

***'And We blessed him with Isaac and Jacob. We guided them all as We previously guided Noah and those among his descendants: David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Musa, and Harun. This is how We reward the good-doers. Likewise, [We guided] Zachariah, Yahya, Isa, and Elias, who were all of the righteous. [We also guided] Ishmael, Al-Yasa, Jonah, and Lot, favouring each over other people [of their time].'* (Verses 84-86)**

Ibrahim was unable to remain with his people after he had delivered Allah's message. Enmity deepened between them after he destroyed their

¹⁷³ Tafsir al-Sa'di, 5/486.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 5/299.

idols and was throw into the fire by them, but was saved from it by Allah. When he became certain that there was no place for him amongst them anymore, he left them and migrated, travelling the lands, going to Sham and Egypt. The prophet of *tawhid* was spreading *tawhid* wherever he went. Nobody was with him except his wife and his nephew Lot who called to Allah with his uncle.

When Ibrahim - peace be upon him – showed excellence in obeying his Lord, and sincerity in calling to His oneness, God Almighty rewarded him by raising his rank and making his children and offspring inheritors of prophethood and the scripture. Ibrahim is the root of the trees of prophethood, and from him they all branched out. All those who were given prophethood were thus from the descendants of Ibrahim. Allah Almighty said:

‘We blessed him with Isaac and [later] Jacob, and reserved prophethood and revelation for his descendants. We gave him his reward in this life, and in the Hereafter he will certainly be among the righteous.’ (al-Ankabut: 27)

Allah made Ibrahim honourable in this life, because he made the most noble people, the prophets and messengers, from his descendants until the Day of Judgment. One of the greatest causes of joy is for someone to know that his descendants will be prophets and kings. So the aim of this verse is to list out the blessings of Allah upon Ibrahim in return for his efforts in defending Allah’s oneness.¹⁷⁵

These verses of Surat al-An’am mention eighteen prophets. Ibrahim, Ishaq, Ya’qub, and Nuh are four. Then he mentioned fourteen others in three parts as you see in the verses above.

1. ‘And We blessed him with Isaac and Jacob. We guided them all as We previously guided Noah.’

Allah informs us that He gave Ishaq to Ibrahim after he reached old age and lost hope of having any children. The angels then came on their way to the people of Lut and gave him the good news of Ishaq being born to him. His wife was shocked to hear that and said, ‘Oh, my! How can I have a child at this old age, and my husband here is an old man? This is truly an astonishing thing!’ They responded, ‘Are you astonished by Allah’s

¹⁷⁵ Tafsir al-Razi, 13/67.

decree? May Allah's mercy and blessings be upon you, O people of this house. Indeed, He is Praiseworthy, All-Glorious.' (Hud: 72-72).

Along with the good news of a child, he was given the good news of continued offspring who would also be prophets. 'We gave him the good news of Ishaq, a righteous prophet.' (al-Saffat: 112). Allah said: 'We gave her good news of [the birth of] Isaac, and, after him, Jacob.' (Hud: 71)

They were told that their child shall have a child of his own to during their life, so you can be pleased. People gain great happiness from seeing their grandchildren, because it means that their lineage continues. Perhaps some people thought that a child born to elderly parents may not be strong enough to continue living and having children, so Allah informed them that he will have a child named Ya'qub, which contains the Arabic root word '*aqib*, which means continuation and offspring. This was a reward for Ibrahim when he left his people and migrated seeking to worship Allah on earth. So Allah replaced him with righteous children upon his religion, so that he could be pleased with them. As Allah said: 'So after he had left them and what they worshipped besides Allah, We granted him Isaac and Jacob, and made each of them a prophet.' (Maryam: 49)

We notice that the previous verse shows the great gift of Ishaq and Ya'qub, since Allah uses the majestic 'We' to describe this gift and praises them for their guidance. The gift of Isaac and Jacob was mentioned four times in the Qur'an with the plural majestic 'We', in the following order, the first being what we have mentioned from Surat al-An'am:

1. 'And We blessed him with Isaac and Jacob. We guided them all as We previously guided Noah.' (al-An'am: 84)
2. 'So after he had left them and what they worshipped besides Allah, We granted him Isaac and Jacob, and made each of them a prophet. We showered them with Our mercy, and blessed them with honourable mention.' (Maryam: 49-50)
3. 'We saved him and Lot [and sent them] to the land We blessed for all people, and We gave him Isaac and Jacob as an additional gift, and made each of them righteous.' (al-Anbiya: 71-72)
4. 'So Lot believed in him. And Ibrahim said, 'I am emigrating to my Lord. He alone is indeed the Almighty, All-Wise.' We blessed him with Isaac and Jacob, and reserved prophethood and revelation for

his descendants. We gave him his reward in this life, and in the Hereafter he will certainly be among the righteous.’ (al-Ankabut: 26-27)

All these chapters are Makkan. The mention of this in these chapters provides our messenger Muhammad (peace be upon him) with emotional support, a reminder that Allah will protect him as He had protected his father Ibrahim before. Likewise, He will grant him victory and spread Islam even if his people oppose him, just as He had granted it to Ibrahim and his children before him.

The mention of Isaac and Jacob together in these four places, shows that the good news of their birth was given to Ibrahim at once. This is mentioned more explicitly in Allah’s statement addressing Sarah, Ibrahim’s wife: ‘His wife was standing by and laughed. We gave her good news of Isaac and, after him, of Jacob.’ (Hud: 71)

Imam al-Tabari said: ‘Allah Most High says that we rewarded Ibrahim for his obedience, purity in worshipping Allah alone, and abandonment of the religion of the polytheists. We rewarded him by raising his rank in the afterlife, rewarded him in this life, blessed him with children who we honoured, raised them above all mankind, and gave them prophethood. They include his son, Isaac, and his grandson, Jacob. We guided both of them to the straight path and the true religion.’¹⁷⁶

- Scholars have spoken about the wisdom behind mentioning Isaac before Ismail in Surat al-An’am:

The great tafsir scholar, Al-Razi, answered this by saying: ‘If someone said: ‘Why was Ismail not mentioned with Isaac, but only mentioned much later?’ We say: ‘The point here is to mention the prophets of Bani Israel, all who are children of Isaac and Jacob. As for Ismail, only one of his children was a prophet, that is Muhammad. It would not be appropriate to mention Muhammad in this place, because Allah commanded Muhammad to show the idolators how when Ibrahim abandoned *shirk* and insisted upon *tawhid*, Allah granted him many favours, both religious and worldly. One of these favours was that he was blessed with children who were prophets and kings. So if Muhammad was the one presenting this argument, it

¹⁷⁶ Tafsir al-Tabari (7/260).

would not be suitable to mention himself, which is why Ismail was not mentioned here alongside Isaac.¹⁷⁷

This is clear. What he means is that Ismail and Isaac were not mentioned together. Otherwise, Ismail was mentioned only a verse after.

Al-Biq'a'i said regarding the wisdom of beginning with Ishaq and Jacob (peace be upon them): 'Allah began with them, because the context is one of showing Ibrahim His favours upon him. He is more pleased with his son, who he spent his time with and was not commanded to separate from him. Similarly, his son's son, the forefather of most prophets who purified the holy lands – the home chosen by Allah for Ibrahim and his children – from polytheism and idolatry, called to Allah, and illuminated the earth with the worship of Allah alone.'¹⁷⁸

- **The wisdom behind mentioning Allah's guidance of Nuh after mentioning the gift of Isaac and Jacob**

'We guided them all as We previously guided Noah.' That is, We guided him before them and gave him righteous offspring, with each of them having distinguished features. As for Nuh, Allah made his offspring the ones that remained after he drowned the people of earth except those who believed and accompanied Nuh on the Ark. So all people are from the offspring of Nuh. Similarly, Allah did not send any prophet after Ibrahim except from his offspring, as the Almighty said: 'and We placed prophethood and scripture among his offspring.' (al-Ankabut: 27).

And He said: 'We sent Noah and Ibrahim, and gave prophethood and scripture to their offspring.' (al-Hadid: 26).

And He said: 'Those were the prophets who Allah has blessed from among the descendants of Adam, and of those We carried with Noah [in the Ark], and of the descendants of Ibrahim and Israel¹⁷⁹, and of those We [rightly] guided and chose. Whenever the revelations of the Most Compassionate were recited to them, they fell down, prostrating and weeping.' (Maryam: 58)

2. 'And those among his descendants: David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Musa, and Harun. This is how We reward the good-doers.' (Verse 84)

¹⁷⁷ Tafsir al-Razi (6/359)

¹⁷⁸ Nadhm al-Durar (7/1770)

¹⁷⁹ Tr: Israel is another name for Jacob (ﷺ)

Allah informs us that He has guided the offspring of Nuh, as he was the last to be mentioned, as mentioned by Ibn Jarir. It could also be a reference to the offspring of Ibrahim, because he is the one who is being spoken about in these verses.

Muhammad Rashid Rida said:

‘Allah mentioned fourteen prophets in these three verses. He did not arrange them chronologically, because He sent down His Book as a source of guidance and a reminder, not a history book. Neither did He list them according to their excellence and virtues, because His book is not a book of virtues and praise, but rather a book of reminders and lessons.

He split them into three according to the features that they share. The first are David, Solomon, Ayyub, Yusuf, Musa, and Harun. They all have in common that God Almighty gave them kingship, leadership, and sovereignty, along with prophethood and messengerhood. He first mentions David and Solomon, both rich kings. He then mentioned Ayyub and Yusuf, the first, a great prince who was rich and benevolent. The second was a great minister and ruler. Each pair was tested with wealth and prosperity, but showed gratitude. As for Musa and Harun, they too were rulers, but they were not kings. So each pair had something distinct about them. David and Solomon were granted more worldly blessings and vast wealth, Ayyub and Joseph were below them in that regard, and Musa and Harun were below them.

However, it seems that Musa and Harun are above Ayyub and Joseph in religious guidance and carrying the burdens of prophethood, while Ayyub and Joseph are above David and Solomon in this regard, because they combined between gratitude in prosperity and patience in adversity, and God knows best.

After mentioning them, Allah said: ‘This is how We reward the good-doers.’ Reward them by granting them blessings and rightly guided leadership in this life, and divine guidance. Just as Allah said regarding Yusuf: ‘When he reached his prime, We gave him wise judgement and knowledge. This is how We reward those who do good.’ (Yusuf: 22). Thus, God rewards some good-doers in this life before the next, while others have their reward delayed until the next life.¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ Tafsir al-Manar (7/586-588)

3. ‘Likewise, [We guided] Zachariah, Yahya, Isa, and Elias, who were all of the righteous.’ (Verse 85)

Muhammad Rashid Rida then mentioned the second category of prophets: ‘Zachariah, Yahya, Isa, and Elias. These prophets stood out with their exceptional *zuhd* (asceticism) and turning away from its beauties and pleasures, which is why they were described here as being righteous, a description which they are most worthy of in comparison to others. Although every prophet is righteous in a complete sense.¹⁸¹

4. ‘And Ishmael, Al-Yasa, Jonah, and Lot, favouring each over other people [of their time].’ (Verse 86)

This is the third category mentioned by Muhammad Rashid Rida, saying: ‘Ishmael, al-Yasa, Jonah, and Lot. He mentioned them later, because they were not given the special leadership or wealth that the first category were given, nor were they completely abstinent from the worldly life, like the second category. However, they were included in being favoured above all people of their time, something that applies to all prophets over the people of his time. Any prophet amongst a people is thus greater than all his people. But if two or more prophets exist amongst people, those prophets are better than everyone else, although some prophets could be greater than others. There is no doubt, for example, that Ibrahim was greater than Lot who also lived at his time; that Musa was greater than his brother Harun who was his assistant; and that Isa was greater than his cousin Yahya, peace be upon them all.¹⁸²

Imam al-Razi spoke about the wisdom behind mentioning the prophets in this order in these verses. Allah mentioned four prophets in these verses, they are: Nuh, Ibrahim, Isaac, and Jacob. Then he mentioned fourteen prophets from their offspring, they are: Dawud, Solomon, Ayyub, Joseph, Musa, Harun, Zakaria, Yahya, Isa, Elias, Ismail, Al-Yasa’, Yunus, and Lot (peace be upon them all).

Altogether He mentioned eighteen prophets. Al-Razi said: ‘If someone argued that maintaining an appropriate order is obligatory, and order is either according to status or according to time-period. We find neither option in the verses here, so what is the reason? We say that the letter (و) does not

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

imply order, as this verse itself shows. No order is intended here neither for virtue nor time. However, I believe that there is an intended order here, that is that Allah granted each group of prophets some virtue and favour. Some of the favours that all people can recognise include power and authority, something that Allah gave Solomon and David a great share of.

The second group faced major hardships and great tests. Allah mentioned Ayyub in this category. The third group, that is Yusuf, faced both things. He faced severe hardship at the beginning, before eventually being given power and authority. The fourth group were given strong miracles, powerful signs, and being brought near to Allah with special care. That is the case with Musa and Harun. The fifth group were far distant from worldly pleasures and much mixing with people. This was the case with Zakariya, Yahya, Isa, and Ilyas, so Allah described them as being righteous. The sixth group are those prophets who did not have many followers and supporters. They are Ismail, Al-Yasa', Yunus, and Lot.

So in this way, we can see that these prophets were mentioned in order according to what we have described here.¹⁸³

Through what al-Razi mentioned here it becomes clear to us the wisdom of combining these four prophets: Ismail, Al-Yasa, Yunus and Lot (peace be upon them), and God knows best.

One wisdom for which these verses separated between Ismail and his father, and Joseph and his father, is what Al-Biq'a'i mentioned: 'He mentioned Ismail and his father, and Joseph and his father, separately, alluding to the long period that each of them was separated from their father in their lives, and that it was Allah alone that kept both sons on the path of guidance despite such a long separation.'

Allah Almighty said:

And [We favoured] some of their forefathers, their descendants, and their brothers. We chose them and guided them to the Straight Path. This is Allah's guidance with which He guides whoever He wills of His servants. Had they associated others with Him [in worship], their [good] deeds would have been wasted. Those were the ones to whom We gave the Scripture, wisdom, and prophethood. But if these [pagans] disbelieve in this

¹⁸³ Tafsir al-Razi, 6/360.

[message], then We have already entrusted it to a people who will never disbelieve in it. These [prophets] were [rightly] guided by Allah, so follow their guidance. Say, ‘I ask no reward of you for this [Quran]—it is a reminder to the whole world.’ (al-An’am: 87-90)

8. Al-An’am: 84-86

Allah, Most High, said:

‘And some of their forefathers, their descendants, and their brothers. We chose them and guided them to the Straight Path.’ ‘This is Allah’s guidance with which He guides whoever He wills of His servants. Had they associated others with Him [in worship], their [good] deeds would have been wasted.’ Those were the ones to whom We gave the Scripture, wisdom, and prophethood. But if these [pagans] disbelieve in this [message], then We have already entrusted it to a people who will never disbelieve in it. These [prophets] were guided by Allah, so follow their guidance. Say, ‘I ask no reward of you for this; it is only a reminder to the world.’ (Verses 87-90)

1. ‘And some of their forefathers, their descendants, and their brothers. We chose them and guided them to the Straight Path.’ (Verse 87)

There is a fourth group of prophets who God Almighty did not mention in His book as being from the offspring of Ibrahim. However, they are relatives in some other way or having no kinship except the brotherhood that is between the prophets. Allah Almighty said: ‘And some of their forefathers, their descendants, and their brothers.’ Meaning that we have sent prophets from their forefathers, descendants, and their brothers who were most sincere towards Allah, such as Idris, Shu’aib, Hud, Salih, and others. We chose them to carry the divine message and we guided them to the straight path of Allah which is neither crooked nor deviant. ‘This is My path, leading straight, so follow it, and do not follow other ways, for they will lead you away from His way.’ (al-An’am: 153)

2. ‘This is Allah’s guidance with which He guides whoever He wills of His servants. Had they associated others with Him [in worship], their [good] deeds would have been wasted.’ (Verse 88)

This is a report of the springs of guidance on this earth. God’s guidance for mankind is represented in what the messengers brought. This certain



truth which must be followed is restricted to this one source, which God Almighty decided is God's guidance, guiding to Him whoever He chooses. But if these guided servants of Allah deviate from the oneness of God, neglect the source from which they derive this guidance, and associate a partner with God in any way, whether belief, worship, or legislation, all their efforts will go to waste and be meaningless.

Imam Muhammad Abu Zahra says: 'The patience these prophets had to endure at times of prosperity and adversity, strength and weakness, distress and ease; the control their souls had over their bodies, making it a servant of the demands of life. They had pride without humiliation and humility without weakness. This is the guidance that is taken from the morals of prophethood. This is the guidance of God Almighty, which is why after mentioning the stories of the prophets, He said, 'This is Allah's guidance with which He guides whoever He wills of His servants.' This restricts guidance to only this; the benevolence and spirituality of the prophets, and the good they did is Allah's guidance, required to be followed by all the followers of the prophets. God chooses from His servants who to guide, if he follows the path of goodness and the straight path. For whoever turns to God, will be guided by Him. While whoever turns to Satan has led himself astray. That is because Allah has granted us all the ability to reach guidance and given us the ability to follow it, but we choose to be overtaken and led astray by temptations and the whispering of the devils.¹⁸⁴

Allah Almighty said, 'of His servants', so all are the servants of God Almighty, guiding to the truth those He has decreed guidance for, as we have clarified above. And although these people have reached the level of tawhid that they have reached, 'had they associated others with Him, their [good] deeds would have been wasted.' And although Allah has protected His prophets from associating partners with Him, and thus protected them from their actions being null and void, this verse shows us the importance of *tawhid* and the danger of *shirk*. It is a command for us to leave *shirk* altogether in all its forms, because it nullifies all actions that we may think are good. Do you not see that *shirk* invalidates all the good that prophets have done, so what is expected that *shirk* would do to others? This verse

¹⁸⁴ Zahrat al-Tafasir, 5/2579

thus shows us the evil of *shirk* in all its forms and commands us to protect our good with the purity of *tawhid*.

Al-Razi said: ‘Know that the guidance spoken of here is *tawhid* and to exonerate Allah of *shirk*, because He said after this, ‘had they associated others with Him, their [good] deeds would have been wasted.’ This shows that the guidance mentioned refers to all things that oppose *shirk*. If we have established that guidance is to know Allah and His oneness, then Allah mentioned that this guidance is from Allah, it becomes clear that faith can only come from Allah. Then Allah concluded this verse by negating *shirk*, ‘had they associated others.’ This means if these prophets had committed *shirk*, their obedience and worship would have been void. So the intention is to invalidate the way of the idolators.

The Prophet said: ‘Allah Almighty said: ‘I am the One Who does not stand in need of a partner. If anyone does anything in which he associates anyone else with Me, I shall abandon him with one whom he associates.’¹⁸⁵

3. *Those were the ones to whom We gave the Scripture, wisdom, and prophethood. But if these [pagans] disbelieve in this [message], then We have already entrusted it to a people who will never disbelieve in it. (Verse 89)*

This is the second point established. In the first, Allah established the source of guidance and made clear that the only guidance is Allah’s guidance which the prophets brought. In the second, Allah explains that the prophets mentioned are the one who were given the Scripture, wisdom, authority, and prophethood.

The word *hukm* used can mean wisdom as well as authority, and both are possible meanings in this verse. This *hukm* means to judge and distinguish between truth and falsehood, oppression and justice, and righteous and corrupt. Prophethood is the revelation that they received from Allah. although what was previously mentioned encompasses prophethood, but it was specifically referred to here due to its importance, its direct relation with Allah, and because the prophets who did not receive Scriptures were mentioned. It also shows the status of the knowledge that they were given and followed, and that it is from Allah. Whoever thus rejects the Scriptures

¹⁸⁵ Sahih Muslim (No: 2985)

has rejected prophethood, as the Arab pagans said: ‘Allah has not sent anything down to any human.’

Allah Almighty revealed to some of these messengers Scriptures, such as the Torah to Musa, the Psalms to David, and the Gospel to Isa. Others were given authority and power, such as David and Solomon. Although they were all were given authority in the sense that the knowledge that they have of the religion is the rule of God and the guidance that they brought bears the authority of God over all people in all matters, for God Almighty only sent messengers to be obeyed and the scriptures were only revealed to judge between people with justice. All of them were given wisdom and prophethood. They are the ones God entrusted with his religion, they carry it to people, uphold it, believe in it, and preserve it. So if the pagans of the Arabs ‘these’ disbelieve in the Book and prophethood, then the religion of God does not need them, and these honourable people who believe in the prophet are sufficient.¹⁸⁶

It is an outstretched ancient truth, a connected network, and one message carried messenger after messenger. They, and those who Allah chose to be worthy of guidance, believed in it. This truth pours tranquility into the heart of the believer and in the hearts of the Muslims, regardless of their number.

This group is not alone, nor is it cut from a tree, it is a branch emerging from a tree whose roots are fixed and its branch in the sky. A great network that is connected, its causes are linked to God and His guidance. The individual believer, in any land and any generation, is great and strong. He is from that sturdy, lofty tree rooted in the depths of human nature and the depths of human history. He is a member of that noble procession that has been linked to God and guided by Him since the earliest times.¹⁸⁷

‘Then We have already entrusted it to a people who will never disbelieve in it.’ They are all those who believed in the message of the Seal of the Prophets (peace be upon him), from the Companions and those who followed them until the Day of Judgment. The Muslim ummah has been entrusted with carrying the message and delivering the trust (*amanah*), after Allah sealed prophethood with the seal of the prophets, our master

¹⁸⁶ Qutb, S. (2/1144)

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

Muhammad, may God's prayers and peace be upon him. The meaning of being entrusted is that they were guided to believing in it and fulfilling its rights, just as a man is entrusted with something to maintain it, take care of it, and preserve it. The prophets were given the message by Allah through revelation, and He commissioned them to convey it, while the Muslim nation was entrusted with preserving the message, establishing it, and spreading it after prophethood was sealed.

The verse contains a reference for the Prophet, while he was in Makkah, that God, glory be to Him, would manifest His religion, cherish His message, and empower him on earth. It also implies the great virtue of the Companions, from the Muhajirin and Ansar, who were entrusted by Allah with His message, making them its protectors and maintainers of His *amanah*. It also alludes to the greatness of the Islamic nation and shows great responsibility that it has in carrying the message of Islam, preserving it, and spreading it among people.

The noble verse also indicates the perfection of the Islamic Shari'ah, for its book is the Noble Qur'an which God Almighty pledged to preserve and rule, its law is the Sunnah of the Prophet, which clarifies the laws of the Qur'an, and its prophet is the final prophet. Through him, peace and blessings be upon him, the tree of prophethood was completed and sealed, as Allah said: 'Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but is the Messenger of Allah and the seal of the prophets. And Allah has [perfect] knowledge of all things.' (al-Ahzab: 40)

Abu Huraira narrated that the Prophet said: 'The parable of myself and the Prophets before me is that of a man who constructed a house. He completed it and made it well, except for the space of one brick in the corner. So the people enter it and marvel at it saying, but say, 'If only a brick would be placed here.' So I am that brick and I am the seal of prophets.'¹⁸⁸

4. *These [prophets] were guided by Allah, so follow their guidance. Say, 'I ask no reward of you for this; it is only a reminder to the world.'* (Verse 90)

This is the third point established. These noble men lead the way, the eighteen prophets mentioned in these verses. Seven others were named by Allah in His book, they are: Adam, Idris, Hud, Salih, Shu'aib, Dhu-l

¹⁸⁸ Al-Bukhari (No: 3535) and Muslim (No: 2287)

Kifl, and Muhammad (peace be upon them). The prophet Muhammad was commanded to only follow the guidance of these prophets who Allah had guided through revelation sent down to them. Their guidance is belief in Allah alone, submitting to His command and will, and the noble manners and traits that they had.¹⁸⁹

The prophets and messengers represent the highest human models, whether as people or in their approach to da'wah. This comes as no surprise, as they are the greats chosen by the Creator. He honoured them and prepared them for receiving his message and prophethood, without them seeking it, or earning it, or attaining it through any deeds. Rather, this is a matter chosen for them, and God knows best where He places His message. Allah Almighty said: 'Those were the prophets who Allah has blessed from among the descendants of Adam, and of those We carried with Noah [in the Ark], and of the descendants of Ibrahim and Israel¹⁹⁰, and of those We [rightly] guided and chose.' (Maryam: 58)

The methods of da'wah of these prophets, both individually and collectively, including their beliefs, manners, and deeds, are considered a practical application of this religion that God revealed as guidance and mercy for His servants.¹⁹¹

The messenger, and all the believers after him, were commanded to follow the guidance of these prophets. They were commanded to take them as role models in their words, deeds, and methods. The prophet being commanded to follow their way suggests that Allah has given him the greatest trait that each prophet had, for the prophet was man's greatest role model and final prophet. Allah gave him a great number of virtues not found together in anyone else. Allah described him saying, 'You are truly upon outstanding character.' (al-Qalam: 4)

Shaykh Muhammad Mutawalli al-Sha'rawi said: 'If the prophet was commanded to do something by His Lord, then we must believe that He has fulfilled that command. And since he has all the excellent traits of the prophets, he is worthy of being the seal of the prophets and messengers.'¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Al-Tafsir al-Mawdu'i (2/474)

¹⁹⁰ Tr: Israel is another name for Jacob (يعقوب)

¹⁹¹ Qutb, M. (1/180)

¹⁹² Tafsir al-Sha'rawi (6/3776)

Al-Razi said: ‘There is no doubt that Allah’s statement, ‘so follow their guidance’, is a command for Muhammad (peace be upon him). However, the discussion relates to what exactly he was commanded to follow. Some people said that he was commanded to follow those things that these prophets all agreed upon, which is belief in the oneness of Allah, negate Allah of all deficient attributes and actions, and all other creedal matters. Others said that it is a command to follow them in all noble traits, such as patience against the harm of the ignorant and forgiveness. However, the truth is that this command encompasses all that.¹⁹³

Noble attributes and perfect qualities were divided among them, so David and Suleiman were people of gratitude for blessings, Ayyub was a man of patience in the face of tribulation, and Joseph was both. Musa was the leader of strong Shari’ah and powerful miracles. Zakaria, Yahya, Isa, and Elias were people of asceticism, Ismail a man of honesty, and Yunus was a man of supplication (*du’a*). So we see that Allah mentioned each one of these prophets, because they mostly had certain noble traits. After mentioning them, He commanded Muhammad to imitate them all, so it is as if Allah commanded Muhammad to gather all the qualities of servitude and obedience that were divided amongst the prophets. And since God commanded him to do so, we cannot say that he fell short in doing so, so it was proven that he had attained these qualities. If that is the case, it is proven that he combined all the good qualities that were dispersed among them as a whole, thus making him the greatest prophet.¹⁹⁴

Muhammad Rashid Rida said: ‘Allah commanded him to follow their guidance, whether those features that they share, or the distinct features that each prophet had, like Nuh, Ibrahim, and the family of Dawud stood out with their gratitude, Yusuf, Ayyub, and Isma’il, with patience, Zakariya, Yahya, Isa, and Ilyas with asceticism and sufficiency, and Musa and Harun with bravery, strength, and standing up for the truth.

Allah guided every prophet and raised him in ranks, raising some above others. Then he revealed to the final messenger a summary of the best traits of the most famous prophets, the ones mentioned in these verses and elsewhere in the Qur’an, then He commanded him to follow their ways.

¹⁹³ Tafsir al-Razi (5/56)

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 5/57.



This is the supreme wisdom of mentioning their stories in the Qur'an. God Almighty has testified that he brought the truth, confirmed the truth of the messengers before him, and that he was not a heretic who brought something new. So we know that he was guided with the guidance of all of them, and thus his innate virtues were above their innate virtues, because he imitated all of them, so the perfection that was scattered amongst them was combined in him. That is why God Almighty testified for him, 'you are truly upon outstanding character.' (al-Qalam: 4).

As for the virtues and traits that he was given, then the matter is even clearer, the greatest of which is the generality and finality of his message, and the perfection of things is in their seal, peace be upon him and all the messengers.

Shaykh Muhammad Abu Zahra said: 'The prophet was commanded to follow them in all their qualities, because he is the final prophet, he is addressing all generations to come, and was sent to all mankind as a warn-er and bringer of good news. He and his shari'ah are thus suitable for all times, because they combined all the qualities that existed in the previous prophets.'¹⁹⁵

If this is the status of his message, then God Almighty has obligated calling to it, because it leads to human perfection and he does not want any reward or thanks from them. So Allah Almighty said, addressing His prophet: 'Say, I ask no reward of you for this.' I do not want any reward from you, no money, prestige, or authority. They assumed that he wanted money, so they offered him money, or he wanted authority, they offered him that. But God made it clear to his Prophet that he should let them know that he does not want any worldly gains, but he only wants to reform and remind people of God and the Last Day, 'it is only a reminder to the world.'

The aim of Allah's revelation of the Qur'an to His Noble Prophet is not for him to earn any money, or take authority or sovereignty, but rather it came as a remembrance, an admonition, and guidance for the world. A reminder of what leads them to righteousness, uprightness of their affairs, the spread of justice, and a reminder to them of the Last Day, and what its

¹⁹⁵ Abu Zahra, 5/2584.

accountability and punishment. A reminder to constantly remember Allah, for the remembrance of Allah is medicine for heart from all its illnesses.¹⁹⁶

This shows the generality of the message of Islam. It is a complete message, free of any material interest. So the carriers of this message and the callers to it should know the reality of this message, to rise to its level, and purify themselves and their efforts from any material gains or cheap worldly pleasures.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

Section 2:

The Story of Ibrahim in Surat Maryam

Allah, Most High, said:

And mention in the Scripture Ibrahim. He was a man of truth, a prophet. He said to his father, ‘My dear father, why do you worship what can neither hear, nor see, nor benefit you in any way? My dear father, knowledge that has not reached you has come to me, so follow me, I will guide you to a straight path. My dear father, do not worship Satan. Surely Satan is ever rebellious against the Most Compassionate. My dear father, I fear that a punishment from the Most Compassionate will afflict you, and you become Satan’s companion.’ He said, ‘Are you renouncing my gods, O Ibrahim? If you do not desist, I will stone you. So leave me alone for a while.’ He said, ‘Peace be upon you. I will ask my Lord to forgive you; He has always been gracious to me. And I will withdraw from you and from what you pray to instead of God. And I will pray to my Lord, and I hope I will not be disappointed in my prayer to my Lord.’ When he withdrew from them and from what they worship besides God, We granted him Isaac and Jacob, each We made a prophet. We showered them with Our mercy, and blessed them with honourable mention.’ (Maryam: 41-50)

The first chapter that provided us with a detailed account of Ibrahim is Surat Maryam (Chapter 19). This chapter was one of the earlier ones to be revealed, which is shown by the fact that Ja’far ibn Abi Talib recited it to the Negus (Al-Najashi) and the Christians with him.

In this chapter, our Lord tells us about Zakaria, Yahya, Maryam, and Isa (peace be upon them). Then the discussion shifts to Ibrahim (peace be upon him) and some of the prophets from his offspring. A discussion that captivates the heart and fills it with admiration and humility. That is because the story of Ibrahim in Surat Maryam includes that incredible dialogue between him and his father; one that contains hidden gems that the attentive reader of this chapter can pick up and understand.

Surat Maryam in the beginning speaks about Zakaria and his son Yahya, then about Mary her son Isa peace be upon them. At the end, it tells us of that which shakes the hearts and feelings. How not, when their claim that the Most Merciful has a son was about to cause the skies to shatter, the earth split, and the mountains to collapse. But before this ending, the chapter tells us about the one who disbelieved in Allah's verses and said, 'I will certainly be granted plenty of wealth and children [if there is an afterlife].' (Maryam: 77)

There is therefore no surprise that the story of Ibrahim in this chapter, mostly, in fact, completely, focused on one area, that is Ibrahim's dialogue with his father. This story shows how Ibrahim spoke to his father, calling him to renounce idolatry and to avoid obeying Satan, all with good manners, gentleness, and respect, as we will explain in detail, God willing, through Qur'anic rhetoric. I really wish that disobedient children would read this story so that they can see the manners of Ibrahim when speaking and preaching to his father.

The mention of the story of Ibrahim was appropriate to the context, because the Arabs acknowledge his high status and the purity of his religion. He is the father of the Arabs. Allah Almighty said: 'the religion of your father Ibrahim.' (al-Hajj: 78).

By mentioning a part of his story, the Qur'an mentions something that the Arab pagans, and others, would be keen to hear, related to them by the Messenger. The aim behind it is to show the invalidity of their false polytheistic beliefs. It is as though it is said to the Arabs: you claim that you love Ibrahim, so why do you not follow him by abandoning idol worship, when you claim to be upon the religion and way of your forefathers? As the Qur'an says about them, they say, 'We found our fathers following this tradition; we are only following in their footsteps.' (al-Zukhruf: 23)

So why do you not follow Ibrahim in abandoning idolatry, when he is the head and most noble of your forefathers who you claim to be so close to and love? Additionally, your father Ibrahim rejected the false religion of his forefathers, so why do you not also abandon the false religion of your fathers? You also acknowledge the purity of the religion of your greatest father Ibrahim, admitting that it is free from the impurity of polytheism, so why did you abandon his religion?

If you claim to use logic, reason, and evidence, then reflect on the arguments that your father Ibrahim used to invalidate his father's corrupt religion. If you do not follow Ibrahim's religion, then at least follow his reasoning and thinking.

In summary, mentioning the story of Ibrahim here encourages the listener to follow in the footsteps of his father Ibrahim (peace be upon him), and follow his creed, either by following his actions, his thought and logic, or following both together. And Allah knows best.¹⁹⁷

1. Maryam: 41

Allah, Most High, said:

***'And mention in the Scripture Ibrahim. He was a man of truth and a prophet.'* (Verse 41)**

This introduction to the story of Ibrahim fits with the stories mentioned in the rest of the chapter. The story of Zakariya in the chapter began with, 'This is an account of your Lord's mercy towards His servant, Zachariah.' The story of Maryam similarly goes, 'And mention in the Book [O Prophet, the story of] Mary.' Just as the mention of Musa, Isma'il, and Idris all begin in the same way, 'and mention in the Book.'

Mention, O Muhammad, in the Scripture, that is the Qur'an, the greatest Scripture. Its reports or stories are the most correct and the most beneficial. Its commands and prohibitions are the most noble and most just. Its mention of reward and punishment are the most truthful and most wise. The prophets and messengers mentioned in it are greater than those around them. This is why the Qur'an repeatedly mentions the stories of the prophets who He has raised above others, due to their worship of Allah, their love for Him, their repentance, their fulfilment of His rights, as well as the rights of people, and their calling people to Allah with patience. So they were raised to the highest levels. Allah mentioned several prophets in this chapter commanding His prophet to mention them, because doing so reveals Allah's praise for them, His support for them, and encourages us to love them and follow them.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ Tafsir al-Razi, 10/464.

¹⁹⁸ Tafsir al-Sa'di, p. 1000.

‘He was a man of truth and a prophet.’ Allah describes him as being both a *siddiq* (man of truth) and a *nabi* (prophet). A *siddiq* is one who is always truthful in his speech, actions, and conditions. Someone who believes in all that he is commanded to believe in, which itself necessitates vast knowledge that is firmly settled and rooted in the heart, leading to firm faith and righteous actions. Ibrahim is the greatest of all prophets, after Muhammad. He is the third father of the chosen nations. Allah made prophethood and scriptures in his offspring. He is the one who called people to Allah and remained patient despite the punishment that he faced. He called those near and far, and did his best to call his father to the truth.¹⁹⁹

Allah described Ibrahim as a *siddiq* even before he received revelation. Notice how he described him as a *siddiq* first, then as a prophet, to show us the status of truthfulness and how it is one of the pillars of prophethood.

Every prophet is a *siddiq*, but not vice versa. The *siddiq* comes just after the rank of the prophet, but is above the rank of the *shahid* (martyr). The word *siddiq* is mentioned three times in the Qur’an, twice in Surat Maryam as a description of two of His prophets: Ibrahim and Idris. Allah said: ‘And mention in the Scripture Ibrahim. He was a man of truth and a prophet.’ And He said: ‘And mention in the Scripture Idris. He was a man of truth and a prophet.’ The third time it is mentioned is a description of Yusuf by the one who escaped from prison and came to ask him about the interpretation of a dream. Allah said: ‘Joseph, O man of truth (*siddiq*)! Interpret for us [the dream of] seven fat cows eaten up by seven skinny ones.’ (Yusuf: 46)

Siddiqah is the feminine form of *siddiq*, and is used once in the Qur’an to describe Mary, the mother of Isa. Allah, Most High said: ‘The Messiah, son of Mary, was no more than a messenger. Many messengers had come and gone before him. His mother was a woman of truth (*siddiqah*).’ (al-Ma’idah: 75). This means that she had believed in the truth of the prophets. Allah said in Surat al-Tahrim: ‘And Mary, daughter of Imran. She guarded her chastity, so We breathed into her from Our spirit. She accepted the truth of her Lord’s words and Scriptures, and she was truly devout.’ (al-Tahrim: 12)

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

Siddiqun is the plural of the term *siddiq*, and this is used twice in the Qur'an. 'And whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger will be in the company of those blessed by Allah: the prophets, the people of truth, the martyrs, and the righteous—what honourable company!' (al-Nisa: 69). And: 'Those who believe in God and His messengers are the truthful ones who will bear witness before their Lord: they will have their reward and their light.' (al-Hadid: 19)

Ibrahim was a *siddiq* amongst his people before prophethood, just as he was honest and reliable in delivering the message and submitting to the commands of his Lord. Describing Ibrahim as a *siddiq* and a prophet before mentioning his dialogue contains several implications.

The First Implication:

Ibrahim gathered the traits of the truthful and the prophets when he addressed his father. This means that Ibrahim became a messenger before he addressed his father, his people, and the king, since the aim of dialogue is to deliver the message of Allah in its complete form. This is why Allah praised Ibrahim, saying: 'And of Ibrahim, who fulfilled his duty.' And He said: 'That is Our argument. We gave it to Ibrahim against his people.' Then Ibrahim being saved from the fire came as an added proof of the truth of his claim that he has been sent by Allah to his people. Allah said: 'But We said, 'Fire, be cool and safe for Ibrahim.' They planned to harm him, but We made them suffer the greatest loss.' (al-Anbiya: 69-70)

The Second Implication:

Allah describing Ibrahim as a *siddiq* before describing him as a prophet, shows us that truthfulness is an essential trait for every prophet and messenger. This means that it is not possible for a prophet to be a liar. Hence, our prophet Muhammad was known as *al-sadiq al-amin* (the truthful and trustworthy) before prophethood. The same is to be said of every prophet. Truthfulness is considered one of the essentials of Islamic conduct. If it is present, the other good traits will be found with it. Which is why Allah described Ibrahim as a *siddiq*, because it encompasses the many noble traits that one would find in a whole nation (*ummah*). Hence, Allah described Ibrahim as being an 'ummah', 'Ibrahim was an *ummah* (leader).' We can

actually say that good traits increase in a person according to the level of truthfulness that he has.²⁰⁰

The *siddiq* is the one who has reached the pinnacle of accepting the truth, so Allah grants them an insight through which they are immediately guided to the truth and recognise falsehood without the need to look to far into the matter. That is because Allah grants you the light that dispels the clouds of doubt from you, and grants you the precise scale with which to weigh things, as God Almighty said: ‘Believers, if you remain mindful of God, He will give you a criterion [to tell right from wrong].’ (al-Anfal: 29)

It was for this reason that Abu Bakr al-Siddiq was name ‘al-Siddiq’. Not only because he himself was truthful, but because he believed and accepted everything that came to him from the messenger of Allah. It was the Messenger himself that described Abu Bakr as al-Siddiq, because he was truthful and never lied, and because he was quick to accept everything the Messenger said and quick to act in accordance with it.

This name that Abu Bakr was given by the prophet was in Makkah as a result of the incident of al-Isra (The Night Journey).²⁰¹ When people informed him of the incident of al-Isra, what was he response? He said: ‘Did he say that?’ They said: ‘Yes.’ He replied: ‘If he did indeed say it, then he is telling the truth.’ They said: ‘You believe that he went to Jerusalem during the night and returned before the morning?’ He replied: ‘Yes. I believe him in what is even greater than that. I believe his revelation that descends from the sky in the morning or evening.’ This is why he was called Abu Bakr al-Siddiq.²⁰²

The matter for him is purely dependent on whether the Prophet said it or not. And so long as he said it, then he is truthful. Just like that, without any discussion, without a need to look further into the matter. Thus, from the onwards, he was a true *siddiq*.

The Khalil (friend) of Allah, Ibrahim, was a *siddiq* and a prophet. A person could be a *siddiq* without necessarily being a prophet, just as a Maryam and Abu Bakr. So this is a trait of enlightenment from Allah, while

²⁰⁰ Baderin, p. 28.

²⁰¹ Tafsir al-Sha’rawi (15/9092)

²⁰² Mustadrak al-Hakim (3/62).

prophethood is purely something that Allah grants from above, a guidance that He reveals, and a responsibility that He gives.²⁰³

The manifestations of truthfulness in the life of Ibrahim are many. One of them is obeying Allah in challenging his people about their false religion, for they used to worship idols and stones which they make with their own hands and then prostrate to. Given his responsibility, the first person that Ibrahim turned to was his own father, very keen to guide him and wanting that which is good for him.

2. Maryam: 42

Allah, Most High, said:

‘He said to his father, ‘My dear father, why do you worship what can neither hear, nor see, nor benefit you in any way?’ (Verse 42)

After Allah described Ibrahim as having both traits and reaching both levels, the status of siddiq and nabi, Ibrahim addresses his father in a way that causes any heart to incline, using a kind, gentle, and gradual approach to call his father to the truth.²⁰⁴ And so we live these verses with Ibrahim’s dialogue with his father in which he reminds him and explains to him the falsehood of his beliefs with good conduct, respect, wisdom, and gentleness.

He begins by addressing him as ‘my father.’ He repeats this four times during his dialogue with him. A gentle and respectful address through which Ibrahim wants to show his father how much he means to him. An address that every father softens towards and feels pleasure in hearing. Ibrahim does this to show him that his advice for him is a sincere one, coming from the heart of one who loves his father and wants the best for him.

After addressing his father in this way, Ibrahim explains why the worship that he takes part in is invalid using questions. He said: ‘O dear father, why do you worship what can neither hear, nor see, nor benefit you in any way?’ He asks his father why he worships an idol made of stone, despite its three deficiencies that are clear to see: they cannot hear, nor see, nor benefit in any way.

²⁰³ Tafsir al-Sha’rawi (15/9093).

²⁰⁴ Al-Kurdi, p. 202.

Note how Ibrahim, calling to Allah, debunks his father's beliefs regarding these idols by describing them in ways that make them unworthy of divinity. If they cannot hear or see, benefit whoever obeys it, nor harm those who disobey it, then what is the benefit in worshipping it? If du'a is the essence of worship, and these idols cannot hear supplication, then what good does worshipping it bring? If it cannot see the offerings and rituals that people perform for it, then what is the benefit of doing so? Can one expect any benefit or fear any harm from something that cannot defend itself from being broken as Ibrahim goes on to do later on?

Ibrahim challenged his father's beliefs using questions that were in fact rhetorical, out of amazement at those who worship idols that cannot benefit or harm. These arguments from Ibrahim show that worshipping something so weak and deficient is wrong, both logically and religiously. The implication of Ibrahim's words is that the one who should be worshipped is the completely perfect One, the source of all benefit and harm.²⁰⁵

Worship is supposed to be directed by humans to someone who is greater, more powerful, and more knowledgeable than humans. It should be for the creator of humans and all creation, the one who benefits, harms, rewards, and punishes. It is authentically reported in Sahih al-Bukhari and Muslim that Umar ibn al-Khattab kissed the black stone, then said: 'I know that you are only a stone. You do not benefit or harm. Had I not seen the prophet kissing you, I would not have done so.'²⁰⁶

Worship is the peak of glorification, so is only deserved by the one who is the source of all blessings; that is the Creator, the Sustainer, the Powerful, the One who brings to life and causes to die. He has the beautiful names and perfect attributes. He alone is worthy of worship. Worship also includes a servant obeying someone in everything they command and prohibit.

So those who worship anything besides God, such as an idol, or the sun, or the moon, did these idols create them or create anything or provide for them or provide for anyone? What exactly did these deities command them to do or forbid them from doing? What is the reward they have

²⁰⁵ Tafsir al-Sa'di, p. 1000.

²⁰⁶ Sahih al-Bukhari (No: 1597) and Sahih Muslim (No: 1270)

promised for those who worship them? What is the punishment they have promised for those who refuse to worship them? The answer is: Nothing.

Ibrahim (peace be upon him) took the best approach in calling his father's. He began by removing from his heart any glorification for these idols, by making it clear to him that they do not deserve any worship or glorification, for they are silent and weak. They do not hear nor see, they do not bring any benefit, nor repel any harm from their worshippers. After this, he drew his father's attention to the honour and responsibility of prophethood that Allah granted him, so he said:

3. Maryam: 43

Allah, Most High, said:

'My dear father, some knowledge that has not reached you has certainly come to me, so follow me. I will guide you to a straight path.'
(Verse 43)

After Ibrahim showed his father the invalidity of idolatry, he explained the source and origin of his message. He is not calling him based on his own desire or opinion, but his message is based on the knowledge that Allah granted him. He thus advises his father to follow him upon the path of guidance, to save himself from destruction.

Once again, Ibrahim, addresses his father, saying 'my dear father.' As if he wants to ignite his father's fatherly emotions and say, 'I am speaking to you as a concerned son.' All this is out of concern for his father's guidance to the straight path.²⁰⁷

Of course, claiming to have been granted knowledge that his father has not been given is not easy to accept, so Ibrahim emphasised this point: 'certainly'. Also notice how Ibrahim did not accuse his father of ignorance, though his father was certainly worthy of such. Neither did Ibrahim claim to have reached the peak of knowledge, though the source of his knowledge is Allah through divine revelation and inspiration. Instead he claimed to have some knowledge, 'there has certainly come to me knowledge that never came to you.' Knowledge that leads to guidance.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Tafsir al-Sha'rawi (15/9098)

²⁰⁸ Tafsir al-Alusi (8/415)

We notice the following:

1. He first confirms the knowledge that he has received, before requesting him to act upon the necessary result of that knowledge, which is, ‘so follow me.’
2. We find in the language of the Qur’an that it often describes knowledge as ‘having come’. This is to show its importance and noticeable nature in eliminating ignorance, removing confusion from the eyes and hearts, and preventing from misguidance, all due to its clear light and the strength of its proof. Thus, Ibrahim describes the knowledge he was given as something that ‘has come to him.’
3. Ibrahim did not immediately tell him that this knowledge came to him from Allah, so that he does not shock his father by claiming prophethood so soon. Instead, he gradually wanted to clarify his arguments to him. This was especially important because his father believed himself to be highly knowledgeable, since he was a senior man of religion amongst his people. But the knowledge that Ibrahim was referring to was knowledge of divine revelation and prophethood.
4. Ibrahim maintained humility by clarifying that only ‘some’ knowledge has come to him, because knowledge is an ocean with shores that no human can attain completely.
5. Ibrahim explains that knowledge has come to him, which his father does not have, so the advice he is about to give him is worth listening to. The word *knowledge* used here shows that the Muslim should worship Allah with sound knowledge, call people to Allah with knowledge, follow the prophets upon knowledge, and go about his whole life in an informed way. When Allah commanded His messenger Muhammad to hold on to the word of *tawhid*, the greatest deed a person can do in this life, the thing that saves one from the fire of Hell, and what guarantees one Paradise, He commanded him to do so with knowledge. ‘So, know [O Prophet], that there is no god [worthy of worship] except Allah. And seek forgiveness for your shortcomings and for the believing men and women.’ (Muhammad: 19)

6. When he told him to follow him, he explained the consequence of doing so, which is, ‘I will guide you to a straight path.’ A path that leads to truth and guidance, one that leads to *the* straight path, the path of the oneness of Allah, that Allah described in the first chapter of the Qur’an, ‘guide us to the straight path.’ (al-Fatiha: 6)

Abd al-Rahman al-Sa’di said: ‘The straight path is the worship of Allah alone without any partners and obeying Him in all our affairs. And this address by Ibrahim shows his wisdom and gentleness, for he did not say, ‘I am knowledgeable and you are ignorant.’ Instead he used words that imply that they both have some knowledge, but that Ibrahim has some knowledge that his father does not have, and should thus submit to the sound proof that he has brought.²⁰⁹

This statement by Ibrahim also shows the importance of following people the righteous scholars. So one who does not have much knowledge should follow those who guide him and bring him knowledge, because that will either be for him or against him on the Day of Judgment.

Then Ibrahim showed his father how idol worship means obeying Satan, because he is its first founder and caller to it.²¹⁰

4. Maryam: 44-45

Allah, Most High, said:

‘My dear father, do not worship Satan. Surely Satan is ever rebellious against the Most Compassionate. My dear father, I fear that a punishment from the Most Compassionate will afflict you, and you become Satan’s companion.’ (Verse 44-45)

After Ibrahim proved the falsehood of idol worship and the source of his knowledge, he explained that his father’s way is the way of Shaytan, while Ibrahim wants to guide him to the way of Al-Rahman (The Most Compassionate).

‘My dear father, do not worship Satan.’

Ibrahim tells his father to not worship the devil, because whoever has worshipped other than Allah has worshipped the devil. As Allah Almighty

²⁰⁹ Tafsir al-Sa’di, p. 1001.

²¹⁰ Al-Ruwayni, p. 189.

said: ‘Did I not command you, O Children of Adam, not to worship Satan, for he is truly your sworn enemy.’ (Yasin: 60)

The worship of Satan here means to worship idols, because he is the one who encourages people to do so and beautifies it for them. Worshipping Satan can also mean to obey him and to act upon his whispers, and whoever disobeys Allah in order to obey someone else, has worshipped that person.

‘Surely Satan is ever rebellious against the Most Compassionate.’

In this verse Ibrahim explains the reason behind his prohibition. He tells him not to worship Satan, because Satan is severely disobedient to Allah the One who, out of His mercy, has given us so many blessings. It is therefore not appropriate to obey the one who is so disobedient to his Lord. He mentioned the name Al-Rahman for several reasons, including:

- Alerting him to the vastness of God’s mercy, and therefore, He alone should be worshipped and obeyed.
- Informing him of the wretchedness of Satan, as he disobeyed the Most Merciful, which led to him being expelled from this mercy. And this shows the complete heinousness of his crime.
- It shows that sin prevents one from the vast mercy of God and closes its doors on him, just as obeying Allah is the greatest cause of obtaining His mercy. Priority should therefore be given to obeying God.

It would have perhaps been easier to say, ‘do not worship Satan, for he is ever rebellious against the Most Compassionate.’ However, Satan’s name is repeated, because merely hearing his name puts off the sound-minded person. It also shows an emphasis by making them two separate statements each worthy of careful consideration.

‘My dear father, I fear that a punishment from the Most Compassionate will afflict you, and you become Satan’s companion.’

Ibrahim warns his father of Allah’s anger and punishment of he dies upon idol worship and obeying Satan. This will make him Satan’s companion in the Hellfire and being cursed from Allah’s mercy. The righteous son began his fourth statement in the same way he began his previous statements, saying: ‘My dear father.’ He made clear that he is worried and concerned about his father, saying: ‘My dear father, I fear that a punishment

from the Most Compassionate will afflict you.’ He is not certain that this punishment will occur, but he fears that it will because of the path that his father has decided to take. He did not speak with certainty about something that is purely Allah’s decision, in order to maintain good conduct with Allah Almighty and to keep some hope in his father’s heart who may consider finding a way out of the risk of punishment by abandoning idol worship and obeying Satan.

Had he told his father that punishment will certainly befall him, he would have closed the doors of salvation that his father may have considered. He used Allah’s name Al-Rahman to show that this God is a merciful and compassionate one, but due to the gravity of the crime committed, even He will not grant His mercy in this case. The mention of this attribute of Allah also means that punishment will not befall immediately, but neither does it prevent punishment altogether. Allah’s mercy has indeed overcome His anger, as the Prophet said, but that does not negate punishment and anger altogether.²¹¹

After warning his father of the punishment, he explained its consequences, ‘and you become Satan’s companion.’ You become his companion in this life and the next. So Ibrahim spoke to his father by gradually taking him from one point to the next. First telling him of the knowledge that has come to him, which makes him worthy of being obeyed. If he then obeys him, he shall be lead to the path of guidance. On the other hand, if he obeys Satan, he risks Allah’s punishment, for if he dies upon these beliefs and actions, he would be Satan’s companion in Hell.

Imam al-Amin al-Shanqiti said: ‘Worshipping Satan in this verse means to obey him in disbelief and disobedience. Shirk in obedience is a form of shirk, as Allah said: ‘Did I not command you, O Children of Adam, not to worship Satan, for he is truly your sworn enemy. But worship Me; that is the straight path.’ (Yasin: 60-61). This verse also shows that the disbelievers who are punished in the afterlife will be companions of Satan, and this is mentioned in many other verses, such as Allah’s statement, ‘So fight the companions of Satan’ (al-Nisa: 76). And: ‘It is none but Satan who frightens you of his friends.’ (al-Imran: 175). And He said: ‘They took Satan as a companion besides Allah.’ (al-A’raf: 30)

²¹¹ Tafsir Ibn Ashur, 16/118.

Whoever allows Satan to beautify disbelief and sin and thus follows him in this life, will have no companion in the afterlife except Satan. As Allah said: ‘By Allah! We have surely sent messengers to communities before you [O Prophet], but Satan made their misdeeds appealing to them. So he is their patron today, and they will suffer a painful punishment.’ (al-Nahl: 63). And whoever has no ally and supporter on the Day of Judgment other than Satan, will have no ally that can help him.²¹²

However, these beautiful and gentle words do not reach the heart of the disbeliever, so his father Azar responds with rejection and threats.

5. Maryam: 46

Allah, Most High, said:

He said, ‘Are you renouncing my gods, O Ibrahim? If you do not desist, I will stone you. So leave me alone for a while.’ (Verse 46)

Azar responded to his son’s gentle invitation with an aggressive rejection. And that is the nature of *iman* (belief) and *kufr* (disbelief), the mind that is built upon faith and the heart that is ruined by disbelief and being distant from Allah, for every vessel pours what it is inside it.²¹³

This aggressive fatherly response is a supportive lesson for the Prophet who faced a lot of harm from his uncle Abu Lahab, and from his people generally. Similarly, this was a message for the Companions who faced hardships from their mothers and fathers. This situation is also a great reminder for all the believers who are mistreated by their relatives who have become distant from the truth and had their nature corrupted.

It is easy to see how the hardest thing for a caller to Allah is to face opposition and enmity from his own family, by harming him with their words and actions, shunning him, and encouraging people to abandon him. This is one of the many trials that Allah test His righteous servants with, to know which of them is truthful. In such cases, there is no cure except patience and firmness, and Allah is the greatest help.

The personality of Azar is not a gentle one towards his son, although gentleness is expected more from fathers towards their sons. This indicates

²¹² Adwa al-Bayan (4/208).

²¹³ Qutb, S. (4/2314)



the impact of disbelief in Allah on a person's human nature, something that we see so clearly in the disbelievers of our time. How often do we see cases of parents killing their children without any bother, as though it has become an accepted thing? The same goes for many other actions that are the result of being distant from Allah and thus a deviated nature.²¹⁴

The Personality of Ibrahim's Father:

This response gives an idea of Azar's personality and alludes to some of its features. The Qur'an has pointed to some of the personality traits of Azar, Ibrahim's father. Some examples include:

a. Polytheism

The dialogue with Ibrahim makes clear that Azar was an idol worshipper, since Ibrahim said: 'My dear father, why do you worship what can neither hear, nor see, nor benefit you in any way?' And it seems like he has a special concern for these idols and gives them his time and effort. It can be understood from the verse of Surat al-An'am, 'do you take idols as gods', that Azar would make idols himself.²¹⁵

b. His Religious Status

From the context of the dialogue we can see that Azar was a man of status amongst his people, with a concern for his idols and religious rituals. We can understand this from what has already been mentioned and from the threats that he made: 'If you do not desist, I will stone you.' He is thus a man of status whose command to stone someone would be fulfilled by his people.²¹⁶

c. Listening to Others

Nonetheless, Azar does appear to be someone who is willing to listen to others, since he allowed Ibrahim to complete what he had to say without interruption.

d. Complete Devotion to Disbelief

The dialogue shows that Ibrahim's father showed complete loyalty and devotion to defending his gods, rejecting anything that opposes them, and

²¹⁴ Al-Qasas al-Qur'ani bayn al-Aba wa al-Abna, p. 82.

²¹⁵ Al-Bahr al-Muhit, 4/170.

²¹⁶ Tafsir Ibn Ashur (16/120).

willing to sacrifice anything for their sake, even if that be his very own son. He said, ‘Are you renouncing my gods, O Ibrahim?’ It seems like he felt that nobody would dare to go to such an extent, so he rhetorically asked this question out of shock and amazement. He is almost suggesting that Ibrahim is not worth the right to disagree, and upset that his own son is opposing the gods of his father. Hence, he referred to them as, ‘my gods.’

However, Azar’s response shows that Ibrahim’s renouncement of the idols was a continuous and firmly rooted matter, not a sudden decision that he had made. Despite that, Azar’s response showed that Ibrahim’s words did not change his stance in any way.

e. His Rough Nature

Azar had received gentle words from his son and was addressed with a kindness that would soften the hard heart and melt the solid rock. He tried to make his father contemplate, fear Allah, and be wary of obeying Satan. However, his response was a rough one, forgetting the father-son relationship and even threatening to kill him.

d. Arrogance and Belittling Others

Arrogance manifested clearly from Azar from the moment he spoke his first words in response to Ibrahim. Perhaps he feels that Ibrahim is not worthy of even being attributed to him, as long as he denounces his gods. So he referred to his son as ‘Ibrahim’, instead of, ‘my dear son’ or some other way similar to the gentleness Ibrahim addressed his father.

These are some of the characteristics of the personality of Ibrahim’s father that can be understood from his brief dialogue with his son. They show the hardship and struggle that the righteous son Ibrahim faced in the path of calling his father to guidance and saving him from the punishment of the Most Compassionate, thus leaving an eternal legacy for all respectable children who are faced with deviated parents in a misguided community.

‘If you do not desist, I will stone you. So leave me alone for a while.’

This is a severe warning for Ibrahim. If he does not completely desist from calling people to his God and warning them against worshipping their idols, he will be stoned. Azar wants his son to completely abandon anything that involves disrespecting their gods. The threat of stoning shows

the harshness of his father, because he is willing to have stones thrown at his son until his death. The harshest of punishments. The Arabic word, *rajm* generally means stoning to death. However, it can also be used to mean curse and insult, and in this case there is no harm in both meanings being intended.

Azar did not suffice with abandoning his son and turning away from him, but instead commanded Ibrahim to leave him alone and to not speak to him for a while. This was intended as a punishment for him, to belittle him, but also a form of threat. Being his father did not do much to prevent him from such a harsh threat and a command for him to stay away from him for an unspecified period of time. What then was Ibrahim's response to his father's reply? Did he respond with aggression? No. Instead, his father's harshness seemed to have increased Ibrahim in gentleness and humility. Read with me Ibrahim's reply.

6. Maryam: 47-48

***He said, 'Peace be upon you. I will ask my Lord to forgive you; He has always been gracious to me. And I will withdraw from you and from what you pray to instead of God. And I will pray to my Lord, and I hope I will not be disappointed in my prayer to my Lord.'* (Verse 47-48)**

Ibrahim's reply to his father was filled with words of honest prayer and kind words, sincerely wishing guidance and salvation for his father. He immediately accepted his father's wish for him to keep away from him. And despite Ibrahim's high status in the sight of Allah, he remained humble before Allah, and maintained an easy and humble approach in his interaction with his father.²¹⁷

Ibrahim's personality in this scene is one of maturity, sound intellect, informed judgment, patience, and discipline. Allah Almighty said: 'Truly, Ibrahim was forbearing, tender-hearted, and devout.' (Hud: 75). The one who ponders this discussion becomes amazed at the positive and optimistic attitude that Ibrahim shows. Despite the harshness he received, death-threats, and abandonment, he still kept hope that his father could soon be guided.

²¹⁷ Al-Saif, H. p. 75.

‘He said, ‘Peace (salam) be upon you.’

This is a prayer from Ibrahim to his father that he will be safe and protected from any harm. He informs his father that he will not respond to him with insults and he hopes for his safety while they are apart. This *Salam* is also one of greeting him farewell, responding to his harshness with kindness. This salutation from Ibrahim really shows the noble restraint that Ibrahim reached. This is how the caller to Allah should be. Whenever he is mistreated, he responds with goodness and turns away from those who mistreat him, as Allah commanded: ‘Repel evil with good. We are well aware of what they claim.’ (al-Mu’minun: 96)

On this, we recall something that Shaykh Abd al-Rahman al-Sa’di said: ‘God has commanded us to follow the religion of Ibrahim (peace be upon him), so whoever follows his religion must follow his path in calling to God with wisdom, knowledge, leniency, and ease, gradually moving from one stage to the next. All this while maintaining patience, not losing hope, and being patient with the harm that comes in his direction, and retaliating to it with forgiveness, or even excellence.’²¹⁸

‘I will ask my Lord to forgive you.’

Ibrahim did not suffice with only greeting his father when leaving and supplicating for him. he also promised that he will seek forgiveness for him from Allah, such that He guides him to the correct belief. Seeking forgiveness (*istighfar*) for a disbeliever means to pray for their guidance which necessitates Allah’s forgiveness. This is permissible before the person dies upon clear disbelief. And Ibrahim did indeed pray for his father’s forgiveness as mentioned in Surat al-Shu’ara: ‘and forgive my father, for he had been from the misguided.’ (al-Shu’ara: 86).

Ibrahim prayed for his father’s forgiveness during his lifetime hoping that he would believe in Allah. However, when he died in a state of disbelief, he broke ties with him and refrained from praying for his forgiveness, which was the right thing to do. The Qur’an pointed this out: ‘As for Ibrahim’s prayer for his father’s forgiveness, it was only in fulfilment of a promise he had made to him. But when it became clear to Ibrahim that his father was an enemy of Allah, he broke ties with him.’ (al-Tawbah: 114)

²¹⁸ Tafsir al-Sa’di, p. 1002.

Qadi al-Baydawi said regarding this verse: ‘Ibrahim promised his father that he would pray for his forgiveness, in that he would be guided to Islam, as this removes all past sins. ‘But when it became clear to Ibrahim that his father was an enemy of Allah’, in that he died as a disbeliever or that it was revealed to Ibrahim that his father would never believe, ‘he broke ties with him’, and stopped praying for his forgiveness.’²¹⁹

So Qadi Baydawi here gives two possibilities regarding when Ibrahim stopped praying for his father’s forgiveness, either when his father died as a disbeliever or that Allah revealed to Ibrahim that his father would never believe. Thus, the forgiveness that Ibrahim promised to pray for is to pray for his guidance and repentance. As we said, this is permissible when one is still alive, because there is a chance they will become believers. However, after their death as disbelievers, it is not permissible to seek forgiveness for that person.

Allah Almighty said:

It is not [proper] for the Prophet and the believers to seek forgiveness for the polytheists, even if they were close relatives, after it has become clear to the believers that they are bound for the Hellfire. As for Ibrahim’s prayer for his father’s forgiveness, it was only in fulfilment of a promise he had made to him. But when it became clear to Ibrahim that his father was an enemy of Allah, he broke ties with him. Ibrahim was truly tender-hearted, forbearing. (al-Tawbah: 113-114)

His statement, ‘I will ask my Lord to forgive you’, shows that he was not certain yet about the final state of his father. And he said, ‘my Lord (*Rabb*)’ to show that he is praying to One who is close and cares for his creation. The One who nurtures and sustains them. A prayer that is specifically made and intended for his father. This things all add to the likelihood of his prayers being accepted. In response to his father’s statement earlier when he said, ‘my gods’, Ibrahim said that he will pray to ‘my Lord’, making it clear that he is asking the true God that is worthy of worship, not the unworthy gods of Azar.

‘He has always been gracious to me.’

²¹⁹ Tafsir al-Baydawi, p. 299.

‘He has always been gracious to me,’ i.e. kind, generous, and merciful. I will pray to my Lord who has always been kind to me and accepted my prayers.

‘As I distance myself from [all of] you and from whatever you invoke besides Allah, I will [continue to] call upon my Lord [alone], trusting that I will never be disappointed in invoking my Lord.’

Ibrahim obeyed his father’s request to keep away from him for a while, so he told him that he will distance himself from him and his people after having fulfilled his duty of preaching and establishing the proof against them. We continue to see Ibrahim’s excellent manners and humility, since he did not specify that he will distance himself from his father, but all his people, unlike his father’s direct order for him to distance himself. And Ibrahim’s announcement that he will distance himself, means that he will be abandoning the land of disbelievers and those in it.

Once again, Ibrahim alludes to the fact that he is abandoning idols that are not sane, nor living, when he said, ‘whatever you invoke’, as opposed to ‘whoever.’ Another reinforcement of their unworthiness of worship and the absurdity of those who worship them. His mention of their idols also indicates the reason for distancing himself from them, besides his father’s threat, and that is that he does not wish to remain amongst people who insist on worshipping gods besides Allah, the Most High.

Notice Ibrahim’s excellent conduct. He responded to his father’s threat of stoning with a greeting of peace and a promise to pray for his forgiveness. He then fulfilled his father’s request and abandoned his people so long as they remain upon idolatry.

Ibrahim then explained the reason for his prayer and worship of Allah, ‘trusting that I will never be disappointed in invoking my Lord.’ Once again he shows his humility with his Lord, as he did not want to claim with certainty that his prayers would be accepted, noting that Allah’s acceptance of any prayer is purely out of His grace and mercy, not something that anyone is entitled to.²²⁰

In Ibrahim’s statement here, he alludes to the fact that the idolators, his father and his people, are wretched and shall be disappointed due to their

²²⁰ Al-Ruwayni, p. 207.

idol worship. They tire themselves out in worshipping them, sacrificing for them, and serving them, yet these idols do not give them anything in return, nor do they benefit them in any way. In fact, these idols shall be a fuel for the Hellfire on the Day of Judgment which they shall be punished with, and thus a cause of misery and disappointment in this life and the next.

Ibrahim acted upon his intentions that he made known and migrated to Sham to preserve his faith, having fulfilled his duty of calling to Allah and facing the disbelievers with his heart, hand, and tongue. This way, he became the first person to migrate in the path of Allah, for the sake of his faith. He left with his wife and his nephew Lot, after he was thrown into the fire by his people, but was saved by Allah who made the fire cool and harmless. He said, 'I am going to my Lord. He shall guide me.' (al-Saffat: 99). So Allah guided him to the holy lands of Sham (Levante). 'We saved him and Lot [and sent them] to the land We blessed for all people.' (al-Anbiya: 71)

Ibrahim chose estrangement and being distant from his father and people, to come closer to Allah, thus giving us a practical example of Allah's rule: 'Whoever leaves something for the sake of Allah, will have it replaced by Allah with something better.' So Allah's grace and blessings immediately came down upon him after the trials he faced.

7. Maryam: 49-50

Allah, Most High, said:

***'When he withdrew from them and from what they worship besides God, We granted him Isaac and Jacob, each We made a prophet. We showered them with Our mercy, and blessed them with honourable mention.'* (Verse 49-50)**

Ibrahim migrated to Sham abandoning his father, family, people, and land, for the sake of Allah, hoping that perhaps he will find a fertile ground to spread the doctrine of monotheism. So God Almighty compensated him with righteous offspring that would comfort him during his exile. Allah gave him Isaac despite his old age and his wife Sarah being infertile. Then he was blessed with a grandson, Jacob, the son of Isaac (peace be upon them all). And before both of them, he was given his first son Isma'il. Allah granted them various types of goods of this life and the next, He made

them prophets, and kept for them a good remembrance and beautiful praise amounts people until the Day of Resurrection. Allah replaced Ibrahim's family with a better family and a homeland better than his homeland that he left. Let us then reflect on these meanings as articulated in these noble verses.

‘When he withdrew from them and from what they worship besides God.’

Ibrahim then did as he had promised, leaving his people and the symbols of disbelief of his people. Although his migration did not occur immediately after his discussion with his father, the wording of the verses make it seem like he left as soon as he made his intentions clear to them, so that the key events of the story are connected and to show how quick Ibrahim was to follow up on his decision.

‘We granted him Isaac and Jacob.’

The gift of Ishaq and Jacob was a reward for his withdrawal from his people. A great gift indeed that shows the greatness of the act of migration in the path of Allah. This does not necessitate that he was blessed with children immediately after his migration, because the common view is that Ibrahim was first given Isma'il, then Ishaq was born much later after that.²²¹

Ishaq was known for his piety, and Allah made him a blessed person, granting him offspring, some righteous and others not so. And Allah praised him in the Qur'an: 'We gave him good news of Isaac—a prophet, and one of the righteous. We blessed him and Isaac as well. Some of their descendants did good, while others clearly wronged themselves.' (al-Saffat: 112-113). The Prophet described Ishaq as being an honourable man with an honourable lineage. In the Hadith related by Abu Huraira, he said:

Some people asked the Prophet: 'Who is the most honourable amongst the people?' He replied, 'The most honourable among them is the one who is the most God-conscious.' They said, 'O Prophet, we are not asking about that.' He said, 'Then the most honourable person is Joseph, Allah's Prophet, the son of Allah's Prophet, the son of Allah's Prophet, the son of Allah's friend.' They said, 'We are not asking about that.' He said, 'Then you want to ask me about the Arabs' descent?' They said, 'Yes.' He said,

²²¹ Al-Ruwayni, p. 209.

‘Those who were best in the pre-Islamic period, are the best in Islam, if they comprehend [knowledge of Islam].’²²²

The honourable son of the honourable is Joseph, son of Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Ibrahim. Allah also described him as a great example worthy of being followed, doing righteous deeds, establishing prayer, giving zakat, and being a servant of Allah. This is the essence of pure tawhid: being a servant of Allah.

Allah (Most High) said: ‘and We gave him Isaac and Jacob as an additional gift, and made each of them righteous. We also made them leaders, guiding by Our command, and inspired them to do good deeds, establish prayer, and pay alms-tax (*zakat*). And they were devoted to Our worship.’ (al-Anbiya: 72-73). Jacob, the son of Isaac, is also called Isra’il. His grandfather Ibrahim was given the good news of his birth when the angels visited him to inform him of what would happen to the people of Lot, as we shall detail later.

As well as being his grandson, Jacob also counts as being Ibrahim’s son, because he was born in his grandfather’s life and was brought up in his home, so he was like his immediate son. He also learnt Ibrahim’s religion which he then passed on to his children. This all implies that Ibrahim lived a long life after leaving his people.

Allah granted Ibrahim Isaac and Jacob without requiring anything in return, because His gifts and blessings are far greater than any good deed any human can do. For He is the Most Generous who gives whoever He wills whatever He will. His grace is infinite and cannot be enumerated. ‘If you tried to count Allah’s blessings, you would never be able to number them. Surely Allah is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful.’ (al-Nahl:18). He gives without request, without need, and without compensation. He gave Isaac and Jacob to Ibrahim out of pure grace and generosity; a manifestation of His Name, Al-Wahhab (The Giver). He gives cure to the sick, children to the barren, guidance to the deviant, and alleviation for the afflicted. His kindness encompasses all creation.

Here we ask about the secret behind specifying Isaac and Jacob, even though Ibrahim was given another son before them: Isma’il. There are several answers to this question:

²²² Al-Bukhari (No: 3373).

1. When Ibrahim left his people, he left with his wife Sarah who also left her people seeking Allah's pleasure. So Allah mentioned that which was a gift for both Ibrahim and his wife. And since this gift came after Ibrahim abandoned his people, Isaac and Jacob were named as his children that kept him company and comfort were mentioned. This was not the case as much with Isma'il who was far away from him.²²³
2. Isma'il was mentioned separately by Allah to show his high status with Allah, as we recite in the same chapter: 'And mention in the Book [O Prophet, the story of] Ishmael. He was truly a man of his word, and was a messenger and a prophet. He commanded his household to pray and give alms, and his Lord was well pleased with him.' (Maryam: 54-55)
3. Isaac and Jacob are the roots of the tree of prophets, since many of their great children and offspring were given prophethood. While the only prophet that came from the offspring of Ishmael was Muhammad.²²⁴
4. Isaac and Jacob were specified because they remained in the land of Ibrahim and continued his legacy after being brought up by him. as for Ishmael, it was Allah that took care of nurturing him after being taken as a toddler to Masjid al-Haram. He was thus mentioned independently, and Allah knows best.
5. Isaac was born to Sarah who was an infertile elderly woman, while Ishmael was born to his mother Hajar, so the gift of Isaac is more apparent due to its miraculous nature.

These answers are all based on the opinions and interpretations of the scholars of tafsir. In any case, they are all valid possibilities, but the fruits of the order of their mention is not so important, and Allah knows best.

'Each We made a prophet. We showered them with Our mercy, and blessed them with honourable mention.'

After the treatment Ibrahim faced from his father and people, Allah replaced him with a son, Ishmael, and a grandson, Isaac. The gift of children

²²³ Tafsir Ibn Ashur (16/124).

²²⁴ Hafidh, Z. p. 71.

that he was so eager to have. They were his new family that brought him comfort. His disbelieving father who threatened to stone him to death was thus replaced with children who were both made prophets by Allah. Prophets with an excellent reputation, always remembered with good.

‘We showered them with Our mercy.’ The exact nature of this mercy was not specified, because the effects of Allah’s mercy upon them (i.e. Ibrahim, Isaac, and Jacob) are abundant, giving the mind the freedom to contemplate Allah’s various blessings upon them, including prophethood, wealth, authority, wisdom, honour, a high status on earth, righteous deeds, and beneficial knowledge. All this was found in Ibrahim, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants, among whom there were many prophets and righteous men and women.²²⁵

One of the signs of Allah’s mercy upon Ibrahim and his children is that ‘We blessed them with honourable mention.’ People speak of them with honourable words and truthful praise that shows their raised status. And so Ibrahim’s prayer was accepted by Allah for him and his children²²⁶, when he prayed, ‘bless me with honourable mention among later generations.’ (al-Shu’ara: 84)

They thus became honest in their call, respected and obeyed amongst their people, because Allah promised all the good-doers a truthful and honourable mention amongst people, and these prophets are the leaders of the good-doers, so deserve the most honourable mention. The hearts are filled with love for them, the tongues are moist with their praise, and they continue to be role models and excellent examples for all the generations after them and the generations still to come. And this is all Allah’s grace, He gives it to whoever He wills.²²⁷

²²⁵ Abu Zahra, 9/4654.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Tafsir al-Sa’di, p. 1002.

Section 3:

The Story of Ibrahim in Surat al-Anbiya

Allah, the Most High, said:

‘And indeed, We had granted Ibrahim his sound judgment early on, for We knew him well [to be worthy of it]. [Remember] when he questioned his father and his people, ‘What are these statues to which you are so devoted?’ They replied, ‘We found our forefathers worshipping them.’ He responded, ‘Indeed, you and your forefathers have been clearly astray.’ They asked, ‘Have you come to us with the truth, or are you just playing about?’ He replied, ‘In fact, your Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, Who created them [both]. And to that I bear witness.’ [Then he said to himself,] ‘By Allah! I will surely plot against your idols after you have turned your backs and gone away.’ So he smashed them into pieces, except the biggest of them, so they might turn to it [for answers]. They protested, ‘Who dared do this to our gods? It must be an evildoer!’ Some said, ‘We heard a young man, called Ibrahim, speaking [ill] of them.’ They demanded, ‘Bring him before the eyes of the people, so that they may witness [his trial].’ They asked, ‘Was it you who did this to our gods, O Ibrahim?’ He replied, ‘No, it was done by the biggest of them—this one. Ask them, if they can talk!’ So they turned to one another, saying, ‘It is you who are in the wrong,’ but then they quickly regressed again and said, ‘You know very well these gods cannot speak.’ He said, ‘Do you then worship, beside Allah, what can neither benefit nor harm you?’ Shame on you and on the things you worship instead of God. Do you not have any sense?’ They said, ‘Burn him and avenge your gods, if you are going to act.’ But We said, ‘Fire, be cool and safe for Ibrahim.’ They planned to harm him, but We made them suffer the greatest loss. We saved him and Lot [and sent them] to the land We blessed for all people, and We gave him Isaac and Jacob as an additional gift, and made each of them righteous. We made them leaders, guiding by Our command, and inspired them to do good deeds, establish prayer, and

pay alms-tax (zakat). And they were devoted to Our worship.’ (Surat al-Anbiya: 51-73)

This passage begins by showing the great status that has been granted to Ibrahim and the virtue that he was gifted with. This is to reinforce the content that is to come in the hearts of the Arabs being addressed, who claim affiliation with Ibrahim. ‘And indeed, We had granted Ibrahim his sound judgment early on.’

The relationship between these verses and the verses mentioned before them, is that Allah spoke about the proofs of His oneness, prophethood, and resurrection. Then he mentioned thirteen prophets, not in chronological order, and the various hardships they faced. This boosts the Prophet’s morale, so that he can follow their footsteps in the struggles that he faces from his people.

The main focus of this chapter is the subject of faith (*aqidah*), which is the origin and foundation of religion. The story of Ibrahim with his people therefore naturally takes the lead on this matter, because the name of Ibrahim has, for a long time and in all scriptural religions, become a symbol of combating idolatry, confronting polytheism, asserting monotheism, and spreading it. To the extent that he is considered the imam (leader) of the monotheists, as Allah says: ‘Indeed, Ibrahim was an *ummah* (a whole community in himself).’ (al-Nahl: 120).

We notice a relative brevity in Surat al-Anbiya of its accounts of the stories of the prophets, unlike the story of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) which is detailed. Perhaps the reason for this is that the polytheists claim to be affiliated to Ibrahim, so God Almighty wanted to clarify Ibrahim’s firm stance in destroying the idols.

Now we discuss and analyse the noble verses of this chapter:

1. Al-Anbiya: 51

Allah, Most High, said:

‘And indeed, We had granted Ibrahim his sound judgment early on, for We knew him well [to be worthy of it].’ (verse 51)

This passage begins with a firm confirmation of the guidance and wisdom that Ibrahim was granted early on. This is a necessary start, because

it reminds the Arabs that their contradiction to the Shari'ah of their father Ibrahim is a sign that their affiliation to him is a false one, and that they do not actually believe in the soundness of his judgment.

Ibn Kathir said:

‘Allah informs that He gave his friend Ibrahim sound judgment and divine arguments from a young age, as Allah said, ‘That is Our argument. We gave it to Ibrahim against his people.’ (al-An’am: 83).

As for what is mentioned about his father taking him into hiding as a baby and taking him out after a few days, and looking at the planets and creation in contemplation, as well as what many works on *tafsir* mention, then most of that is taken from Biblical writings. Whatever is consistent with the truth revealed to us, is accepted. Whatever opposes it, is rejected. And whatever does not oppose what we have, nor is mentioned in our revelation, we stay silent about, neither accepting nor rejecting it. This third category is one which many of the early scholars allowed to narrate, though a lot of it contains little benefit. Had there been any benefit in them for people’s faith, the complete religion of Islam would have clarified it.

The approach that we adopt in this commentary of the Qur’an is to avoid many of the biblical traditions, because being occupied with them is a waste of time. Additionally, many of them include lies, since they are unable to distinguish between what is authentic and what is weak, the way Muslim Hadith specialists have. The point is that Allah gave Ibrahim sound judgment early on. ‘For We knew him well’, i.e., We knew him to be worthy of such.²²⁸

1. The Words of Dr. Fadhil Hasan Abbas:

The story begins with noting the sound judgment (*rushd*) that Allah granted Ibrahim, through which he was guided. This word is a comprehensive word that includes everything that resolves the affairs of the material and spiritual life, this world and the hereafter. *Rushd* contrasts with *ghiwayah* which means to be tempted into desire, just as guidance (*huda*) contrasts with misguidance (*dhalalah*). One of the great aspects of the Qur’an is that it uses a word along with another synonymous words, with having a distinct meaning, while if that word was used alone, it would give broader

²²⁸ Tafsir Ibn Kathir, 5/341-342.

meaning. Examples of this include, *islam* and *iman*, *birr* and *taqwa*, *faqir* and *miskin*, *kufr* and *shirk*, and *rushd* and *hidayah*. If these two words are used together, each of them has its own distinct meaning. See how Allah says: ‘The desert Arabs say, ‘We have faith.’ [Prophet], tell them, ‘You do not have faith (*iman*). What you should say instead is, ‘We have submitted (*islam*),’ for faith has not yet entered your hearts.’ If you obey God and His Messenger, He will not diminish any of your deeds: He is most forgiving and most merciful.’ (al-Hujurat: 14).

No one doubts that both *iman* (faith) and *islam* (submission) in this verse have their own meaning. Similarly, the saying of the Most High: ‘And cooperate in righteousness (*birr*) and piety (*taqwa*)’ (al-Ma’idah: 2); the Almighty’s saying: ‘Sadaqah (i.e. zakat) is for the poor (*fuqara*) and needy (*masakin*)’ (al-Tawbah: 60), and His saying: ‘By the stars when they fade away! Your fellow is neither misguided (*dhalla*) nor astray (*ghawa*).’ (al-Najm: 1-2]. Each word in these verses has its own appropriate meaning.

However, if the word is mentioned alone, it is inclusive of the meaning of both words. If the word *iman* is mentioned without the word *Islam*, it is inclusive of the two meanings, as well as if the word poor (*fuqara*, sing. *faqir*) is mentioned without the word needy (*masakin*, sing. *miskin*), or the word *kufr* without the word *shirk*. What matters to us here is that the word *rushd* in Surat al-Anbiya is mentioned alone without the word *hidayah*, so it is an encompassing word that implies sound belief, good conduct, guided knowledge and deeds, and internal and external truthfulness.²²⁹

2. The Words of Dr. Al-Bahi al-Khawli:

There are no detailed accounts about the early upbringing of Ibrahim, neither in the Qur’an or the Torah, except two verses that briefly allude to this.

- **The First Verse:** ‘Indeed, We had granted Ibrahim his sound judgment (*rushd*) early on, and We knew him well [to be worthy of it].’ (al-Anbiya: 51). That is early on as a child before he became a messenger.

Rushd in the Qur’anic understanding is of two types. The first is the sound judgment that one organises their worldly and financial life. This type can be attained by both righteous and corrupt men after reaching a certain age. Like Allah said: ‘Test [the competence of] the orphans until

²²⁹ Abbas, F. Qasas al-Qur’an, p. 306.

they reach a marriageable age. Then if you feel they are capable of sound judgment, return their wealth to them.’ (al-Nisa: 6).

The second type is that through which one distinguishes between truth and falsehood, and acts in accordance with that understanding... The result of spiritual judgment (*rushd*) is that one never prefers falsehood over the truth, otherwise he would be leaving that which is better for that which is less. So when Allah says that he has given Ibrahim *rushd*, it means that he has granted him both types of sound judgment to the highest level.

- **The Second Verse:** ‘We also showed Ibrahim the wonders of the heavens and the earth, so he would be sure in faith.’ (al-An’am: 75). That is, we show him this at a young age, so that when he reaches the age of maturity, he would have certain faith. And I have already explained this verse earlier.

3. The Words of Shaykh al-Sa’di:

When Allah mentioned Musa and Muhammad (peace be upon them) and their scriptures, he said: ‘Indeed, We had granted Ibrahim his sound judgment (*rushd*) early on.’ That is, before sending Musa and Muhammad, and before their scriptures were revealed. Allah showed him the wonders of the heavens and earth and gave him a soundness that perfected him and that he called to: one that no other was given, except Muhammad. Allah attributed the sound judgment to Ibrahim himself, ‘his sound judgment’, to show that he was given *rushd* that was suitable for a man of his high status and circumstance. Otherwise, every believer has an element of *rushd* proportional to the faith that he has. ‘And We knew him well.’ That is, we gave him his sound judgment and prophethood, distinguished him with being a *khalil* (friend) of Allah, and made him from the chosen few in this life and the next, because We knew him to be worthy of this. This is due to his purity and intelligence. He then mentioned his arguments against his people, warning them of *shirk*, and breaking the statues.²³⁰

4. The Words of Shaykh Muhammad Mutawalli al-Sha’rawi:

Rushd is that the intellect is guided to that which is best in all good things, such that no corruption comes after righteousness, nor any evil after good, nor any lowliness after loftiness. This is *rushd*. As for being led

²³⁰ Tafsir al-Sa’di, p. 1071.

to corruption after righteousness or evil after goodness, then this means that there is no *rushd*.²³¹

5. The Words of Mrs. Fatima Muhammad Ahmed Ali:

‘The *rushd* that he was given is one that befits him and the other great messengers like him. This is the most perfect *rushd* in righteousness and guidance. It leads one to be guided to uprightness in both religious and worldly matters, and to be guided by the divine laws of nature before the age of puberty. ‘We were well aware of him’, i.e. his greatness and perfection, or it could mean that We were well aware of his suitability and worthiness of guidance and prophethood. This shows that Allah is fully aware of all things, including minute details, and that He chooses what He will in all His words and actions.

Allah guided Ibrahim to the truth, informed him of the right way before he became a prophet. In fact, even before reaching the age of manhood. Allah was aware that had the noble traits and excellent character that made him worthy of being chosen for prophethood. So Allah guided Ibrahim from a young age to sound judgment and intellect. His saying, ‘We had granted’, shows that this was a purely divine gift, not something that Ibrahim attained through his won efforts. While His statement, ‘We were well aware of him’, suggests that Ibrahim’s great virtues were a continuous feature in him and the maintenance of his high status in the sight of the Lord of the world.’²³²

6. The Words of Ishaq Muhammad Hamdan:

Allah confirms in the introduction of this passage that He granted Ibrahim early guidance to His oneness (*tawhid*). This is different from the natural state (*fitrah*) that is present in every human. This is the complete *rushd*; guidance that is based on divine revelation, and reforming nations through the divine laws.²³³

7. The Words of Muhammad Ratib al-Nabulsi:

Rushd means guidance to Allah’s oneness, which is path to knowing that there is none worthy of worship except Allah. that is because *tawhid* is

²³¹ Tafsir al-Sha’rawi (15/9567).

²³² The Creedal Implications in the Story of Ibrahim, p. 59.

²³³ Baderin, p. 67.

the ultimate knowledge. ‘We knew him well’, means that Allah’s knowledge encompasses all things. This verse shows Ibrahim’s leadership traits from a young age, since Allah blessed him with sound judgment in righteousness and excellence, before granting him prophethood, as mentioned by al-Qurtubi who attributed this view to the majority of exegetes.²³⁴

The word *rushd* is mentioned in the verse in an unrestricted way, which means it encompasses physical, spiritual, and intellectual *rushd*, unconnected to maturity or prophethood, but rather a *rushd* that is before its due. This is the implication of Allah’s statement, ‘early on’, i.e. before prophethood and before puberty.

The author of *In the Shade of the Qur’an* (Sayyid Qutb) argued that *rushd* means to be guided to *tawhid* (Allah’s oneness), arguing that this is the greatest meaning of the word *rushd* in this case.²³⁵

Rushd is one of the pillars of rightly guided leadership (*al-qiyadah al-rashidah*). This is something apparent in the life of Ibrahim, for he grew up with honour, a pure heart, a swift mind, strong arguments, penetrative insight, and deep thinking. He had the traits and skills that make him worthy of being a leader and role model for all people. His sound judgment was clear to see in all his discussions, whether with his own father, the star worshippers, his people, or the King of Babylon, Nimrod son of Kanaan. He overcame them and nullified their arguments through the sound mind and judgment that Allah gave him, and the understanding he was given of his opponents arguments and plots.²³⁶

2. Al-Anbiya: 52-56

Allah, Most High, said:

‘[Remember] when he questioned his father and his people, ‘What are these statues to which you are so devoted?’ They replied, ‘We found our forefathers worshipping them.’ He responded, ‘Indeed, you and your forefathers have been clearly astray.’ They asked, ‘Have you come to us with the truth, or are you just playing about?’ He replied, ‘In fact, your

²³⁴ Tafsir al-Nabulsi, 9/450.

²³⁵ Qutb, S. (4/2385)

²³⁶ Simat al-Qiyadah, p. 58.

Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, Who created them [both]. And to that I bear witness.’ (al-Anbiya: 52-56)

1. ‘[Remember] when he questioned his father and his people, ‘What are these statues to which you are so devoted?’

Remember, O Prophet, and recall to your people, the Arab pagans who claim to be followers of Ibrahim and from his lineage, how Ibrahim he fought his people due to their *shirk*. This verse shows Ibrahim’s specific concern for saving his father, before anyone else, from the depths of *shirk*, due to the special relationship that exists between any father and son. At the same time, Ibrahim worked to save the rest of his people from the same thing. This approach of saving one’s relatives from misguidance before anyone else is one that the Qur’an has emphasised in its address to the final prophet: ‘and warn your closest relatives.’ (al-Shu’ara: 214).

Ibrahim did not refer to the idols that his father and people used to worship as ‘gods’ (*alihah*, sing. *ilah*), the way they would, but instead described them as mere ‘statues’.

This passage also shows us the love, sincere advice to others, and genuine keenness to guide people, that Ibrahim had; characteristics that we see throughout in Ibrahim’s efforts in calling to Allah. We see his devotion to his father and his attempt to save him and his people from damnation. He was therefore gentle and subtle in denouncing them at the beginning of their conversation, appearing as a questioner, before showing them the error of their beliefs.²³⁷

The dialogue in these noble verses show that Ibrahim was facing a generation devoted to their idols and statues, glorifying them and invoking them continuously. The Arabic word ‘*akifun* implies complete devotion, whether physically in the presence of their idols, the devotion of their hearts, or both. This shows just how excessive they were in their idol worship, because their forefathers, though worshipped these idols, the generations that followed, were more than just worshippers, but complete devotees.

²³⁷ Al-Saif, H. p. 95.

Ibrahim's questions revealed the closedmindedness of these people. They were satisfied with simply following their forefathers, regardless of how corrupt their choice were and no matter how false their religion was.²³⁸

Imam Muhammad Abu Zahra said regarding Allah's statement, 'What are these statues to which you are so devoted?':

'A statue (*timthal*, pl. *tamathil*) is a carved image of a human or animal, but their gods are usually in the image of humans. Such idols existed amongst the Greeks and Romans who used to worship them and call them 'gods'. They believed in the god of love, the god of farming, and the god of justice. The word '*ukuf*'²³⁹ means to divert oneself to something out of devotion and worship. Ibrahim's questioning about their idols includes an element of mockery, for he is simply pointing directly to stones that appear in front of them that do not benefit or harm. His rhetorical question also suggests that he is condemning them for their idol worship, for he is not asking about the nature of these idols, but rather their qualities, since they are unable to benefit or harm, nor do they have any divine characteristics. However, they did not answer his question with a valid justification that shows that they are worthy of worship. Instead, they resorted to saying that this was a matter they found their forefathers doing.'²⁴⁰

2. They replied, 'We found our forefathers worshipping them.'

A reply which shows their closedmindedness closed by dead customs, in contrast with the freedom of faith and its research and contemplation, judging things according to their realities, not according to customs. Faith in God Almighty brings liberation from traditional illusory sanctities and ancient traditions that are not based on evidence.²⁴¹

The word 'found' implies that they are proud of the customs they have inherited and value them greatly, the same way they value their forefathers by following in their footsteps. One reading this reply is amazed at how a sound minded person can give such a reply, despite the intellect that Allah gave them through which they distinguish between truth and falsehood.

²³⁸ Ibid, p.100.

²³⁹ Tr: This is where the word *i'tikaf* comes from. The act of devotional seclusion in the mosque usually done in Ramadan by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

²⁴⁰ Abu Zahra, (9/4882).

²⁴¹ Qutb, S. (4/2385).

However, it is abhorrent epithet, which quashes the minds and ignores evidence, no matter how clear and strong they are, and stuns all attempts at dialogue and deliberations of review and correction.

The one who contemplates this silly answer devoid of any acceptable meaning, is surprised to see that a person could utter it, let alone that it deserves to be transmitted or mentioned. But the Qur’anic, with all accuracy and honesty, conveys their reply, giving the opposition the opportunity to complete a full sentence and present a clear idea, so that the dialogue is relayed clearly and completely.

Through this, we realize the distinctiveness of the methodology of the Holy Qur’an in presenting dialogues, providing a space for others, regardless of opinion and view. It does not use methods of distortion that are unfortunately used today by many of those controlling media outlets and influencing large sectors in many Arab and Islamic countries.

This reply, ‘we found our forefathers worshipping them’, is repeated by many generations to most of the prophets. The people of Muhammad also used it. Allah, the Most High, said:

‘In fact, they say, ‘We found our forefathers following a [particular] way, and we are following in their footsteps.’ Similarly, whenever We sent a warner to a society before you [O Prophet], its elite would say, ‘We found our forefathers following a [particular] way, and we are walking in their footsteps.’ (al-Zukhruf: 22-23)

3. He responded, ‘Indeed, you and your forefathers have been clearly astray.’

Ibrahim responded with firm words through which he asserts with all confidence that they are drowning in misguidance; a misguidance that is clear to see for every person with a sound mind. This assertiveness and fearlessness from Ibrahim shook their beliefs. He described them and all their ancestors as being astray.

Here, the strong youthful features that distinguished Ibrahim are evident in his courage to defend the truth, attack falsehood, and confront outdated traditions, whatever that cost him.

Muhammad Abu Zahra says: ‘*Dhalal* (misguidance) [in the Arabic language] means walking down a path whose end is unknown, nor does it

lead to the desired destination. It is used to refer to treading the path of falsehood. The reason it was described as clear misguidance is that it opposed clear and basic logical reasoning. That is because a god being worshipped must be higher and stronger than his worshipper. But what power does a statue have over man? No error is clearer and more misguided than this. God Almighty confirmed their misguidance by saying that they were ‘upon’ it, indicating continuity and consistency. Ibrahim also showed that both they and their forefathers are misguided, both the followers and ones being followed.²⁴² In response to Ibrahim’s assertive claim, they said:

4. They asked, ‘Have you come to us with the truth, or are you just playing about?’

This dialogue exposed the true feelings of Ibrahim’s people. They began to feel doubts regarding their beliefs as soon as Ibrahim tested and questioned their beliefs. That is what is expected from a belief based on clouding the mind and tampering with truths. The question of one who is astray and unsure of their own religion beyond what customs and traditions relay to them. One who is not confident about their own belief, because they have neither contemplated it carefully, nor assessed it. Completely astray, unsure about which religion and which way is the truth.²⁴³

They asked him whether he was being serious about his claim or whether he is playing about. Ibrahim felt no need to answer that question directly, but instead moved straight into describing the true God that they should worship, through which they will recognise whether he is playing around or being serious.

5. He replied, ‘In fact, your Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, Who created them [both]. And to that I bear witness.’

Ibrahim used both logical and scriptural proof. As for the first, then all those Ibrahim was debating admitted that Allah alone is the creator of all things, humans, angels, demons, animals, the skies, the earth, and that he controls them and manages their affairs. This thus includes all things that are worshipped besides Allah. Does it then make sense to worship something that is under the control of someone else, cannot cause benefit

²⁴² Abu Zahra (9/4883).

²⁴³ Al-Saif, p. 101.

or harm, nor give life or death, and leave the worship of the One who is in control, manages, and provides for all creation?

Ibrahim (peace be upon him) tells his people that God Almighty is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, He created you from nothing, unlike anything He created before. Clear proof, logic, and human nature, all prove that He is your Lord, whether you like it or not. He is one Lord, the Lord of people and the Lord of the heavens and the earth. His being the creator is what makes Him the true God and true Lord. This is the true religion, unlike what the idolators claim of there being many gods, while also admitting that they do not create, but that only Allah is the creator. Yet they still worship their gods that create nothing.

The second type of proof is the scriptural and textual evidence that is transmitted by the Messengers (peace and blessings be upon them). Whatever they brought is infallible and does not err, for they do not tell anything other than the truth. So the testimony of one of Allah's messengers is itself a sufficient proof that must be followed, so Ibrahim said: 'And to that I bear witness.' Bearing witness to the fact that God alone is worthy of worship and that the worship of anything else is. And what testimony, after the testimony of God, is higher than the testimony of the messengers? Especially the prophets of firm resolve, especially Khalil al-Rahman (the friend of Allah), Ibrahim.²⁴⁴

This testimony is the one mentioned by Allah Almighty by saying: 'Allah [Himself] is a Witness that there is no god [worthy of worship] except Him—and so are the angels and people of knowledge. He is the Maintainer of justice. There is no god [worthy of worship] except Him—the Almighty, All-Wise. (Al Imran: 18)

The witness (*shahid*) is the one who was guided to the truth, as if he had seen the truth with his own eyes and was guided to the evidence for this truth, so he said, 'I am a witness that your Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, and I have clear evidence for this truth.'²⁴⁵ Ibrahim's words indicate his great confidence in the word of monotheism that he calls to. His certainty and confidence is that of someone who bears witness to an undoubted fact.

²⁴⁴ Tafsir al-Sa'di, p. 1072.

²⁴⁵ Tafsir al-Sha'rawi (15/9578).

Ibrahim did not witness the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor did he witness the creation of himself or his people, but the matter is so clear and obvious that the believers testify to this with confidence, for everything in the universe points to the oneness of the Creator. Everything within the entity of man leads him to acknowledge and testify the oneness of the Creator, the Maintainer, and the oneness of the laws through which He runs the universe.²⁴⁶

3. Al-Anbiya: 57-67

Allah, Most High, said:

[Then he said to himself,] ‘By Allah! I will surely plot against your idols after you have turned your backs and gone away.’ So he smashed them into pieces, except the biggest of them, so they might turn to it [for answers]. They protested, ‘Who dared do this to our gods? It must be an evildoer!’ Some said, ‘We heard a young man, called Ibrahim, speaking [ill] of them.’ They demanded, ‘Bring him before the eyes of the people, so that they may witness [his trial].’ They asked, ‘Was it you who did this to our gods, O Ibrahim?’ He replied, ‘No, it was done by the biggest of them—this one. Ask them, if they can talk!’ So they turned to one another, saying, ‘It is you who are in the wrong,’ but then they lapsed again and said, ‘You know very well these gods cannot speak.’ He said, ‘Do you then worship, beside Allah, what can neither benefit nor harm you?’ Shame on you and on the things you worship instead of God. Do you not have any sense?’ (Surat al-Anbiya: 57-67)

1. [Then he said to himself,] ‘By Allah! I will surely plot against your idols after you have turned your backs and gone away.’ (v. 57)

After their insistence upon falsehood, Ibrahim swore that he would plot and plan to carry out the courageous decision that he took, despite the dangers involved in carrying out his plot. The Arabic word *kayd* (plot) used in the verse implies that this task is one which will be preceded by strategic planning that help him to make the best decisions and achieve the goals that he seeks.

²⁴⁶ Qutb, S. (4/2386).

The goal was clear in the mind of Ibrahim. It was to call his father and the rest of his people to the worship of Allah alone and to reject all objects of worship except Him. He knew that he a difficult task was ahead of him, but he had planned. He expected their questioning after he carries out his task and was prepared to reply to them. Some psychologists today refer to this as dialogical analysis, or dialogical interaction analysis, referring to analysing human communication. He thus knew what to expect and had prepared in advance.²⁴⁷

The way he was going to go about it was to first call them to abandoning idol worship. If they did not accept that, he would move on to breaking their idols to show them how weak and incapable they are of protecting themselves from harm, let alone to protect others. His target was clear and so was the time of execution, ‘after you have turned your backs and gone away.’ His planned method was to break all their idols except the biggest one, to show them how pathetic and illogical their beliefs are.

Ibrahim chose the appropriate time to destroy their idols. It was a day of celebration for them, so an appropriate day to carry out this daring operation, because it is a day on which people are usually occupied, and on which they tend to put grudges and enmities aside. When the day came (some said that it was the day of Nowruz), people went out to the gardens and parks, leaving fruits and foods by their idols for blessing, before returning later on to it eat. The people asked Ibrahim to go out and join them on this day, and to participate in the feast, but Ibrahim excused himself so that he could execute the plan that he had prepared. After looking up into the sky: ‘Then he looked up to the stars. He said, ‘I am sick,’ so [his people] turned away from him and left.’ (al-Saffat: 88-90)

He used the excuse of sickness to avoid joining them, but really the sickness that he was referring to was his being sick and agitated at their insistence on their disbelief. But he used the word sickness so that they would leave him alone. This is not considered lying from an Islamic perspective, but rather a form of *tawriyah*, which means to use vague language that can be interpreted in more than one way, the more obvious meaning being the unintended one. So his people thought that he was physically ill, but Ibrahim was referring to something else; grief and sadness at the idolatry of his

²⁴⁷ Al-Saif, p. 200.

people and their refusal to obey him in worshipping Allah alone.²⁴⁸ When they left him, he found the opportunity that he was waiting for.

Shaykh Muhammad Mutawalli al-Sha'rawi raised a question: 'Is the plot against the idols or does he mean that he will plot against the people using their idols? For the idols merely part of Allah's creation who glorify Allah and praise Ibrahim for what he is doing.

And how beautiful are the words of a poet regarding this who said, speaking on behalf of the rocks of the Cave of Mount Hira and the Cave of Mount Thawr, explaining how the stones of Thawr were envious of the stones of Hira, because the Messenger used to worship Allah in Hira before prophethood, so they enjoyed the company of the Prophet throughout this period. Then when the Prophet migrated to Madina, he stayed at a cave in Mount Thawr, so Thawr rejoiced at becoming equal to Mount Hira. The poet said:

كَمْ حَسَدْنَا حِرَاءَ حِينَ تَرَى الرُّوحَ أَمِيناً يَغْزُوكَ بِالْأَنْوَارِ
فَحِرَاءٌ وَثَوْرٌ صَارَا سَوَاءً بِهِمَا تَشْفَعُ لِدَوْلَةِ الْأَحْجَارِ
عَبَدُونَا وَنَحْنُ أَعْبَدُ اللَّهُ مِنَ الْقَائِمِينَ بِالْأَشْحَارِ
تَخَذُوا صَمْتَنَا عَلَيْنَا دَلِيلًا فَغَدُونَا هُمْ وَقُودَ النَّارِ
قَدْ تَجَنَّبُوا جَهْلًا كَمَا قَدْ تَجَنَّبُوا عَلَى ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ وَالْحَوَارِي
لِلْمُعَالِي جَزَاؤُهُ وَالْمُعَالَى فِيهِ تُنْجِيهِ رَحْمَةُ الْغَفَّارِ

How envious we were of Hira, seeing the Holy Spirit (Gabriel) descend with light.

But now Hira and Thawr have become equal, both intercessors for the land of stones.

They worshipped us, but we worship Allah more than those who pray in the late night.

They used our silence as a proof for them, but we shall become a fuel for their fire.

²⁴⁸ Al-Anbiya fi al-Qur'an, p. 111.



They have transgressed with ignorance, as they did against the son of Mary and the disciples.

The transgressor will be held accountable, while the object of transgression will be saved by the mercy of Al-Ghaffar (The Forgiver).

So destroying the idols is not actually a plot against them, but rather those who worship them and believe that they benefit and harm. Ibrahim uses a practical proof to show them the invalidity of idol worship. As if he is saying, ‘if I am wrong, then let these idols stop me from breaking them. But if I am upon the truth, then you will see that they will be unable to do anything.’²⁴⁹

2. ‘So he smashed them into pieces, except the biggest of them, so they might return.’ (verse 58)

The gods that they worship, then turned into small, scattered pieces of wood and rock, with the exception of the largest idol which Ibrahim left so that they could turn to him to ask him about what happened in his presence and why he did not defend the smaller gods. Perhaps after that, they might return to themselves too to reconsider their beliefs and comprehend how worshipping these statues is useless.²⁵⁰

There are several reasons for destroying the idols, the most important being:

- Unleashing his intense anger and hatred for the idols and the corrupt beliefs. He relieved himself of some of this anger by breaking them into small pieces, curing himself from sickness, bother, and distress. Similar to what Allah Almighty mentioned as one of the fruits of fighting in the path of God: ‘and heals the hearts of the believing people.’ (al-Tawbah: 14)
- Establishing clear evidence for the invalidity of idolatry, by proving their inability to protect themselves, let alone protect others or benefit those who worship them.
- To destroy the status of these idols in the hearts of its worshippers. They see them destroyed before their eyes, unable to defend them-

²⁴⁹ Tafsir al-Sha’rawi (15/9579).

²⁵⁰ Qutb, S. (4/2386).

selves, which will reduce the sanctity they have for them in their hearts.

This is exactly what Musa did to the god made by the Samiri.²⁵¹ He said: ‘Now look at your god to which you have been devoted: we will burn it up, then scatter it in the sea.’ (Taha: 97). By burning it, Musa was able to unload his hatred and anger for this calf that people worshipped instead of God, and remove the false beliefs from the hearts of the people who worshipped it.

Ibrahim then returned to his family after he smashed the idols with peace of mind and happiness, having achieved what he had planned for a while.

Allah Almighty said, ‘except the biggest of them’, which he left for a reason we have already explained. Contemplate the careful use of language here, because anything that is abhorrent to Allah cannot be referred to using words of glorification, unless referred to specific people. As the Prophet used to do when writing letters to the disbelieving kings around the world, he would say: ‘To the chief (or the great one) of the Persians’, ‘to the chief of the Romans’, and so on. He did not describe them with absolute greatness, but only greatness in relation to their own people. Ibrahim did the same here. He did not describe their idol as great, but being ‘the biggest of them.’

3. They protested, ‘Who dared do this to our gods? It must be an evildoer!’ Some said, ‘We heard a young man, called Ibrahim, speaking [ill] of them.’ (v. 59-60)

When the people returned from their festival and saw what had happened to their idols, they were stunned and terrified. Their eyes froze upon seeing their wrecked idols. When they then woke up from their astonishment, they asked about the perpetrator. Once again, referring to them as ‘our gods’, to show the extent that their love of falsehood and their eagerness to be affiliated to them blindly, even if their falsehood is proven.

The people of Ibrahim should really ask themselves, or ask their great idol that they worship: ‘If they were truly gods, then how did they allow

²⁵¹ Tr: The Samiri, or the man from Samaria, was a hypocrite who led the Children of Israel into idol-worship. (The Clear Qur’an).

this to happen without defending themselves, and why did the biggest one of them, not defend them?’ Superstition has obstructed their minds from thinking and false traditions have obstructed them from contemplation and reflection.

Immediately, their minds jumped to Ibrahim, who they heard speaking about them and calling them to the worship of one God. The young man who held bold stances against their idols, declared his rejection and enmity more than once, and swore to plot against them. Some people testified against him, saying: ‘We heard a young man, called Ibrahim, mention them.’ Several things made them think that this was from the doings of Ibrahim:

- That he was the only one who would benefit from doing so.
- He is the only one who would dare to do such a thing.
- He excused himself from attending with them on the day of celebration.
- He often spoke ill of their idols.

Despite knowing Ibrahim well and knowing what he has been calling, so much that his message reached the king, after he destroyed their idols, they described him as a mere ‘young man’ or ‘boy’. They did this with the intention of belittling him, completely ignoring his status amongst them, so that it becomes easier for people to harm him. It is as if they do not know him when they say: ‘he is called Ibrahim’. An unknown young man.

The successful debater should therefore be careful not to belittle the person they are having a dialogue with, even indirectly, because it is bad manners. It is a tool used by people who do not have sound arguments, so instead resort to this to convince the weak hearted and naïve. An easy way to change people’s minds and turn them away from positive ideas that may have settled in their hearts.²⁵²

4. They demanded, ‘Bring him before the eyes of the people, so that they may witness.’ (v. 61)

The chiefs of the people and nobles ordered to bring this young man named Ibrahim, so that all the people can witness his claims and what he has done, then witness his punishment, so that it can be a deterrent for

²⁵² Al-Saif, p. 103.

others. The chiefs insisted on repulsing Ibrahim in the eyes of the public and having them play a part in punishing him. They wished to make it a trial, judgment, and decision of the people, as though all people hated him and opposed him. The chiefs are merely implanting the will of the people. This approach allows them to achieve several goals:

- To calm the emotions of the raging masses who call for revenge and for the criminal to be put to death for destroying their gods.
- Restoring confidence in their idols by taking revenge from Ibrahim. At the same time avenging themselves, because they felt that this act was a challenge to their authority, so their hearts were filled with contempt for Ibrahim.
- To scare the public and by making an example out of Ibrahim, so that no one would dare to oppose the authorities after that. The fate of whoever does will be like the fate of Ibrahim: burning and destruction. This indeed is the standard practice of leaders in every time and place with those who oppose them. They terrorise the people by publicly punishing any form of dissent, carrying out the death sentence immediately in front of the people. Ibrahim was brought to be punished, but he a giant who stood with his head held high, with confidence, firm belief, and strong faith.²⁵³

The people gathered to witness the historical public trial. They heard the news and knew who the perpetrator was. Large raging crowds come rushing to witness the great revenge. While Ibrahim stands alone. But he is a believer, so is not intimidated by their large numbers and loud noise. In fact, this is exactly what Ibrahim wanted. People came from all places to witness the trial and to hear the words of the one who destroyed their gods. So Ibrahim (peace be upon him) advanced amidst these large crowds with fearless confidence.

5. They asked, ‘Was it you who did this to our gods, O Ibrahim?’ (v. 62)

So the public trial begins. Security questions were bypassed and the focus was on this one main question: ‘Was it you who did this to our gods, O Ibrahim?’ Unlike the security questions in many courts today who ask a hundred questions, with only one of them being the relevant one.

²⁵³ Kishk, A. p. 22.



A question of severe condemnation. A threat to Ibrahim. Their words dripping with malice and rage against him, because he destroyed their idols in a gruesome way, and struck the most sacred things they had inherited from their fathers and grandfathers. This daring act shook their entire being at all levels. They were convinced that it could only be Ibrahim who destroyed the idols, for all the evidence points to him being the perpetrator. Ibrahim left the biggest of their idols unbroken and untouched, so they ask him about what happened to the rest of the idols. Here Ibrahim (peace be upon him) answers with confidence and certainty, unintimidated by these raging crowds calling for his death, nor these courts that are surrounded by a show of force, oppression, and terror. Like an experienced war veteran, Ibrahim responded by turning the accusation against their biggest idol and requested the testimony of the shattered idols.²⁵⁴

6. He replied, ‘No, it was done by the biggest of them—this one. Ask them, if they can talk!’ So they turned to one another, saying, ‘It is you who are in the wrong,’ (v. 63-64)

Ibrahim’s swiftness and ability to present strong arguments are clear to see from his response here. He did not lie, but rather made them think about the falsehood that they are upon. The sarcasm is clear to see in his response. He wants to tell them that these idols do not even know who broke them. Was it me or their biggest idol? They are inanimate objects that cannot comprehend. But you guys are equally unaware, because you cannot distinguish between what is possible and impossible. It seems like this mocking reply by Ibrahim made them rethink a little. ‘So they turned to one another, saying, ‘It is you who are in the wrong.’

It was a good start for them to rethink the falsehood of their stance and the transgression of their idol worship, so that their insight is made to see finally and recognise the darkness they were in. However, it was just a matter of moments, before they returned to the darkness that hearts have always been upon.²⁵⁵

The message that Ibrahim wanted to deliver had reached them. It is clear to see that his tangible argument made the momentarily rethink

²⁵⁴ Al-Baderin, p. 88.

²⁵⁵ Qutb, S. (4/2387).

themselves. They see that these are nothing but broken statues, broken by a man of exceptional character.

However, things took a turn when the public began to sympathise with Ibrahim, and began to recognise who the true oppressors were. This swift change in emotions agitated the authorities, so ‘media outlets’ immediately began taking steps to get in the way of that. Aiming to get in the way of Ibrahim’s voice that mocks them and their idols. The public, and even the members of the court it seems, were convinced that Ibrahim was not wrong in what he did. However, the decision-makers set aside all these convictions and overruled them with an unjust decision, with the aim of removing the impact of the Islamic awakening that touched the hearts of many people.²⁵⁶

In conclusion, the message that Ibrahim wanted to get across to his people had been delivered, touching the depths of their hearts. His truthful words shook them and revealed their reality. If these idols speak, then ask them. If they do not speak, then how do you worship them and make them gods? So Ibrahim was an expert in discourse, and he succeeded in convincing his people of the invalidity of idolatry.²⁵⁷

7. But then they quickly regressed again and said, ‘You know very well these gods cannot speak.’ (v. 65)

This verse is one of the subtle and precise expressions of the Qur’an. The root word *naks* (نكس) denotes something flipping and turning upside down. In the hadith reported by Abu Hurairah, the Prophet said: ‘May the slave of the dinar be miserable (*ta’is*) and disappointed (*intakas*).’ This is a prayer for him to be turned upside down in loss when he was so keen on money. Similarly, the Arabs describe a newborn whose feet come out before his head as *mankus* (upturned), because he came out in a flipped and abnormal way.

The derivatives of the root word *na-ka-sa* is mentioned three times in the Qur’an:

²⁵⁶ Kishk, p.22.

²⁵⁷ Al-Baderin, p. 191.

1. As a description, in Allah's statement, 'If only you could see the wicked hanging their heads [in shame] before their Lord.' (al-Sajdah: 12)
2. In the present tense, in Allah's statement, 'And whoever We grant a long life, We reverse them in development.'²⁵⁸ Will they not then understand?' (Yasin: 68)
3. In the past tense, in Allah's statement, 'But then they quickly regressed again and said, 'You know very well these gods cannot speak.' (al-Anbiya: 65)

Al-Gharnati said: 'They quickly regressed again is a metaphor to mean that they quickly went back on what they temporarily admitted as being the truth. Although they could have literally regressed out of embarrassment.' And when you consider the derivatives of the word *naks* mentioned above, you will, dear reader, some incredible meanings in this Qur'anic description. You will see people who turned their backs on that which is good for that which is lowly, making a mockery out of themselves. They said, O Ibrahim, how can you tell us to ask them when you know that they do not speak?

Their initial move was a return to contemplation and thought, but they quickly regressed back into rigidity and denial. Though their confession here is sufficient, for what greater proof of the weakness of their gods than their confession that their gods cannot speak. Perhaps this is the first time in history that a defendant questions the judges and makes them confess their own wrongdoing, making the judges more worthy of being taken to court.

8. He said, 'Do you then worship, beside Allah, what can neither benefit nor harm you?' Shame on you and on the things you worship instead of God. Do you not have any sense?' (v. 66-67)

When they admitted that their idols cannot speak, Ibrahim took the opportunity to guide them. He announced this great truth in the presence of leaders, followers, and all the people, 'Do you then worship, beside Allah, what can neither benefit nor harm you?' how can you worship such weak

²⁵⁸ Human beings are born weak, then they reach their prime, then they grow weak after a certain age. See 30:54. (The Clear Qur'an)

and harmless idols? Here they are in front of you, destroyed into pieces. Had they been gods, they would have defended themselves. If they cannot even do that, then what harm or benefit can they bring anyone else? How then can they be worshipped alongside Allah? Allah alone is the One worthy of worship. He is the One able to do all things, and benefit or harm His creation. After Ibrahim established the clear argument against them, to which they could not reply, he further emphasised the severity of their beliefs and said, ‘Shame on you and on the things you worship instead of God. Do you not have any sense?’ The word ‘uff’ is one which denotes condemnation and a rejection of their falsehood and disbelief. It shows the anger that Ibrahim reached. Shame on them, their idols, and everything that they worship instead of Allah.

This scene occurs at a later stage in the story of Ibrahim with his people. Because we do not see such an angry and firm attitude in his earlier discussions with his people. Instead, he is more inclined to being gentle and soft. Perhaps it was the severity of the misguidance and the ignorance of his people that made the gentle and patient Ibrahim become angered to the extent that we see.

Ibrahim concludes his response by asking them, ‘do you not have any sense?’ He condemns them for not using their sense and not accepting clearly logical realities. That is because they shut down and crippled their own minds due to their disbelief and misguidance. Then when they decided to prosecute Ibrahim, he was able to overcome them with sound arguments using the sound reasoning of his firm faith.

The responses of Ibrahim truly show us the proper way to debate and to structure our thoughts and arguments. He ensured that every statement he made was placed appropriately and was as effective as possible. He first began by proven the unworthiness of the idols of worship, then harshly rebuked them for holding on to their beliefs despite how clear the truth became to them. He then condemned them for refusing to use their intellect to contemplate and think carefully.

The value of reason is always present in the mind of Ibrahim (peace be upon him). He clearly senses its importance in human happiness and ability to reach the truth. ‘Do you not have any sense?’ Each time we proceed

with this heated dialogue, we notice the role of intellect, experience, and organisation in this personality.

He was a model example showing amazing courage in breaking the idols. He was then put on trial in the presence of the public, before a severe punishment was prepared for him. However, Ibrahim was not phased with any of this as he stood firm. He did not talk his way out of punishment, nor did he praise the tyrants to save himself. Perhaps belittling the faith, disregarding the sanctities of Islam, and the neglect of rights of both nations and people, are all inevitable consequences of the absence of the sound minded reformer, the brave interlocutor, and the brave preacher whose heart is occupied with the concerns of his nation, the problems of his society, and the tragedies of his country.²⁵⁹

9. They said, ‘Burn him and avenge your gods, if you are going to act.’ (v. 68)

When Ibrahim overcame them with forceful arguments and exposed their falsehood and in front of the masses, they were unable to confront him with similar arguments and evidence. Instead they were overcome with rage, and felt endangered, so they resorted to brute force and punishment; the solution resorted to by all tyrants when they are opposed with clear truth and sound logic. ‘They said, ‘Burn him and avenge your gods, if you are going to act.’ It seems like they had consulted one another about what to do first as the verses of Surat al-Ankabut show: ‘But the only response of Ibrahim’s people was to say: ‘Kill him or burn him!’ But Allah saved him from the fire. Surely in this are signs for people who believe.’ (al-Ankabut: 24)

The revenge that the idolators took against Ibrahim was mentioned in three chapters of the Qur’an, Surat al-Ankabut, Surat al-Anbiya, and Surat al-Saffat.

1. In Surat al-Ankabut, Allah, the Most High, said: ‘But the only response of Ibrahim’s people was to say: ‘Kill him or burn him!’ But Allah saved him from the fire. Surely in this are signs for people who believe.’ (al-Ankabut: 24)

²⁵⁹ Al-Saif, p. 104.

2. In Surat al-Anbiya, Allah said: ‘They said, ‘Burn him and avenge your gods, if you are going to act.’ But We said, ‘Fire, be cool and safe for Ibrahim. They planned to harm him, but We made them suffer the greatest loss.’ (al-Anbiya: 68-70)
3. In Surat al-Saffat, Allah, the Most High, said: ‘They said [to one another], ‘Build him a furnace and cast him into the blazing fire.’ And so they sought to harm him, but We made them inferior.’ (al-Saffat: 97-98)

We can see that these verse complement one another, since each verse presents a different angle of their revenge. The first verse in Surat al-Ankabut speaks of how Ibrahim’s people responded to him when he called them to Allah and ordered them to abandon the worship of idols, before breaking their idols. Though it was only some of them who ordered that he be killed or burned, but the silence and acceptance of the rest is a sign of their approval. They wanted to kill him, so that they could be relieved from him. But it is as though their evil souls felt that death alone was not sufficient revenge, so they suggested that he be burnt alive.

In the end, they opted for the latter, ‘Burn him and avenge your gods, if you are going to act.’ They chose the most cruel form of punishment. Not just to punish Ibrahim, because to avenge their gods in the most severe way possible. Then they suggested something even beyond mere burning. They wanted this to be a great blazing fire, so they ordered that a furnace be built for him, which is what the third verse mentioned in Surat al-Saffat. And the word *jahim* is more than just mere *nar* (fire), but a fire that is blazing and pumped.

Due to the severity of the blazing fire, they could not get close to it, and due to the great size of what they built, they had to throw Ibrahim into it from far. So we can see each verse depicts part of the incident and adds something not mentioned in the other verses. How great is this Qur’an! As Allah said, ‘Alif Lam Ra. [This is] a Scripture whose verses are perfected, then set out clearly, from One who is all wise, all aware.’ (Hud: 1)

The tyrants declared their verdict to burn Ibrahim alive and proceeded to carry out the punishment, gathering the firewood and flaming a huge fire. They then brought him and threw him into the fire, in the presence and encouragement of the vengeant crowds. However, Ibrahim’s heart did

not shake. He remained firm, unimpacted by the fire blazing high, nor by the screaming crowds. He was simply repeating, with his heart and tongue:

'hasbi-Allah wa ni'ma-l wakil

(Allah is sufficient for us, and He is the best Protector)'.²⁶⁰

It is narrated in Sahih al-Bukhari that Ibn Abbas said: '*Hasbuna-Allah wa ni'ma-l wakil* (Allah is sufficient for us, and He is the best Protector). Ibrahim said it when he was thrown into the fire, and Muhammad said it when the people said: 'Those to whom the people said, 'The people have assembled against you, so fear them.' But this only increased them in faith, and they said, 'Allah is sufficient for us, and He is the best Protector.' (al-Imran: 173)

So Ibrahim was thrown into the fire, and as he is repeating this word, support immediately came to him. Ibn Kathir said: 'Some of the *salaf* (early scholars) said that Jibril came to him in the sky and said, 'Do you have any need?' So Ibrahim replied: 'Not from you, but from Allah.' It is narrated from Ibn Abbas that he said: 'Allah's command was quicker than his.'²⁶⁰

It is no surprise that the angels of the heaven came to Ibrahim's help, when even the animals of the earth tried to help. Aisha narrated that the Messenger of Allah said: 'When Ibrahim was thrown into the fire, every animal tried to put the fire out, except the gecko that blew in the fire to stir it up. So the Messenger commanded that geckos be killed.'²⁶¹

But Allah commanded the fire to be cool and safe for Ibrahim.

10. But We said, 'Fire, be cool and safe for Ibrahim.' (v. 69)

The fire is only one of Allah's creation, He controls it as He wills, and it submits to His will. The fire thus submitted to Allah's command and did not burn Ibrahim, despite remaining in its blazing state. As Allah said: 'And Allah saved him from the fire.' (al-Ankabut: 24)

Notice the precision of the wording of the Qur'an. Allah did not only command the fire to be cool, for its cold may have caused him some harm too. But He commanded it to be cool and safe, not causing him any harm, but instead comfortable. There is no doubt that Allah does not neglect his righteous servants in such tough circumstances, for He is the One that said:

²⁶⁰ Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Muhammad Ali al-Sabuni, (2/84).

²⁶¹ Ahmad (No: 24534), Ibn Majah (No: 3231), and Ibn Hibban (No: 795).

‘And whoever is mindful of Allah, He will make a way out for them, and provide for them from sources they could never imagine.’ (al-Talaq: 2-3). Make a way out for them from all types of distress, suffering, and hardship.

When Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was thrown into the fire, Allah removed from the fire the heating and burning nature that He placed in it, while keeping its light and ignition. He, the Most High, is able to do all things. The fire is only from Allah’s creation that does not disobey His command, so it became cool and safe for Ibrahim as He, so Ibrahim was saved from their fire.

Though it was possible for Ibrahim to just hide away from his people before they got hold of him, and thus escape their fire. It was also possible for Allah to send rain from the sky on that day and extinguish the fire, but none of this occurred. If Ibrahim disappeared, his people would have said: ‘If we had captured him, we would have burnt him and our gods would have destroyed him.’ They would have made a similar claim if it rained after their fire had been lit. But Allah Almighty willed that everyone witness the fire being lit and Ibrahim being thrown into the blazing fire, and then still not burn. This way, people witness the divine miracle through which Allah reserves His servant and messenger Ibrahim (peace be upon him). So that the people can see the invalidity of their beliefs, when their gods whom they wanted to take revenge for remain broken, unable to harm him, though he destroyed and humiliated them. They plotted and planned, but were the losers in the end.²⁶²

Allah’s word, ‘Be’, is one through which universes, worlds, and laws of nature have been created. ‘When He wills something to be, His way is to say, ‘Be’, and it is.’ So we do not ask how the fire did not burn Ibrahim when fire always naturally burns. Because the One who created the fire with an ability to burn, is also the One who told it to be cool and safe. This one word leads to the existence of whatever it is Allah wanted, whether people are familiar with that thing or not.

Those who compare the actions of Allah, the Most High, to the actions of human beings are the ones who ask, how can this be? How was this possible? Those who understand the difference between the two, do not ask these questions in the first place, nor do they try to produce a scientific or

²⁶² Sindi, p. 153.

non-scientific justification, because this matter is outside the realm of the laws of nature of this world. Thus, any methodology that interprets these events in a way other than referring to Allah's absolute power, is a corrupt methodology in its essence, because what Allah does is not subject to human standards and their limited knowledge.

All that is required of us, is to believe that this happened, because its maker has the power to make it happen. As for how this fire became cool and safe, and how it did not harm Ibrahim, then the Qur'anic remained silent about these details, because they cannot be comprehended by the limited human mind. We only have the Qur'anic text as proof.²⁶³

When Allah commanded the fire to be cool and safe for Ibrahim, He broke the laws of nature, and it is only the creator of the laws of nature who can break them. Things were not created with independent powers and abilities, but instead they were created to fulfil a certain purpose, so the One who created it for a purpose can take its distinct abilities away. Allah created fire with an ability to burn, so He alone can take that ability away from it, until it remains a fire, but unable to burn.²⁶⁴

11. 'They planned to harm him, but We made them suffer the greatest loss.' (v. 70)

The ended up being the greatest losers, because their physical and verbal efforts to put the flame of truth out, turned against them into a proof that Ibrahim was upon the truth, while their flames of falsehood were put out, as was the flame that they lit to harm Ibrahim. The verse shows their disgrace and disappointment when Ibrahim made his way out of the fire unharmed, making them contemplate this miracle that has just occurred before their eyes to prove the truth that he has come with in calling to the worship of Allah.

Referring to their intention to burn him as a 'plan' or a 'plot' implies that they had plotted this secretly, perhaps so that he would not run away and thus they would not be able to avenge their gods.

In Surat al-Anbiya, Allah said, 'We made them the greatest losers.' In Surat al-Saffat, He said, 'We made them the lowest.' Their loss comes from

²⁶³ Qutb, S. (4/2388).

²⁶⁴ Tafsir al-Sha'rawi (15/9586).

the humiliation they faced when their beliefs were exposed and shown to be ridiculous. They were also encouraging one another to avenge their gods and take revenge from Ibrahim, as though they were at war with him. So Allah made them the losers in this battle by saving Ibrahim from the fire and showing his message to be the truth.

As for in Surat al-Saffat, Allah mentioned that they said, ‘Build him a furnace and cast him into the blazing fire.’ (al-Saffat: 97). Here they were at the top of the building preparing to throw Ibrahim down into the fire. Though they were initially physically above him looked down at him engulfed by the blazing fire, so Allah said, ‘We made them the lowest’, because Ibrahim is above them in status, proof, and he came out of the fire safely.

Loss is used to refer to the loss of worldly goods, such as wealth and status, as well as abstract concepts, such as health, safety, intellect, faith, reward. Whenever loss is mentioned in the Qur’an it is always in reference to the second type.

Allah thus saved Ibrahim from the plot of his enemies, and they instead came out as absolute losers after which there is no return.

12. ‘We saved him and Lot [and sent them] to the land that We blessed for all people.’ (v. 71)

Ibrahim migrated from his land in Iraq to the holy land of Palestine that Allah had blessed for the whole world, and he settled there.

This blessing in the land of Palestine encompasses all things: faith, economy, politics, knowledge, civilization, and warfare (*jihad*). The Qur’an affirms that this blessing in Palestine extends to ‘all people’. This is a rebuttal of the false claim made by some Jews that Allah’s blessing in this land is only restricted to them. Instead, it is a blessing for all people. The blessed Muslim land of Palestine extends its blessings and its light to the whole world.²⁶⁵

Ibrahim settled in Palestine, his land of migration, just as Muhammad settled in Madina, his land of migration. From there, his travels began to nearby lands.

²⁶⁵ Al-Baderin, p. 107.

When Ibrahim settled in the blessed land of Palestine, he would visit nearby places. There are several travels of this type that the Qur'an and authentic Prophetic traditions narrate. The first trip was to Egypt and the rest, more than four trips, to Hijaz (the Western Province in modern Saudi Arabia). His wife Hajar and son Ismail were with him on the first trip to Hijaz, but he went there alone on the rest of the trips to visit his son Ismail.

Here we summarise the main events that occurred after Ibrahim's migration:

- His trip with his wife Sarah to Egypt.
- His trip with his wife Hajar and his son Ismail to the Hijaz.
- His vision in which he slaughtered his son Ismail.
- His guests and his receiving the good news of the birth of Isaac and Jacob.
- He built the Ka'bah along with his son Ismail.
- His call to Hajj in response to God's command.

Due to the importance of these events, we shall study them in more detail in the upcoming sections, God-willing.

His trip to Egypt with his wife Sarah is reported authentically in the Sunnah of the Prophet. His migration to Sham, where he settled, is mentioned in several places in the Qur'an:

1. 'I will withdraw from you and from what you pray to instead of God.' (Maryam: 47). So he withdrew himself from their false worship and physically withdrew himself from the land by migrating.
2. 'I am going to my Lord. He shall guide me.' (al-Saffat:99)
3. 'So Lot believed in him. And Ibrahim said, 'I am emigrating to my Lord. He alone is indeed the Almighty, All-Wise.' (al-Ankabut: 26)
4. 'We saved him and Lot [and sent them] to the land that We blessed for all people.' (al-Anbiya: 71)

The scholars have two opinions regarding the exact place that Ibrahim migrated to.

- The first view says that he migrated to Makkah.
- The second view says that he migrated to Sham.

There is no doubt that he entered both Makkah and Sham. He eventually settled in Sham, in Palestine, and according to the majority of exegetes,

including Ibn Kathir, the blessed land referred to in the verse is Sham. Allah blessed its land, crops, fruits, and waters, and He sent most of the prophets from these lands.²⁶⁶

Ibn Kathir says about the meaning of the verse, ‘We saved him and Lot’, that Allah preserved them throughout their journey until they arrived at the blessed lands which they migrated to.²⁶⁷

Ibrahim was the first person to migrate in the path of Allah, along with his nephew Lot, and his wife Sarah. This verse shows that fleeing to protect your faith is an obligation, from lands of disbelief to a land in which one can establish his faith and practice is. There is no scholarly disagreement that the obligation of this form of migration (*hijrah*) continues until the Day of Judgment.²⁶⁸

The Prophetic sunnah contains a number of narrations that speak about the virtue of Sham. Imam al-Mundhiri included in his book, *Al-Tarhib wa al-Tarhib*, a chapter heading titled, ‘Encouraging Living in Sham and its Virtues’, in which he mentioned eighteen narrations of hadith. One of those narrations is: ‘Blessed be Sham. The angels of the Most Merciful extend their wings over it.’²⁶⁹ Palestine is the best of lands of Sham, because it contains the first *qiblah*, Masjid al-Aqsa, where the Prophet made his night journey to.

The *hijrah* was the path to safety, for had Ibrahim not migrated, he would not have secured being safe from his people’s plots, nor from the tricks of the devil who is always seeking to deceive humans by all means possible. Remaining amongst the disbelievers and settling with the oppressors can easily lead to punishment in the afterlife. Allah said: ‘And do not be inclined to the wrongdoers or you will be touched by the Fire. For then you would have no protectors other than Allah, nor would you be helped.’ (Hud: 113)

So the migration was an escape from the plots and harm of the oppressors, the first step to victory. Ibrahim’s life, therefore, from the moment of his migration onwards became one of accomplishment and building

²⁶⁶ Tafsir al-Qurtubi (11/202).

²⁶⁷ Abu Zahra (9/4893).

²⁶⁸ Adwa al-Bayan, al-Shanqiti (4/590).

²⁶⁹ Tirmidhi (No: 3954). This Hadith is authentic according to Ibn Hibban and other scholars (translator).

success, despite his enemies trying to destroy and end it. The migration became a point in which a foundation was built and great Ibrahimic projects were initiated. One of the achievements of Ibrahim during this migration was being given, along with his offspring after him, the inheritance of the holy lands which Allah had blessed for all people. He migrated to the direction of prayer (*qiblah*) which Allah was pleased with for the first Ibrahimic community, the children of Israel, Jacob, son of Isaac.

Only the true believers understand the importance of the foundation of the first *qiblah*. It is not a light matter that this was appointed for Ibrahim, because it was there that a great human civilization sprang to life and continued to bless humanity.

13. ‘And We gave him Isaac and Jacob as an additional gift, and made each of them righteous.’ (v. 72)

In this chapter, Allah mentioned some of the favours and gifts that He gave to Ibrahim as a result of his *hijrah* and other sacrifices. Allah did not leave him alone, but gifted him children to replace his losses. He gave him Isaac who was the son of Sarah despite reaching an age of infertility. Jacob is the son of Isaac, but is considered one of Ibrahim’s sons, because he was born in Ibrahim’s life and was brought up in Ibrahim’s home, under his care, like a direct son. He learnt the religion of his father and was given prophethood like his father.

This passage did not mention Ismael although he was Ibrahim’s eldest son, born to Hajar, because the passage is speaking about the lands that Ibrahim migrated to and about the prophets of Bani Israel who lived in that region. However, straight after the passage about *hijrah* in Surat al-Saffat (verses 90 – 100), Allah said: ‘So We gave him good news of a forbearing son.’ That is son is Ismael. From the lineage of Isaac came the children of Israel, the Jews and Christians. And from the lineage of Ismael came the nation of Muhammad (peace be upon him). The gift of Isaac and Jacob was thus the greatest gift that Ibrahim was given, so he praised and thanked Allah greatly for it. ‘All praise is for Allah who has blessed me with Ishmael and Isaac in my old age. My Lord is indeed the Hearer of [all] prayers.’ (Ibrahim: 39)

The *nafilah* (additional gift) mentioned in the verse refers to Jacob, because he was the son of Ibrahim’s son. Mujahid said: *nafilah* means

gift.²⁷⁰ Like the voluntary prayer (*nafilah*) which is an addition on top of the obligatory prayer. So in this case, the *nafilah* is a reference to Jacob, an additional gift after the gift of Isaac. ‘We made each of them righteous.’ Dhahhak said: ‘We made both prophets and messengers.’ Others said that the word is more encompassing and refers to being men of good deeds, distant from sin.²⁷¹

The verse itself implies that the gift of Isaac was not immediate, but came after a while when the angels came to discuss the people of Lot with Ibrahim. So Allah gifted Ibrahim with two sons who were the fathers of two great civilizations. The Arab civilization that descended from Ishmael and the children of Israel who descend from Jacob the son of Isaac.

14. ‘We made them leaders, guiding by Our command, and inspired them to do good deeds, establish prayer, and pay alms-tax (zakat). And they were devoted to Our worship.’ (v. 73)

Know that Allah first described them as being righteous, because this is the first stage of the travellers to Allah. He then described them as being *imams* (leaders), then as prophets receiving revelation. If righteousness, which is the first stage, prevents one from sin, then this trait is more present in the final stage, which shows that the prophets are free from sin. Then when Allah described their level, he explained that they are occupied with servitude to Allah, so Allah said: ‘And they were devoted to Our worship.’ So when Allah blessed them with many favours that befit His Lordship, they fulfilled their part and were righteous servants of Allah devoted to His worship.

The Commentary of Shaykh al-Sa’di

Due to their righteousness, He made them leaders who guided people by His command. This is one of the greatest blessings that Allah bestows upon His slave; making him a leader who people are guided by and follow. That is because they were patient, steadfast, and had certain faith in the revelations (and signs) of Allah. ‘Guiding people by Our command.’ That is, on the basis of the teachings of Our religion. They did not instruct people to do things on the basis of their own opinions and desires; rather it

²⁷⁰ Adwa al-Bayan (5/591-592).

²⁷¹ Tafsir al-Razi (22/191)

was by the command of Allah and in accordance with His religion, and for the purpose of seeking His pleasure. A person cannot be a leader unless he calls people to that which Allah has commanded. ‘And We inspired them to do good deeds.’ Which they did, and called people to. This includes all good deeds, whether duties towards Allah or towards other people. ‘Establish prayer and give zakah.’ This comes under the heading of mentioning specific deeds after speaking in general terms, because of the noble status and virtue of these two acts of worship. Whoever does them properly, his religious commitment will be sound, but whoever neglects them will be more neglectful with other matters. Moreover, prayer is the best of deeds that are due to Allah, and zakah is the best of deeds that involve kindness towards His creation. ‘And they were devoted to Our worship.’ In other words, most of their time was occupied with acts of worship, with their heart, their words, and their physical actions. So they deserved to be described as worshippers, as they adhered to that which Allah instructed humankind and the purpose for which He created them.²⁷²

The Commentary of Ibn Ashur

Specifying establishing prayer and giving zakat, although they are both included in doing good deeds shows their importance. Because through prayer the soul is rectified, as prayer prevents indecency and wrongdoing. The soul is also rectified through zakat, and with zakat comes the rectification of the community by giving sufficiency to those in need. This alludes to the essence of the pure Islam (*hanifiyyah*) that Ibrahim was sent with. Inspiring them to do good, establish prayer, and pay zakat, means, as is clear to see, that these things were revealed to them. He then mentioned that which distinguished them over the rest of the people, which is their complete adherence to worshipping Allah Almighty. The verse also alludes to the fact that they singled out God in worship, and that they never worshipped anything else, which is a characteristic of the rank of prophecy, since the prophets are protected from ever worshipping other than Allah from the time of puberty. As Yusuf (peace be upon him) said: ‘never could we associate any partners with Allah.’ (Yusuf: 38). And Allah said, praising Ibrahim: ‘He was never a polytheist.’ (al-Imran: 67)

²⁷² Tafsit al-Sa’idi (5/245-246)

The Commentary of al-Shanqiti:

The reference in, ‘We made them’, is to all those mentioned, Ibrahim, Lot, Isaac, and Jacob, as stated by Abu Hayyan in *Al-Bahr al-Muhit*, and this the preferred view. This noble verse shows that Allah made Ishaq and Jacob *imams*, i.e. leaders in the religion, followed by others in the good that they do. ‘By Our command,’ means that they guide through the revelation that We revealed to them. It could also mean that they guide people to Our religion and call them to Our oneness, due to Our command for them to do so.

This verse shows that Ibrahim’s prayer, mentioned in Surat al-Baqarah, for his offspring to become *imams*, was answered by Allah in relation to some of his offspring, but not all. The rule here is that the wrongdoers from his offspring are not given such leadership, unlike the righteous of them, such as Isaac and Jacob, who were explicitly made *imams*. Ibrahim’s prayer is the one mentioned in Allah’s statement: ‘[Remember] when Ibrahim was tested by his Lord with [certain] commandments, which he fulfilled. Allah said, ‘I will certainly make you into a role model for the people.’ Ibrahim asked, ‘What about my offspring?’ Allah replied, ‘My covenant is not extended to the wrongdoers.’ (al-Baqarah: 124). Here Ibrahim asks that Allah make righteous leaders from his offspring. Allah’s reply to Ibrahim implies that this covenant extends to those who are not wrongdoers, as explicitly mentioned in this verse here. The existence of both righteous and wrongdoers from his offspring is explicitly mentioned in Surat al-Saffat, in Allah’s statement: ‘We blessed him (Ibrahim) and Isaac as well. But of their offspring are some who excel in doing good and others who are clearly unjust to themselves.’ (al-Saffat: 113)

Allah’s statement here, ‘and (We) inspired them to do virtuous deeds,’ i.e. to do good and to command people to do the same. Establishing prayer and paying zakat are some of those good deeds, but they were specifically mentioned due to their distinct virtue. ‘And they were devoted to Our worship.’ This means that they would abstain from sin and obey Our commands with sincerity. So they themselves follow what they encourage people to do and themselves abstain from the things they command people to abstain from, as Prophet Ayyub said: ‘I do not want to do what I am forbidding you from.’ (Hud: 88)



The word *a'immah*, which is plural for the word *imam*, means leaders who are followed by others. It is used to describe leaders in goodness, such as here, but also used to refer to leaders in evil, such as, 'And We made them imams (leaders) calling to the Fire.' (al-Qasas: 41)²⁷³

'And they were devoted to Our worship.' They were obedient to Allah and worshipped Him alone. This is a great testimony from Allah that proves their innocence from all false claims that seek to belittle or slander them, such as some things mentioned in Judeo-Christian books.²⁷⁴

²⁷³ Adwa al-Bayan (4/592-593).

²⁷⁴ Al-Tafsir al-Mawdu'i (5/374).

Section 4:

The Story of Ibrahim in Surat al-Shu'ara

Allah, Most High, said:

'Tell them the story of Ibrahim, when he asked his father and his people, 'What do you worship?' They replied, 'We worship idols, to which we are fully devoted.' He asked, 'Do they hear you when you call? Do they help or harm you?' They replied, 'No, but this is what we found our fathers doing.' Ibrahim said, 'Those idols you have worshipped, you and your forefathers, are my enemies; not so the Lord of the Worlds, who created me. It is He who guides me. He who gives me food and drink. He who cures me when I am ill. He who will make me die and then give me life again. He who will, I hope, forgive my faults on the Day of Judgement. My Lord, grant me wisdom and join me with the righteous. Give me honourable mention among later generations. Make me of the inheritors of the Garden of Bliss. Forgive my father, for he is one of those who have gone astray; and do not disgrace me on the Day all people are resurrected; the Day when neither wealth nor children will be of any benefit, [when none will be saved] except the one who comes before God with a pure heart [devoted to Him].'

And the Garden is brought near to the righteous, and the Fire is placed in full view of the misguided. It will be said to them, 'Where are those you worshipped beside God? Can they help you now, or even help themselves?' Then they will all be hurled into Hell, together with those that misled them, and all Iblis' soldiers. There they will say to their gods, as they bicker among themselves, 'By Allah, we were clearly misguided when we made you equal with the Lord of the Worlds. It was the evildoers who led us astray, and now we have no intercessor, nor a close friend. If only we could have a second chance, we would be true believers!' There truly is a sign in this, though most of them do not believe: your Lord alone is certainly the Almighty, the Merciful.' (Surat al-Shu'ara: 69 – 104)

The Noble Qur'an relates to us, with all precision, the story of Ibrahim here in Surat al-Shu'ara. The verses came pouring down to describe the scenes of his great story in a touching and powerful way. We see Ibrahim's personality (peace be upon him); this towering figure that defies all influences with his firm belief in monotheism that impacts the mind and heart, as we shall come to see in the upcoming verses in this chapter. We shall see that strong connection that he has with his Lord, the thing that will always be the essence that the believer returns to and the light that illuminates the way for him.

Let us then begin to interpret these verses section by section, in a clear and simple way, with the aim of allowing the guidance of the Merciful to speak to our human instinct, our minds, and the general conscience of every human being wherever they may be.

1. Al-Shu'ara: 69-71

Allah, Most High, said:

'Tell them the story of Ibrahim, when he asked his father and his people, 'What do you worship?' They replied, 'We worship idols, to which we are fully devoted.' (v. 69-71)

1. 'Tell them the story of Ibrahim.' (v. 69)

The verses begin with a divine order to the Prophet to recite to people the great story of Ibrahim. This story is related to us by the Qur'an, which is Allah's speech, the most truthful of speech. His story, in relation to our prophet Muhammad and his nation, is from the knowledge of the unseen (*ghayb*), which we firmly believe in.

The unseen is of three types:

1. Historical realities, such as the life of Ibrahim, other prophets, and the past nations before and after him.
2. Knowledge of the future that is yet to happen, such as the lifespan of the world, the afterlife, and Heaven and Hell.
3. The unseen that is present, such as the angels, devils, and so on.

All of this is from the unseen (*ghayb*) that Allah has revealed upon the heart of Muhammad (peace be upon him). Allah said: 'These accounts are

part of the unseen. We revealed them to you. Neither you nor your people knew them before now. So be patient! The future belongs only to those who are righteous.’ (Hud: 49). Belief in Ibrahim and his religion is an essential part of belief in Allah, in fact, it makes up the pillars of faith and is the most important trait of the true believers. Allah, Most High, said: ‘This is the Book! There is no doubt about it—a guide for those mindful of Allah, who believe in the unseen, establish prayer, and donate from what We have provided for them.’ (al-Baqarah: 2-3)

With unmatched bravery Ibrahim stands in defence of the oneness of Allah, calls people to the religion that Allah is pleased with for humanity, and fulfils the trust that was given to him. So he initiates a discussion with the idolators, for the sake of making the truth known, not to show off or for any worldly gains. He clarifies for us, his followers, that the faith is built upon calling to *tawhid* (Allah’s oneness) and fighting *shirk* at all costs.

2. When he asked his father and his people, ‘What do you worship?’ (v. 70)

Ibrahim begins with none other than his father, before moving on to the rest of his people, which is the wise thing to do, because the reformer and guide to the truth must begin with himself and those closest to him first, before moving to those further away. One’s family are the biggest priority in calling them to the truth: one’s wife and children, their father, mother, brother, sister, and other close relatives. They are a person’s first responsibility when it comes to their faith specifically, and other religious duties and virtues more generally.

Ibrahim was only speaking with them, but speech is one of the greatest tools of change. Consider how many have been guided through a word of truth and how many hard hearts have softened by an impactful word. Just as words can have a negative impact, they can also have a positive impact. Ibrahim’s question is a direct one: ‘What do you worship?’ He knows the answer as well as they do, for it is clear to see that they worship idols. He did not ask them who they worship, as that would imply worshipping a living being, but he is subtly alluding to the fact that they worship a non-living object, so he asked what they worship.

Ibrahim’s question is rhetorical and critical, with the aim of showing them the falsity of what they are doing. That is because worship is to obey

and submit to the commands and prohibitions of the one being worshipped. So what exactly are these idols commanding and forbidding them? So these gods have not brought any guidance, and how easy it is to worship such a god; one that neither commands nor forbids you. They are gods that cannot reward those who obey them, nor punish those who disobey. As for the real God that we know, He commands us to do good, forbids us from doing evil, has clearly guided humanity in all aspects of their lives.

3. They replied, ‘We worship idols, to which we are fully devoted.’ (v. 71)

They admit to worshipping statues instead of Allah, but went beyond what was asked of them and explained that they are fully devoted to these idols. That is, their hearts are constantly devoted to them, because their rituals and worship is not daily, but seasonal. Their pride in being devoted to their idols shows the sickness of their hearts. Their affirmation that they are devoted to their idols is an immediate reaction to Ibrahim’s question to show him that they will remain so, regardless of what this discussion leads to and regardless of what he has to say about their idols. They have made it clear that they are willing to defend their idols at all costs. It is as though Ibrahim knew what they would say, so he began to list out logical reasons that show the falsity of what they believe.

2. Al-Shu’ara: 72-74

Allah, Most High, said:

He asked, ‘Do they hear you when you call? Do they help you or cause harm?’ They replied, ‘No, but this is what we found our fathers doing.’ (v. 72-74)

1. He asked, ‘Do they hear you when you call?’ (v. 72)

Ibrahim was smart and careful to discuss the most important things with them, so the first question he directed to them related to whether these idols can hear any of their prayers. Since answering prayers is based on first hearing them, how can something that cannot hear your prayers? They cannot hear you, whether you pray loudly or quietly, whether you are near them or far away from them, while the true God should be able to hear his creation under all circumstances.

If someone says, one can understand you through signs, even if they are deaf. The response would be that this still means that they would have to be nearby. The one who can truly respond to people is the one who hears them at all times wherever they are.

The importance of hearing, and its superiority in fact, is something alluded to in the Qur'an in the way it usually lists hearing before the other senses. Allah said: 'Do not follow what you have no [sure] knowledge of. Indeed, all will be called to account for [their] hearing, sight, and intellect.' (al-Isra: 36). Additionally, when Allah speaks of Himself in the Qur'an, He usually mentions His hearing first, such as, 'the All-Hearing, All-Knowing', 'the All-Hearing, All-Seeing', and 'All-Hearing, All-Knowing.' And one of the supplications of the Prophet was: 'O Allah, protect my body, my hearing, and my sight. There is no god but You.'²⁷⁵

I remind here that we are speaking about their gods, so Ibrahim chose the most effective things to bring up in his discussion with them. So here he has established before them that their gods cannot hear, which gave them an initial shock. Before they replied, Ibrahim added another problematic question for them.

2. 'Do they help you or cause harm?' (v. 73)

They know that their gods have never given them anything, for how can something that cannot help itself help or harm others. Such people are described in the Qur'an as being misguided: 'Who could be more astray than those who call upon other than Allah, those who will not respond to them until the Day of Judgment, and are [even] unaware of their prayers?' (al-Ahqaf: 5)

Once again, Ibrahim chooses his words carefully, mentioning harm before benefit. The nature of humans is to prefer benefit and to enjoy pleasures before anything else. However, in Islamic law, preference is given to preventing harm over attaining benefit. The legal maxim goes: 'Preventing harm comes before attaining benefit.' That is because if harm is allowed to occur, it will block means of benefit. Imam al-Shatibi said: 'The Shari'ah is based on taking caution and being firm with matters that lead to harm. This is one of its major principles.'²⁷⁶

²⁷⁵ Al-Adab al-Mufrad (No: 701).

²⁷⁶ Al-Marsumi, p. 44.

Ibrahim suggests that these idols cannot cause harm. He did not only say, ‘can they harm you?’ But he made it clear that they cannot harm anyone or anything, even those who disbelieve in them and their enemies. When they heard what Ibrahim said, they felt defeated and embarrassed. But what do you think their reply could be? If they claim that these idols do benefit and harm, they would be asked to prove it. If they admit that they bring nor harm or benefit, then Ibrahim has proved his point. They thus find themselves between a rock and a hard place.

Another verse tells us that Ibrahim said, ‘do you desire false gods other than Allah?’ (al-Saffat: 86). He described their idols as false. Their beliefs are based on pure falsehood and lies, which is the case with all those who worship gods in all times and places. The claim that these rocks and stones are gods are mere lies through which the naïve are deceived. Then he questioned them, ‘what do you think of the Lord of the world?’ The author of Tafsir al-Qurtubi said that this is a threat that means: ‘What do you think will happen when you meet Him having worshipped other than Him? Similar to: ‘O man! What has deceived you about your Gracious Lord?’ (al-Infitar: 6). Other scholars said that the verse means: ‘Who do you think your Lord is such that you associated a partner with Him?’²⁷⁷

Ibrahim reminds them of their error and how astray they have gone in worshipping other than Allah, for all proofs and signs show that the universe only has one God. This verse also shows that worshipping anything other than Allah is a form of thinking badly of Allah, when a person should think the best of Allah. The Messenger of Allah said that Allah, Most High, says: ‘I am as my servant think of Me.’²⁷⁸

This was the way of they righteous; they always thought well of Allah, out of faith in Him and to secure their own success in this life and the next. This is one of the foundations of the religion of Ibrahim. The level of your trust in Allah is based on how well you think of Allah. He is sufficient for us and an excellent Protector. This is why some scholars interpreted *tawakkul* (trust in Allah) as being *husn al-dhann billah* (thinking well of Allah).²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ Tafsir al-Qurtubi (15/92)

²⁷⁸ Bukhari (No: 7405)

²⁷⁹ bn al-Qayyim: Madarij al-Salikin (2/121)

And the Prophet, three days before his death, gave us some farewell advice by saying: ‘None of you should die, except while thinking well of Allah.’²⁸⁰

Qadi Iyad said: ‘His saying, ‘I am as my servant thinks of Me,’ some said this means that he is with them with His forgiveness when they seek it, acceptance if He returns to Me, acceptance if he prays to Me, and sufficiency if he seeks it from Me, because these things do not appear unless a servant thinks well of Allah and has firm faith. The hadith could also be a warning for people from thoughts that cross their mind, such as Allah’s statement: ‘If you reveal what is in yourselves or conceal it, Allah will hold you to account for it,’ and His saying: ‘Know that Allah knows what is in yourselves, so beware.’

Al-Khatabi said about the Prophet’s hadith, ‘None of you should die, except while thinking well of Allah,’ i.e. with his good deeds, because one who does good will think good of Allah, while whoever’s deeds are not good, will not think good of Allah.’²⁸¹

Of course, Ibrahim’s people had a response, as anyone arguing would. Otherwise they would be admitting their defeat. So they told Ibrahim that this is something they found their fathers doing.

3. They replied, ‘No, but this is what we found our fathers doing.’ (v. 74)

Al-Alusi said: ‘They ignored the fact that their idols have no hearing, benefit, or harm, admitting that which they have no way of denying. They were forced to admit that they have no justification except blind following. It is as though they said: They cannot hear, they do not benefit us, nor cause harm, but we found our fathers doing this and worshipping them, so we follow them in that.’²⁸²

Al-Razi said: ‘This one of the strongest proofs of the falsity of *taqlid* (blind following) and the obligation of following proof and reasoning (*istidlal*). Because approving of *taqlid* and rejecting proof would be following the way of the disbelievers that Allah has denounced and opposing the way of Ibrahim that Allah has praised. Ibrahim replied, ‘Those idols you have worshipped, you and your forefathers, are my enemies.’ He meant to

²⁸⁰ Muslim (No: 81)

²⁸¹ Sharh Sahih Muslim (8/172)

²⁸² Ruh al-Ma’ani (19/94)

say that falsehood does not change, whether its in the past or present, and regardless of the number of its followers.’²⁸³

Hidden within their response is defeat, as they admitted that their gods cannot do any of the things Ibrahim asked them about. They know that these are non-living objects. Since their gods cannot benefit, they had no choice but to admit the true reason for their idolatrous beliefs; blind following their fathers, without thinking or understanding. This is clear to see from their response.

So many have been destroyed by their blind following of their forefathers without thinking or being critical. This is the exact fanaticism that is rejected in the religion of Ibrahim. The Messenger of Allah warned against obeying creation at the expense of disobeying Allah. He said: ‘There is no obedience to creation in disobeying Allah.’²⁸⁴

Obedying parents and those in authority is obligatory upon the Muslim, but only with this condition mentioned in this Hadith. The Qur’an showed us that some people have lost their afterlife because they insisted on obeying their forefathers who have no knowledge, no understanding, and no guidance. Allah, Most High, said: ‘When it is said to them, ‘Come to Allah’s revelations and to the Messenger,’ they reply, ‘What we found our forefathers practicing is good enough for us.’ [Would they still do so,] even if their forefathers had absolutely no knowledge or guidance?’ (al-Ma’idah: 104). And Allah said: ‘Whenever We sent a messenger before you to warn a town, those spoilt elite would say, in the same way, ‘We saw our fathers following this tradition; we are only following in their footsteps.’ (al-Zukhruf: 23)

This is where Ibrahim’s role comes in, as they await further discussion and debate. However, each time he surprises them with a firm stance. If they insist upon following their old traditions, despite being astray, then Ibrahim, Allah’s prophet, is more worthy of maintaining a firm stance, because he is upon the truth that is more worthy of being followed.²⁸⁵

²⁸³ Tafsir al-Razi (24/143)

²⁸⁴ Tabarani (No: 381). Translator: The Hadith is narrated in Musnad Ahmad (No: 724), Bukhari (No: 7257), and Muslim (No: 1840)

²⁸⁵ Al-Marsumi, p. 38.

3. Al-Shu'ara: 75-77

Allah, Most High, said:

Ibrahim said, 'Those idols you have worshipped, you and your ancient forefathers, are my enemies; not so the Lord of the Worlds. (v. 75-77)

This beautiful statement of Ibrahim is consistent with the Qur'anic way of affirmation and negation that is the true meaning of *la ilaha illa-Allah* (there is no god worthy of worship except Allah). He negates the divinity of their gods and declares them as his enemies, then affirms that Allah alone is the true god worthy of worship.

Ibrahim announces his enmity and war against that which they and their fathers worship. This enmity applies, not only to them and their direct fathers, but all their 'ancient' forefathers who followed the path of idolatry, no matter how long back they go. The exception of Allah Almighty could be a new sentence to mean that his enmity is restricted to their gods, not his God, the Lord of the world. Alternatively, it could be an exception to what they worship, because their forefathers worshipped Allah and other gods, so Ibrahim tells them that he rejects all the gods they worship except the One true God that they worship.

In another verse, Ibrahim said: 'You and your forefathers were truly upon clear misguidance.' (al-Anbiya: 54). Ibrahim challenged the idolators and their idols. He challenged their false beliefs without any fear, in the hope that this would be a wake-up call from their blind following of false traditions. After doing so, he went on to explain who this true God is, without paying attention to their question. As men with serious missions and noble goals do not turn to pure argumentation and ignorance. He is speaking about *tawhid*, the foundation of all foundations, and the reason for which people were created. Allah, Most High, said: 'We never sent a messenger before you [O Prophet] without revealing to him: 'There is no god [worthy of worship] except Me, so worship Me [alone].'' (al-Anbiya: 25)

Allah, the Lord of the Worlds, is self-sufficient, everything happens by His will. He controls all beings, with their good and evil. He ascended above His throne and runs the affairs of the universe alone. The fate and outcome of all matters are in His hands. His commands and decree to give life and cause death, make some rich and others poor, elevate some and

debase others, all descend through His angels. He relieves hardships, provides for the needy, and answers the prayers of the desperate. ‘All those in the heavens and the earth beseech Him [for their needs]. Day in and day out He has something to bring about.’ (al-Rahman: 29)

Nothing can prevent what He gives, nor attain what He withholds, nor refuse His decree, nor change His commands, nor alter His words. The angels, along with Jibril, ascend to Him, and people’s deeds are presented to Him each morning and evening.

This way the Qur’an teaches us to never sweettalk when it comes to faith, but to be rank and clear, even with our own relatives and friends. Ibrahim was clear about his enmity to the idols of his people and their forefathers, though they are his own forefathers too. That is because our most important allegiance is that of faith, while all other allegiances are secondary.

4. Al-Shu’ara: 78-82

Allah, Most High, said:

‘Who created me. It is He who guides me. He who gives me food and drink. He who cures me when I am ill. He who will make me die and then give me life again. He who will, I hope, forgive my faults on the Day of Judgement.’ (v. 78-82)

When Ibrahim announced his full allegiance to Allah alone, He went on to praise His Lord, describe some of His attributes, and list some of His favours upon him. This shows them the absolute and unlimited power of Allah compared to the inability of their idols. He does so to further reinforce that He alone is the One truly worthy of worship. Ibrahim’s mention of Allah’s favours is a manifestation of how he lives with full mindfulness of Allah, has dedicated his whole life to Allah, and has referred all blessings, whether for him or all creation, to Allah.

These verses, despite their brevity, have listed out the various stages of life, starting with creation, then life, then guidance by Allah’s command. Throughout this life there is food, drink, health, illness, eventually ending in death, then being brought to life with the hope of forgiveness in the afterlife.

1. 'It is He who created me, and thus He who guides me.' (v. 78)

Allah alone is the One who creates, guides, provides, cures, brings live, causes death, and forgives sins on the Day of Judgment. Is there anything more important than these things? So if these matters are so important and you know that Allah alone is the One who controls all these matters in your life, then it only makes sense to worship Him alone sincerely.

Someone can say, 'Fulan brought food.' This does not negate that someone else could also have brought food. However, if you were to say, 'It was Fulan who brought the food', this implies that it was only Fulan who had brought it, nobody else. Ibrahim did not suffice by saying that Allah created him, but made it clear that, 'It is He who created me.' None other than Allah claims to have created human beings. But the corrupt chiefs claim to lead people to the truth, such as Pharaoh who said, 'I have told you what I think; I am guiding you along the right path.' (Ghafir: 29). Ibrahim therefore began by affirming Allah's creation then stating that Allah is the One who truly guides me aright, although there are some who claim to guide people. True guidance is from the creator alone.

Every person has ideas, principles, and a lifestyle, but Allah is the Wise creator of this universe. We, His creation, are like machines who have no choice but to go by the guidance of the original maker, because none other can provide us with the guidance that we need. So Allah has given us that needed guidance so that we can live our lives in the most complete and ideal way that suits our nature. Without it, we would be far astray, only harming ourselves and those around us.

When you read about any manmade ideology, or the books of a major philosopher, or and manmade law, you would see that it contains misguidance, because the One who created you alone is the One who can guide you perfectly. So the claim that God does not exist is misguidance. So is the claim that humans are originally apes, that the material and physical world is all that exists, and that pleasure is the most important thing in human life. These are all examples of misguidance and deviation from the complete and pure human nature.

Anything that opposes the guidance of the creator is necessarily false. Hence, if some researchers claim that wine in small quantities is good for the heart, we know that it is false, because it directly opposes the teachings

of the Qur'an, for whatever intoxicates in large amounts is prohibited in small amounts.²⁸⁶

The creator is the One who guides. This guidance and the means to it are in His Book that cannot be approached by falsehood from any angle. Ibrahim answers the question that many people ask, 'who created me?' Allah, Most High said: 'This is God, your Lord, there is no God but Him, the Creator of all things, so worship Him; He is the maintainer of everything.' (al-A'raf: 102).

Ibrahim mentioned guidance after creation, before mentioning food and drink and other things, because the human need for guidance is greater than their need for food and drink. Humans without guidance which connects them to Allah are like nothing, because humans naturally need guidance for their affairs to run straight. This guidance is purely a divine favour that Allah gives to whoever He wills. It is essential belief for every Muslim that no human has any control over the guidance of others, even the best of creation, when Allah addressed him saying: 'You cannot guide whoever you like [O Prophet], but it is Allah Who guides whoever He wills, and He knows best who are [fit to be] guided.' (al-Qasas: 56)

One form of guidance is the ability that Allah gives to His creation that allows them to seek provision for their livelihoods, including various means of producing food and drink, hunting, reproducing, and protecting life. 'He (Musa) said, 'our Lord is He who gave everything its [perfect] form, then guided it.' (Taha: 50). The word guidance is mentioned by Ibrahim in the verse in the present tense, to show that it is continuous and constant, including all forms of guidance for the success of his life and the next, from one's creation until his death.²⁸⁷

There is great wisdom in mentioning guidance alongside creation. For the one who created humans and knows everything about them is most suited to providing them with guidance that they need. Allah, Most High, clarified how He is the source of guidance just as He is the source of creation:

²⁸⁶ Translator: This is taken from an authentic Hadith narrated from the Prophet (peace be upon him) in which he said: 'Whatever intoxicates in large amounts is prohibited in small amounts.' (Ahmad, Tirmidhi, and Nasa'i)

²⁸⁷ M. Shams, p. 364.

- ‘Glorify the Name of your Lord, the Most High, who created [all things] in due proportion, who determined their destinies and guided them.’ (al-A’la: 1-3)
- ‘We said, ‘Get out, all of you! But when guidance comes from Me, as it certainly will, there will be no fear for those who follow My guidance nor will they grieve. As for those who disbelieve and deny Our messages, they shall be the inhabitants of the Fire, and there they will remain.’ (al-Baqarah: 38-39)

Had it not been for the rule of guidance that Allah has placed in the universe, nothing would have fulfilled its purpose to its best ability, nor would any tree have produced any fruits. All creation therefore came as a great sign of the creator and Lord of creation who guided all things to attaining their full potential, as is the case with rain, the planets and stars, the fish that are in the depths of the oceans, and all creation fulfills its potential by Allah’s will.

No matter how much a person contemplates the universe and Allah’s creation in the various forms that it comes in, he will only find Allah’s guidance quite apparent and spread, guiding all creation towards what suits them. This is a great sign that shows that the creation that we see is necessarily guided in a miraculous way. Yet despite all these great signs all over the universe there are some people today who claim that the universe and life is no more than a coincidence. Thus deviation and blindness to the truth continue to be revived in different forms, in ways that do not befit an animal were it able to talk, let alone a human.

Ibrahim knew that the One who is in charge of creation, is also the most worthy of being in charge of guidance. He summarised this by saying, ‘It is He who created me, and thus He who guides me.’ He thus affirms the two greatest favours of Allah on human beings: creation and guidance. These two blessings go hand in hand, one cannot do without the other. In fact, creation without guidance would no longer be a blessing, but a form of punishment, which unfortunately is the reality of the life of disbelievers, idolators, and hypocrites. They were led astray by the devils, so they worshipped their desires, rejected the truth that Allah sent, and worshipped idols, in the greatest display of disbelief that humanity has ever witnessed.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁸ Shibli, p. 135.

- **Allah's Name: Al-Khaliq (The Creator)**

Allah's Name 'Al-Khaliq' is mentioned eight times in the Qur'an, such as in the following verses:

- 'He is Allah, the Creator (Al-Khaliq), (al-Hashr: 24)
- 'Is there a creator (Khaliq) other than Allah?' (Fatir: 3)
- 'Allah is the Creator (Khaliq) of all things.' (al-Zumar: 62)

Allah describes Himself in Qur'an as Al-Khaliq in many other verses too, using several variants of the word.

- 'Glory be to Allah, the best of creators.' (al-Mu'minun: 14)
- 'Do you call upon a Ba'l (one of their idols) and forsake the Best of Creators?' (al-Saffat: 125)
- 'Do you create it or are We the Creators?' (al-Waqi'ah: 59)
- 'Indeed, your Lord is the All-Knowing Creator (Khallaq).' (al-Hijr: 86)

These two names, Al-Khaliq and Al-Khallaq can only be used for Allah. It is not permissible to describe anyone else using them.

Al-Khaliq is the originator who creates things without precedent. Allah said: 'Is there a creator (*khaliq*) other than Allah?' (Fatir: 3). While Al-Khallaq implies excessiveness and Allah's vast and plentiful creation. The many billions of creation are brought into existence at every moment, are a manifestation of Allah's Name Al-Khallaq. These two names are affirmed by all nations, Muslims and disbelievers. Imam Ibn al-Qayyim says: 'Nothing is more obvious than Allah being a Creator, which is why all nations accepted this, believers and disbelievers, since knowing this is within human nature. And Allah used this as an argument in several verses in the Qur'an, saying, 'If you ask them who created the heavens and earth, they would say 'Allah'.' (al-Zumar: 38)

- **Allah's Name: Al-Hadi (The Guide)**

Allah's Name 'Al-Hadi' is mentioned twice in the Qur'an, in Allah's statement, 'Your Lord is sufficient as a Guide and Supporter.' (al-Furqan: 3); and His saying, 'Allah is the Guide of the believers to the straight path.' (al-Hajj: 54). Al-Hadi is the One who favours whoever He wills with the blessing of guidance, guiding them to monotheism, as Allah said: 'And He guides whoever He wills to a straight path.' (Yunus: 25). He guided all

creation to that which benefits it. He taught animals how to find its provision and protect itself from harm.

Shaykh Abd al-Rahman al-Sa'di said: 'Al-Hadi is the One who guides towards all forms of good and protection from harm, teaching His creation that which they do not know, guiding them to righteousness, teaching them taqwa (God-consciousness), and making the hearts turn to Him and submit to His command.'²⁸⁹

Ibn al-Qayyim clarified the different types of guidance (*hidayah*):

- **The First Type**

'General guidance that is shared amongst all creation, mentioned in Allah's statement, 'He (Musa) said, 'our Lord is He who gave everything its [perfect] form, then guided it.' (Taha: 50). He gave each thing its distinct form which distinguishes it from all other things, created it in its own distinct image, then guided it to what it was created for.

This is the guidance of all living animals that act in line with what benefits them and protects them from harm. Similarly, the guidance of inanimate beings have their own form of guidance that suits them, just as each limb has its guidance for which it was created for. The feet, for instance, are used to walk, hands to work and hold, the tongue for speech, ears for hearing, eyes to see, and all other body parts are used for what is appropriate for them. The 'guidance' of each animal pair is partnership, reproduction, and the upbringing of their children, while the child is guided to seeking and drinking from its mother's breast. These are just few of endless examples of Allah guiding His creation to everything that is good for them, so glory be to Allah, the Lord of the world.'²⁹⁰

By understanding this guidance, we automatically and easily establish prophethood. That is because the God who has guided all His creation on the most minute of details in all aspects of their lives, will surely not leave human beings, an honourable kind, astray and without any guidance which help them to fulfill their full potential. This would contradict Allah's wisdom, which is why He negated such a thing from Himself.

²⁸⁹ Al-Jalil, A. p. 518.

²⁹⁰ Badai' al-Fawaid, (2/36).

‘Do you think that we created you in vain, and that you would not be brought back to Us? Exalted is Allah, the true King, there is no god but Him, the Lord of the Glorious Throne!’ (al-Mu’minun: 115-116)

- **The Second Type:**

The guidance of clarification of the two paths of good and evil, salvation and destruction. This type of guidance does not necessitate that all people will be completely guided, for it is something that people have the ability to accept or reject. Allah said: ‘We guided Thamud, but they chose blindness over guidance.’ (Fussilat: 17). In other words, we clarified guidance for them, but they rejected it. Similarly, ‘Indeed, you (O Prophet) guide to a straight path.’ (al-Shura: 52). The Prophet does not have the ability to make people guided, but he brings them guidance and teaches it to them.

- **The Third Type:**

The guidance of success (*tawfiq*), which actually leads people to guidance. This is the type mentioned in the following verses, ‘He misguides whoever He wills, and He guides whoever He wills.’ (Fatir: 8). And: ‘You cannot guide whoever you like.’ (al-Qasas: 56). So Allah affirmed that the Prophet guides people to the truth, but established that he does not have the control to make them guided, unlike Allah who guides whoever He wills.

- **The Fourth Type:**

This is the ultimate guidance; guidance to Paradise or Hellfire, when its people are driven to them. Allah, Most High said: ‘Those who believe and do good, their Lord shall guide them [to Paradise] through their faith. Rivers will flow beneath them in the Gardens of Bliss.’ (Yunus: 9). And the people of Paradise will say: ‘Praise to Allah who guided us to this.’ (al-A’raf: 43). While it will be said regarding the people of Hell: ‘[Angels], gather together those who did wrong, and their peers, as well as whatever they worshipped beside God, lead them all to the path of Hell.’ (al-Saffat: 22-23)

Guidance is the greatest blessing that one can be given by Allah, for every blessing other than guidance comes to an end, while guidance leads to contentment in this life, then eternal contentment in the afterlife. The gift of guidance is so great that even the most guided people – the Prophets – would always ask Allah for guidance.

- Yusuf says: ‘Make me die a Muslim and gather me with the righteous.’ (Yusuf: 101)
- Sulaiman says: ‘Lord, inspire me to be thankful for the blessings You have granted me and my parents, and to do good deeds that please You. Admit me by Your grace into the ranks of Your righteous servants.’ (al-Naml: 19)

The final messenger, Muhammad, peace be upon him, would ask his Lord for guidance in his supplications and prayers. Aisha (Allah be pleased with her) said: ‘The Prophet would begin his night prayer by saying:

اللَّهُمَّ رَبَّ جِبْرِيلَ وَمِيكَائِيلَ وَإِسْرَافِيلَ، فَاطِرَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ، عَالِمَ الْغَيْبِ
وَالشَّهَادَةِ، أَنْتَ تَحْكُمُ بَيْنَ عِبَادِكَ فِيمَا كَانُوا فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ، اهْدِنِي لِمَا اخْتَلَفَ فِيهِ مِنَ
الْحَقِّ بِإِذْنِكَ، إِنَّكَ تَهْدِي مَنْ تَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

‘O Allah, Lord of Jibril, Mika’il, and Israfil, the Originator of the heavens and earth, Knower of the unseen and seen, You judge between your servants regarding that which they differed in. Guide me to the truth in that which they differ on, for You guide whoever You will to a straight path.’²⁹¹

He would also often say:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ الْهُدَى وَالتَّقَى وَالعَفَافَ وَالْغِنَى

‘O Allah, I ask you for guidance, *taqwa*, purity (*‘afaf*), and self-sufficiency (*ghina*).’²⁹²

This nation has been commanded to ask Allah for guidance in every single unit of prayer, in Allah’s statement: ‘Guide us to the straight path. The path of those You have favoured, not those who have incurred wrath, nor those who are astray.’ (al-Fatiha: 6-7)

The Messenger taught his grandson Hasan ibn Ali to say:

اللَّهُمَّ اهْدِنِي فِيمَنْ هَدَيْتَ، وَعَافِنِي فِيمَنْ عَافَيْتَ

‘O Allah, guide me along with those you have guided and protect me along with those you have protected.’²⁹³

²⁹¹ Sahih Muslim (No: 770)

²⁹² Sahih Muslim (No: 2721)

²⁹³ Abu Dawud (No: 1425) and others. Authenticated (graded *sahih*) by Ibn Khuzaimah and Ibn Hibban.



These are the supplications of the Prophet, though he is the guide, protected by Allah from misguidance, so what then of us weak men who are prone to falling for the trials of doubts and desires? Our need to ask for guidance from Allah is greater than our need for food and drink.

This statement by Ibrahim, ‘It is He who created me, and thus He who guides me’, shows that these great meanings that are contained in the names and attributes of Allah were settled in his mind and heart. He knew exactly who Allah is and understood that he is under the complete control of His creator.

2- ‘He who gives me food and drink.’ (v. 79)

This is another great divine favour. Allah provides for his creation, facilitating the means of food and drink. Whether meat, fish, bread, fruits, or otherwise, Allah of it comes from Allah. He is the one who caused the plants to grow and allowed cattle to eat from them. He created the rivers and seas in which fish live. He sends down the rain that humans and animals drink from and benefit from in other ways. Ibrahim showed that Allah is therefore the one who gives people food and drink through creating all these various means.

Despite this being a given fact, many people are heedless of the reality that Allah is the provider. They attribute food and drink to other creation who have no true control over the matter. Idolators, for instance, think that their idols are the cause of these blessings. Ibrahim was therefore a unique figure among his people, as he referred every blessing solely to Allah, none other. The story of Ibrahim teaches us that one of the manifestations of sound faith is to only see Allah as the true giver of blessings, seeing humans as nothing more than means through which they exchange goods.

We can also extract from Ibrahim’s statement that human interaction should not reach the extent of worship out of fear for one’s sustenance. Unfortunately many people behave with excessive humility, rather humiliation, in the presence of kings, leaders, and businessmen, for the sake of some money or some worldly gain.

Ibrahim teaches us that there is nothing to fear or worry about when one puts their trust in Allah, knowing that provision comes from Him, and that nothing He has decreed for us will miss us. There is thus no need to

keep the burden of provision on our shoulders, allowing it to stress us. Instead, Allah controls these matters entirely.

Having said that, Islam strongly encourages us to take appropriate means to earn a living. All the prophets would do this, all of them being shepherds at some point in their lives. The Messenger of Allah praised Prophet Dawud for the fact that he used to earn his livelihood with his own hand. The Messenger also encouraged his companions to do the same. He was asked about the best money earned. He replied: ‘For a man to work with his own hand, and every fair and honest trade.’²⁹⁴

Similarly, Nuh was a carpenter, Dawud an ironsmith, some reports claim that Idris worked in sewing and knitting, and it is well known that the prophet Muhammad worked in trade.

3. ‘He who cures me when I am ill.’ (v. 80)

He mentioned illness and cure after mentioning food and drink, perhaps alluding to the fact that some illnesses are the result of excessive food. Some narrations say, ‘The stomach is the home of illness, and dieting is the head of medicine.’ Regardless of any medication, cure always comes from Allah alone, the One who gives strength and is able to do all things. Doctors are often faced with illnesses which they feel cannot be cured except through a miracle, and Allah brings cure.

We notice that Ibrahim attributed illness to himself in the verse. Out of good conduct with Allah, he did not say, ‘when Allah makes me ill’, although Allah indeed is the One who causes sickness and brings cure.

Ibrahim was blessed with a sound mind and pure heart through which he recognises the obvious and hidden favours of Allah. This concise statement summarises the relationship between Allah and creation. We are the weak humans who fall sick and become weak, and we are in need of Allah’s mercy and power to grant us strength and cure. This is thinking of the sound minded, unlike those with diseased hearts who think that humans have unmatched powers and are capable of creating miracles that break the rules of nature. Yet when they are inflicted with a minor pain, you see their faces turn dark and their cold hearts empty, due to their pride and arrogance that prevent them from every turning to Allah. Such people are one

²⁹⁴ Ahmad (No: 17265)

of the causes of punishment descending upon people, for such people are struck by calamity after calamity by Allah. Perhaps that will make them ponder before death overtakes them and it becomes too late.

Most of the problems that people face today are the result of not following Allah's guidance. A person goes to the doctor for treatment, then attributes cure to that doctor, thanking him heavily, thinking that he is the one who has cured him, while forgetting that Allah is the one that cures. Bearing in mind that a small error from a doctor could end the patient's life. Thanking the doctor is necessary, just as it is to thank anyone who helps us. However, our mind must always be set on the One who ultimately brings cure.

The advanced knowledge of doctors has gone some way in helping find cures for people, yet we remain weak and limited. A doctor can fall ill in the exact area that they specialise in, such as a heart specialist getting a heart disease. At times doctors find no solution and simply say that there is no cure for a certain illness. They may tell a person that they only have two weeks to live, but the patient goes on to live for twenty years, while the doctor who made the prediction dies before him. Often when a patient is told that their illness has no solution, they realise that they have no choice but to return to Allah, when they see the wonders of Allah's power. All this should make us certain that our reliance should be solely upon Allah, the One who controls all cures and illnesses.

Ibn Kathir said regarding this verse: 'He attributed illness to himself, although it is also within Allah's decree and creation. But he attributed to himself out of good conduct, like Allah's command to those who pray to say, 'Guide us to the straight path. The path of those You have favoured, not those who have incurred wrath, nor those who are astray.' (al-Fatiha: 6-7). So He attributed the favour to Himself, but the One being angry with them was not mentioned explicitly. Similarly, He attributed misfortune and misguidance to creation, not Himself, when the Jinn said: '[So now] we do not know whether those who live on earth are due for misfortune, or whether their Lord intends to guide them.' (al-Jinn: 10). That is why Ibrahim said that when he falls ill, none is able to cure me other than Allah, through whichever means are used.'²⁹⁵

²⁹⁵ Tafsir Ibn Kathir (5/188)

The Prophetic Sunnah also contains many narrations that show that cure is in the Hands of Allah alone. Ibn Abbas narrated that the Messenger of Allah said: ‘Whoever visits one who is sick and says: ‘I ask Allah, the Great, Lord of the Great Throne, to cure you’, seven times, Allah will cure them, if their time has not come yet.’²⁹⁶

أسأل الله العظيم رب العرش العظيم أن يشفيك

Ibn al-Qayyim said: ‘The Prophet used to visit his companions who fell ill, he visited a young Jewish servant of his, and he visited his uncle who was an idolator. He presented Islam to both of them, so the Jewish boy accepted Islam, but his uncle did not. The Prophet used to sit close to the sick person by his head, and ask about how he is. He would also ask whether the sick person would like anything, and then bring it for him, if it does not harm him. He would wipe his right hand over the sick person and say:

اللهم ربّ الناس أذهب البأس واشفه أنت الشافي لا شفاء إلا شفاؤك شفاء لا يغادر سقماً

‘Oh Allah, Lord of people, there is no cure except your cure, remove this harm and bring a cure that removes all illness.’²⁹⁷

He used to also make du’a repeatedly for the sick, like he said when Sa’d was ill,²⁹⁸ ‘O Allah cure Sa’d, O Allah cure Sa’d, O Allah cure Sa’d.’²⁹⁹

- **Allah’s Name: Al-Shafi**

Allah’s Name ‘Al-Shafi’ is mentioned in the Qur’an as a verb, such is in Allah’s statement, ‘When I fall ill, it is He who cures me.’ It is also mentioned in the Prophet’s Sunnah in the Hadith of Aisha in which she reported that the Prophet would say, if he visited someone sick, or a sick person was brought to him: ‘Remove the harm, Lord of people, and bring complete cure, for You are the Curer (Al-Shafi). There is cure but Yours.’³⁰⁰

The story of Ibrahim shows us that Allah alone is the One who truly brings cure. Anything beyond that is merely a means through which Allah brings cure. If He wills, they bring cure, and if He does not, they will never bring cure.

²⁹⁶ Ahmad (No: 2138), Abu Dawud (No: 3156), and Tirmidhi (No: 2083)

²⁹⁷ Sahih Muslim (No: 2191)

²⁹⁸ Sahih al-Bukhari (No: 5744)

²⁹⁹ Zad al-Ma’ad (1/394-395)

³⁰⁰ Sahih al-Bukhari (No: 5675)

Al-Halimi said: One can say in their prayer, ‘Ya Shafi, Ya Kafi’, because Allah cures the hearts from doubts and ignorance, resentment and envy, and bodies from illnesses and disease. None has the power to do this except Him, and none refers to himself with this name except Him.

Allah, Most High, said about the impact of the Qur’an on our hearts: ‘We send down the Quran as a healing and mercy for the believers, but it only increases the wrongdoers in loss.’ (al-Isra: 82). And He said: ‘O humanity! Indeed, there has come to you a warning from your Lord, a cure for what is in the hearts, a guide, and a mercy for the believers.’ (Yunus: 57)

4. ‘He who will make me die and then give me life again.’ (v. 81)

Ibrahim then moved on in his discussion to speaking about life, death and life after death. These matters are all from the core tenets of faith, so Ibrahim made these statements with all confidence and certainty.

Death is something that everyone believes in, whether righteous or corrupt, because people believe in what they can sense directly, and they have seen that their grandparents, parents, and those around them passed away. As for resurrection after death, then that is something that is from the unsee in relation to humans, so their beliefs differ on it. Belief in resurrection is a divine favour and blessing.

Ibrahim intentionally emphasised this matter, not only due to its relevance to the dialogue, but because it is his duty to deliver true beliefs as part of being a messenger. A message which every Muslim should be keen on continuing to deliver to others. He makes it clear that Allah alone, unlike their manmade idols, gives life and death. ‘He who will make me die and then give me life again.’ Ibrahim alludes to the fact that the afterlife does not come immediately after death, but rather that there is a period in between known as the life of the *barzakh* (lived in the grave) before the Day of Judgment.

5. ‘He who will, I hope, forgive my faults on the Day of Judgement.’ (v. 82)

This great prophet and messenger, despite his great status in the sight of Allah, does not feel that he is perfect, nor does he rely upon his actions. Rather he fears that he may have sinned or erred, and so his greatest hope is that Allah engulfs him with His mercy and forgives him. This is the

reality of a heart filled with *taqwa* and understanding of Allah. He understands the greatness of Allah's reward and the insignificance of the deeds of any human in comparison to that. Thus, through these statements, Ibrahim makes mention of the core elements of faith; the oneness of Allah, His power and control over his creation in all their affairs, major and minor, resurrection after death, Allah's favour, and the negligence of His creation towards Him.

Abu al-Su'ud explains that Ibrahim made this statement out of humility and to cover for any errors that he may have fallen into, as well as to teach his followers the importance of abstaining from sins and to rush to repenting for their negligence. He mentions that Ibrahim is encouraging to his father and his people to rethink themselves and the serious state that they are in. For Ibrahim, despite his obedience to Allah and his excellence in worship, is in need of Allah's mercy and forgiveness. What then of those who are overcome by disbelief and sin?

Some people interpreted the faults of Ibrahim as being a reference to the three statements he made, 'I am ill', 'the biggest of them did it', and saying that Sarah is his sister. However, this is not accurate, because these statements of Ibrahim were nothing more than intelligent use of figurative speech to attain noble goals, not sins which require him to repent.³⁰¹

After praising Allah with these words and hoping for his forgiveness, Ibrahim supplicated:

5. Al-Shu'ara: 83-89

Allah, Most High, said:

***'My Lord, grant me wisdom and join me with the righteous. Give me honourable mention among later generations. Make me of the inheritors of the Garden of Bliss. Forgive my father, for he is one of those who have gone astray; and do not disgrace me on the Day all people are resurrected; the Day when neither wealth nor children will be of any benefit, [when none will be saved] except the one who comes before God with a pure heart [devoted to Him].'* (al-Shu'ara: 83-89)**

³⁰¹ Tafsir Abu al-Su'ud (6/24-25).

Ibrahim calls upon his Lord, not for any worldly gain, nor even physical health, but he sincerely prays for goals far more noble.

**1. ‘My Lord, grant me wisdom and join me with the righteous.’
(v. 83)**

Grant me knowledge of You, Your limits, and guidance. Grant me knowledge through which I know what is right and wrong, lawful and unlawful, and through which I judge between people with justice and wisdom.

It truly is an excellent favour, to be granted knowledge of Allah’s revelation, understanding of their deeper meanings, and comprehension of the wisdoms of legislation. One of Allah’s greatest favours upon His messengers, is that He granted them this knowledge.³⁰²

What incredible humility Ibrahim shows here when he asks Allah to join him with the righteous. How great his concern is about his mistakes and the potential for his heart to turn, hoping to be simply gathered along with the righteous. This in reality means that he is asking Allah to guide towards righteous knowledge and noble deeds which lead to being with the people of piety and righteousness. Similar to the prayer of the Prophet on his deathbed when he said: ‘[O Allah, join me] with the highest companions.’³⁰³

2. ‘Give me honourable mention among later generations.’ (v. 84)

Al-Sa’di said, this means that he asks Allah to be mentioned by people in a good way until the end of time. So Allah accepted his prayer, giving him knowledge and wisdom that made him one of the greatest messengers. He also joined him with his brothers, the prophets, and gave him honourable mention in all religions at all times. Al-Qurtubi said: ‘Allah has accepted his du’a, for anyone who sends salutations (*salat*) upon the Prophet also does so for Ibrahim, especially during prayers and on the pulpit on Fridays, which are the best times to do so. Salutations are a prayer for mercy.’³⁰⁴

Al-Alusi said: ‘Make my beneficial legacy one which has honourable mention amongst all nations until the Day of Judgment. In other words,

³⁰² Tafsir al-Nabulsi (8/374).

³⁰³ Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn Kathir (2/65).

³⁰⁴ Tafsir al-Qurtubi (13/113).

grant me the success to do good and live in a noble way according to what pleases You, that which others take as an example and thus truthfully make honourable mention of me. There is no harm for wishing good mention of people, because when people mention us in a good way, this is a sign that Allah loves us, as narrated in an authentic Hadith.

The ‘later generations’ could also refer to the last nation to have a prophet sent to them. So he prayed that Allah would send a messenger amongst them who would revive his religion and call people to the monotheism of Ibrahim. It is thus as though he prayed for a messenger to be sent who continues Ibrahim’s message and whose message remains until the Day of Judgment; a virtue that only applies to our prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This was a prayer that Ibrahim explicitly made, as Allah related: ‘Our Lord! Raise from among them a messenger who will recite to them Your revelations, teach them the Book and wisdom, and purify them. Indeed, You [alone] are the Almighty, All-Wise.’ (al-Baqarah: 129)

Ashab narrated that Malik b. Anas said: ‘Allah, Most High, said: ‘Give me honourable mention among later generations.’ So there is no harm if a person likes that people praise him and for him to be seen doing righteous deeds, so long as he intends this for Allah’s sake. Allah said: ‘And I blessed you with lovability from Me.’ (Taha: 39). And He said: ‘Those who believe and do good, will be given love by the Most Gracious (in the hearts of the believers).’ (Maryam: 96). That is Allah will cause people to love and praise them.³⁰⁵

3. ‘Make me of the inheritors of the Garden of Bliss.’ (v. 85)

This shows that Ibrahim knows that actions alone do not enter one into Jannah, but that it is Allah’s mercy that enters those who do good into Jannah. As the Prophet said: ‘Do your best and expect good, for none will enter Jannah through their actions alone.’ They said: ‘Not even you, O messenger?’ He said: ‘Not even me, unless Allah engulfs me in His mercy. And know that the most beloved actions to Allah are those that are consistent, even if little.’³⁰⁶

To ‘inherit Paradise’ is a concept mentioned in the Qur’an elsewhere in Allah’s statement: ‘They are they inheritors. They inherit Al-Firdaus,

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Sahih Muslim (No: 2818).

abiding there forever.’ (al-Mu’minun: 10-11). However, inheritance means to take someone else’s wealth after they die, so how is Jannah something that is inherited?

The scholars said that Allah created Jannah spacious enough to fit all people, if they believe, and He created Hellfire spacious enough for all people, if they disbelieve. That is because Allah created all people with the ability to choose to believe or to disbelieve and reject. Jannah is therefore inherited in the sense that they will take the places of the disbelievers freely, distributed amongst them. Since the inheritor takes money without any effort or hard work, similarly, the people of Jannah will take these places freely, as though it is a gift for them, with no effort needed on their part.

Thus Jannah is given to them through Allah’s mercy and kindness, not through their small efforts in this life which do not equate the great reward of Jannah. As for the guidance that Allah has legislated for us, then this is for our own benefit in this life. So since it is for our own good and benefit, how can we take compensation for it? Allah is therefore granting is purely Jannah out of His mercy, since our good deeds benefit us, not Him. But out of His mercy, He gifted us Jannah for following His guidance.

None of us should therefore ever feel proud of the good that we do, but instead do good with sincerity, hoping for Allah to accept it and shower us with His mercy.³⁰⁷

Ibrahim’s prayer for Jannah refutes the claim of those who say that you should never worship Allah in return for Jannah, but rather because Allah deserves our worship, Glory be to Him. Ibrahim also told the Prophet to pass his greetings to his ummah and tell them to increase their trees in Jannah through praising Allah, thanking Him, and glorifying Him.

Ibn Mas’ud narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ‘I met Ibrahim on the night of my ascent (mi’raj) and he said, ‘O Muhammad, pass my salam to your ummah and let them know that the soil of Jannah good, its water fresh and sweet, and that it is spacious plains. Its plants are *Subhanallah, Alhamdulillah, la ilaha illa Allah, and Allahu Akbar.*’³⁰⁸

³⁰⁷ Tafsir al-Sha’rawi (17/10601).

³⁰⁸ Tirmidhi (No: 3462).

**4. Forgive my father, for he is one of those who have gone astray.
(v. 86)**

Despite the harsh treatment and threats that Ibrahim faced from his father, he kept to his promise to seek forgiveness for him. The Qur'an later clarifies that it is not permitted for a believer to seek forgiveness for the disbelievers, even if they are relatives. It explains that Ibrahim only sought forgiveness for his father due to the promise that he gave him. Allah, Most High, said: 'As for Ibrahim's prayer for his father's forgiveness, it was only in fulfilment of a promise he had made to him. But when it became clear to Ibrahim that his father was an enemy of Allah, he broke ties with him. Ibrahim was truly tender-hearted, forbearing.' (al-Tawbah: 114).

We will speak about this verse in more detail later on insha'Allah.

5. 'And do not disgrace me on the Day all people are resurrected; the Day when neither wealth nor children will be of any benefit, except the one who comes before God with a pure heart.' (v. 87-89)

This du'a gives an insight into how Ibrahim feels about the great standing on the Day of Judgment and his fear of that day. He knows the realities of that day and the reality of the good needed for success on that day. For nothing has any value on the Day of Judgment except pure sincerity towards Allah. A heart free from evil desires, corrupt beliefs, and attachment to other than Allah. It is only such a heart that is of any value on the day in which neither wealth nor children will benefit. None of the things that people chase after in this world will be of any benefit on that great day.

'And do not disgrace me on the Day all people are resurrected.' (v. 87)

This is a sign of humility from Ibrahim as he prays to Allah for honour and safety on the Day of Judgment when people are brought back to life from their graves.³⁰⁹

'The Day when neither wealth nor children will be of any benefit, except the one who comes before God with a sound heart.' (v. 88-89)

Ibn Kathir said: 'One's wealth cannot save them from Allah's punishment, even if they pay an amount of gold that equals the whole earth in weight. Nor do children save them, even if they could sacrifice all humans on earth. Nothing benefits on that day, except belief in Allah, sincerely

³⁰⁹ Tafsir al-Tabari (19/86-87).

worshipping Him, and dissociation with shirk. That is why he said, ‘except the one who comes before God with a sound heart’, i.e. a heart pure from *shirk* or disease. Muhammad ibn Sirin said: ‘The sound heart is to know that Allah is true, that the Hour will come without doubt, and certainty that Allah will resurrect those who are in their graves.’

- Ibn Abbas said: ‘A sound heart is one that is alive and believes that there is none worthy of worship except Allah.’
- Mujahid and Hasan said: ‘A sound heart is free from shirk.’
- Sa’id b. al-Musayyab said: ‘The sound heart is the pure heart of the believer, because the heart of the disbeliever and hypocrite is sick. Allah said: ‘There is sickness in their hearts.’ (al-Baqarah: 21).
- Abu Uthman al-Naisaburi said: ‘It is the heart that is free from *bid’ah* (innovation) and finds contentment in the sunnah.’³¹⁰

Al-Maraghi said: ‘If children do not benefit one on the Day of Judgment, then nobody will, because your children are your closest relatives.’ Al-Nasafi said: ‘If one spends their wealth in righteous ways and has righteous children, then they will benefit the person with a sound heart.’

Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyah said: ‘So the sound heart is the one that is free from any shirk. One that is directed to the pure worship of Allah alone, with love, reliance, fear, hope, and sincerity. He only loves for the sake of Allah and hates for the sake of Allah, gives for Allah and abstains for Allah. Then all this does not suffice unless he submits to and follows none other than the Prophet (peace be upon him), following the Prophet’s beliefs, words, and actions. His judge in all his affairs are thus the guidance of the Messenger, not pushing himself ahead of the Messenger on any belief, words, or actions. As Allah said: ‘O believers! Do not proceed [in any matter] before [a decree from] Allah and His Messenger. And fear Allah. Surely Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.’ (al-Hujurat: 1)

He also said: ‘This sound heart is already in Paradise in this world, then in a Paradise in his grave, then ultimately in Paradise in the afterlife. However, a heart is not fully sound unless it is safe from five things:

- Shirk that opposes Tawhid.
- Bid’ah that opposes the Sunnah.
- Desire that opposes the divine commands.

³¹⁰ Tafsir ibn Kathir (5/190-191).

- Heedlessness that opposes remembrance (*dhikr*).
- Whims that oppose submission and sincerity.

These are five barriers that come between a person and their Lord. Each one of them has many branches that come under it.³¹¹

The sound heart is safe from *shahawat* (desires) and *shubuhah* (destructive doubts). Ibn al-Qayyim mentioned that many different definitions have been given to define the ‘sound heart’, but the definition that encompasses all that is the heart that: is free from all *shahawat* that oppose Allah’s command and *shubuhah* that oppose Allah’s revelation. So it is safe from servitude to any other than Allah.³¹²

Notice how Ibrahim’s supplications are not related to worldly matters. They are prayers and concerns that go far beyond this material world, stemming from a heart that knows Allah, and thus belittles all that which is not of the afterlife.

6. Al-Shu’ara: 90-95

Allah, Most High, said:

When the Garden is brought near to the righteous, and the Fire is placed in full view of the misguided, it will be said to them, ‘Where are those you worshipped beside God? Can they help you now, or even help themselves?’ Then they will all be hurled into Hell, together with those that misled them, and all Iblis’s supporters. (al-Shu’ara: 90-95)

1. When the Garden is (*Jannah*) brought near to the righteous, and the Fire is placed in full view of the misguided. (v. 90-91)

Jannah is brought near for the believers and the Fire is displayed before the disbelievers, before each enters their place of dwelling. That is so that the joy of the believers is multiplied and made soon, and so that the regret and pain of the disbelievers is multiplied.

‘The misguided’ are those who were engrossed in sin, crossing Allah’s boundaries and rejecting the truth that came to them.

³¹¹ Ibn al-Qayyim: *Al-Da wa al-Dawa*, p. 219.

³¹² Al-Wuhaibi, H. Sincerity in the Qur’an, p. 232.

2. It will be said to them, ‘Where are those you worshipped beside God? Can they help you now, or even help themselves?’ (v. 92-93)

Many verses of the Qur’an give the same meaning as this verse. Allah, Most High says: ‘[Angels], gather together those who did wrong, and their peers, as well as whatever they worshipped beside God, lead them all to the path of Hell. And detain them, for they must be questioned. Why do you not support each other now?’ (al-Saffat: 22-25)

They have left you. In fact, they dissociated themselves from you altogether. ‘When those who have been followed disown their followers, when they all see the suffering, when all bonds between them are broken.’ (al-Baqarah: 166). Then those who followed will say: ‘The disbelievers will say, ‘Our Lord, show us those jinn and men who misled us and we shall trample them underfoot, so that they may be among the lowest of the low.’ (Fussilat: 29).

It is a warzone. That is because Allah has told us that ‘close friends on that day will be enemies to one another, except the pious (people of *taqwa*).’ (al-Zukhruf: 67). Allah’s saying, ‘Can they help you now, or even help themselves’, is a rhetorical question. Neither can help themselves, let alone help those who are destined for punishment.

3. ‘Then they will all be hurled into Hell, together with those that misled them.’ (v. 94)

The wordings of the Qur’an are powerfully expressive. Being hurled (*kubkibu*) into the Fire suggests them being thrown into it aggressively, toppling over one another and crashing into each other. They do not walk in at their own pace in their own time, but are forced and hurdled into the Fire. Just like a huge number of goods, such as nuts or other small goods, coming out of a truck are poured out at once, instead of being taken out one by one. So they, and the devils who led them astray are all dumped in together without care or consideration.

4. ‘and all Iblis’s supporters.’ (v. 95)

The name Iblis comes from the Arabic root word ‘*ablasa*’ to mean distanced, because he was distanced from Allah’s mercy and lost all hope in Allah’s forgiveness. Iblis’ supporters are all those who are on his side and follow him, whether they be from his children or human beings.

7. Al-Shu'ara: 96-98

Allah, Most High, said:

***'There they will say to their gods, as they bicker among themselves, 'By Allah, we were clearly misguided, when we made you equal with the Lord of the Worlds.'* (al-Shu'ara: 96 – 98)**

This verse describes the scene in Hellfire in which those who were astray and led others astray or were led astray are bickering and debating amongst themselves and admitting that they were all misguided and deceived. They finally come to the realisation and admit that they were completely astray, having put their trust in pieces of rock that cannot benefit or harm and making them equal to Allah, the Most High, in worship, hope, and fear. This truly is clear misguidance.

They admitted that their shirk was in worshipping other things besides Allah, since they admit and know fully well that Allah, Most High, is the only creator, the Lord of the Worlds. So they did not believe these idols and deities to be creators, but they worshipped them besides Allah, which led them into the Hellfire.

8. Al-Shu'ara: 99-101

Allah, Most High, said:

***'It was the evildoers who led us astray, and now we have no intercessor, nor a close friend.'* (al-Shu'ara: 99 – 101)**

They now realise that those drawing them towards what they used to do were only misguiding them and leading them away from the truth. However, this will not be of any help as it is too late. Now they have nobody to intercede for them or help them.

Intercession (*shafa'ah*) means to mediate on behalf of someone to bring about some benefit for them or protect them from harm. Correct intercession on the Day of Judgment is one which fulfills three conditions:

- a. Allah being pleased with the intercessor. 'On that Day, intercession will be useless except from those to whom the Lord of Mercy (Al-Rahman) has granted permission and whose words He approves.' (Taha: 109)

- b. Allah being pleased with the one being interceded for. ‘He knows what is before them and what is behind them, and they cannot intercede without His permission—indeed they themselves stand in awe of Him.’ (al-Anbiya: 28)
- c. Allah’s permission for the intercession to take place. ‘Who is there that can intercede with Him except by His permission?’ (al-Baqarah: 255)

These three conditions are mentioned in Allah’s statement: ‘There are many angels in the heavens whose intercession would be of no use, until Allah gives permission to whoever He wills and approves of.’ (al-Najm: 26)

Intercession is of many types. One is the intercession of our Prophet (peace be upon him) who has been given the greater intercession, the gates of Jannah are first opened for him, he intercedes to raise the rank of the inhabitants of Jannah above the rank they are originally given, as well as other forms of intercession.

Others who intercede include: the angels, the martyrs (*shuhada*), the children of the believers, and the Qur’an itself. There are many reasons for attaining intercession on that Day, but the most important of them are: pure *tawhid* and sincere worship of Allah.

‘Nor a close friend.’

A close friend is quick to help his friend, especially at times of hardship. However, friendship on the Day of Judgment is of no help, for each person is fully occupied with themselves. No friend will ask about his friend. As Allah said: ‘The day man will flee from his own siblings, and from his mother and father, and from his wife and children. Each of them will be absorbed in concerns of their own on that day.’ (Abasa: 34-37)

Allamah Abu Zahra said, regarding this verse: ‘The letter (ف) used in Arabic which means ‘so’ is consequential. This means that the result of having corrupt company in this life is that there will be nobody to intercede for us today. Nobody to stand with us or speak up for us or feel our pain. They continue to wish, but to no avail.’³¹³

³¹³ Zahrat al-Tafasir (10/5374).

9. Al-Shu'ara: 102-104

Allah, Most High, said:

***'If only we could have a second chance, we would be true believers! There truly is a sign in this, though most of them do not believe: your Lord alone is certainly the Almighty, the Merciful.'* (Surat al-Shu'ara: 102 – 104)**

1. 'If only we could have a second chance, we would be true believers!'

They wish they could start life over again, so that they could believe in Allah, obey Him, and follow His path, so that they can avoid what they no find themselves in. Other verses in the Qur'an have also explained this scene. 'When death comes to one of them, he cries, 'My Lord, let me return, so that I may act righteously in that (world) which I have left behind.' Never! It is simply a word of appeal that he utters. And a barrier stands behind them until the very Day they are resurrected.' (al-Mu'minun: 99-100)

They will never return this world again. It is simply an appeal, a word of regret, through which they try to save themselves on that day. But this will be of no help to them, as there is a *barzakh* (a barrier) that stands behind them until they are resurrected. They plead and make empty promises, but only to save themselves. But Allah has told us that they are not truthful in their promise.

If you could only see, when they are made to stand before the Fire, how they will say, 'If only we could be sent back, we would not reject the revelations of our Lord, but be among the believers.' No! The truth they used to hide will become all too clear to them. Even if they were brought back, they would only return to the very thing that was forbidden to them. They are only liars! (al-An'am: 27-28)

2. 'There truly is a sign in this, though most of them do not believe.'

The Arabic word used for sign is 'ayah'. These are visible things that draw people's attention. They should not pass without carefully considering these signs and contemplating them. But despite that, most people still do not believe, nor pay attention. The signs being referred to are the words of Ibrahim and his story mentioned as a whole. In the tafsir of al-Baydawi

he mentioned that the word ‘ayah’ in this verse means a proof and a reminder for those who wish to contemplate. For this verse is structured excellently, presenting the foundations of religious understanding, its proofs, Ibrahim’s excellence in calling his people to Islam, his conduct towards them, and his deep concern for them.³¹⁴

Ibn Ashur summarises the story of Ibrahim mentioned in Surat al-Shu’ara saying:

‘Departing to delving into the circumstances of the story was necessary to show the reality of da’wah towards faith through instilling hope and fear. He began by questioning them about their beliefs and actions to wake them up a little, then he showed them why their idols are false after making contemplate their blindness, deafness, and weakness. Then he responded to his people’s argument from blind following tradition when they were unable to defend their beliefs using reason.

When the proofs became clear of the invalidity of their gods, he explained the true God to them, the Lord of creation, who controls all things, until He brings gives them life after death. The One we hope will forgive us on the Day of Resurrection. So they should know that if they seek forgiveness from their disbelief, Allah will forgive them. Whereas if they do not abandon their *shirk*, nothing will benefit them on that Day. Then Allah described for them the dwelling of reward and the dwelling of punishment.

Since his people insisted upon idolatry, and none believed except Ibrahim, his wife, and his nephew Lut, it was more appropriate to speak of the severe punishment that awaits the wrongdoers. This is why the verses delved into speaking about the state of the people of Hellfire, the ugliness of their condition, their deep regret, and wish to return to the world to make up for things, but this will be to no avail.³¹⁵

3. ‘Your Lord alone is certainly the Almighty, the Merciful.’

The story of Ibrahim ends in Surat al-Shu’ara with Allah, the Lord of Mercy, addressing His final messenger, reminding him that He stands firmly in the face of His enemies and stands by His *awliya* and shows them mercy. Your Lord is Aziz (Almighty) with His enemies and Rahim

³¹⁴ Tafsir al-Baydawi (4/143).

³¹⁵ Tafsir Ibn Ashur (19/150-151).

(Merciful) with His *awliya*. His mercy includes nor encompassing all people with punishment immediately, but the punishment of the people of evil is delayed for the Day of Resurrection. He did not equate between the righteous and corrupt, but gave each what they deserve. He was merciful in placing punishments for the transgressors, so that they would not continue in their transgression. For the world does not stand on equating between evil and good, but the good must be known, followed, and used to overcome evil.

The verses depicted the end of the people of Ibrahim, which in reality is the end of *shirk*. This way, the scenes and stories mentioned in the Qur'an are presented as though they are happening before our eyes and moving our emotions.

Allah's Name: Al-Aziz (The Almighty)

Allah's Name Al-Aziz is repeated in the Qur'an 92 times, mostly alongside other names of Allah, Most High. Some examples are in Surat al-Baqarah (v. 260), Fatir (v. 9), Saad (v. 28) and (v. 66), Yasin (v. 138), and al-Buruj (v. 8). All the meanings of might are included in Allah's Name Al-Aziz. As Allah said: 'Whoever wants might, then to Allah belongs all might.' (Fatir: 10)

Ibn Kathir states that Al-Aziz means that He has totally dominated all things and has overcome all things, so nothing can overcome Him, due to His might, greatness, and power.³¹⁶ Al-Qurtubi and al-Sa'di also mentioned similar meanings.

Allah's Name Al-Rahim (The Most Merciful)

Allah's Name Al-Rahim is mentioned in the Qur'an 123 times, mostly mentioned alongside Allah's Name Al-Ghafur (The Forgiving). Examples include Surat al-Muzzammil (v. 20), al-Ahzab (v. 43), and al-Shu'ara (v. 191).

The Names Al-Rahman and Al-Rahim are often mentioned together. Both names come from the word mercy (*rahmah*), with the name Al-Rahman implying an even greater extent of mercy. Though different scholars held differing views about the exact difference between the two terms:

³¹⁶ Tafsir Ibn Kathir (4/343).

1. Some said Al-Rahman is the One with encompassing mercy for all creation in this world and for the believers in the afterlife. As for Al-Rahim, then it is a specific and more intimate form of mercy for the believers alone. ‘He was merciful (*rahim*) with the believers’, as Allah said. However, Allah’s statements, ‘Allah is *Ra’uf* and *Rahim* with people.’ (al-Ahzab: 43). Also, His statement, ‘It is your Lord Who steers the ships for you through the sea, so that you may seek His bounty. Surely He is ever merciful (*rahim*) to you.’ (al-Isra: 66)
2. The second view says that Al-Rahman refers to Allah’s essential attribute of mercy, while Al-Rahim refers to Allah’s applied mercy manifested in His creation. So the first is an attribute while the second relates to the action of showing mercy, so his being Al-Rahim shows that He is Al-Rahman, and vice versa. Consider how the Quranic verses use *Rahim* when speaking of his mercy to creation, such as ‘He is *rahim* with them’, and ‘He is merciful with the believers.’ While the Qur’an never says, ‘He was *rahman* with them.’ So this shows that Al-Rahman is He who has the attribute of perfect mercy, while Al-Rahim is the One who shows mercy. This was explained by Ibn al-Qayyim.³¹⁷

Ibn al-Qayyim then goes on to say: ‘For this reason, Allah often mentions that he rose above and is settled above His throne alongside His attribute of Al-Rahman, such as His statement, ‘Al-Rahman established Himself above the throne.’ (Taha: 5). And He said: ‘Then He established Himself on the throne, Al-Rahman.’ (al-Furqan: 59). He established Himself on the largest of creation, which is His throne, along with His most encompassing attribute, which is His mercy, for His mercy has encompassed all things.’³¹⁸

Al-Aziz and Al-Rahim Mentioned Together

In Surat al-Shu’ara, this verse is mentioned as a conclusion for the story of each prophet. ‘Your Lord alone is certainly the Almighty, the Merciful.’ This is an appropriate way to conclude each passage, because it alludes to the fact that the punishment that the disbelievers received is the result of Allah’s might, justice, and power. These meanings are included in

³¹⁷ Al-Khalil, p. 120.

³¹⁸ Ibid, p. 121.

His Name Al-Aziz. While saving the believers and granting them victory over their enemies, is the result of Allah's mercy and His Name Al-Rahim.

In general, these two names being mentioned alongside each other shows the perfection of Allah, for He is merciful while also being mighty and great. While Allah is dominant, great, and powerful, this does not negate His mercy and kindness with His creation, nor does His mercy mean that He lacks power and might. His mercy is based on His power and ability, not due to weakness or inability. And these attributes are manifested in the rules and nature of this world.

Section 5:

The Story of Ibrahim in Surat al-Ankabut

Allah, Most High, said:

And remember when Ibrahim said to his people: ‘Worship Allah (Alone), and fear Him. That is better for you, if only you knew. You worship besides Allah only idols, simply creating lies [about them]. Those who you worship besides Allah have no power to give you provision, so seek your provision from Allah (alone), and worship Him (alone), and be grateful to Him. To Him you will be brought back. And if you deny, then nations before you have denied (their messengers). And the duty of the Messenger is only to convey (the message) plainly.’

See they not how Allah originates creation, then repeats it. Verily, that is easy for Allah. Say: ‘Travel in the land and see how (Allah) originated creation, and then Allah will bring forth (resurrect) the creation of the Hereafter (i.e. resurrection after death). Allah is able to do all things.’ He punishes whom He will, and shows mercy to whom He will, and to Him you will be returned. And you cannot escape in the earth or in the heaven. And besides Allah you have neither any Wali (Protector or Guardian) nor any Helper. And those who disbelieve in the Ayat (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) of Allah and the Meeting with Him, it is they who have no hope of My Mercy, and it is they who will (have) a painful torment.

So nothing was the answer of [Ibrahim’s (Ibrahim)] people except that they said: ‘Kill him or burn him.’ Then Allah saved him from the fire. Verily, in this are indeed signs for a people who believe. And [Ibrahim (Ibrahim)] said: ‘You have taken (for worship) idols instead of Allah, and the love between you is only in the life of this world, but on the Day of Resurrection, you shall disown each other, and curse each other, and your abode will be the Fire, and you shall have no helper.’ So Lot believed in him [Ibrahim’s (Ibrahim) Message of Islamic Monotheism]. He [Ibrahim (Ibrahim)] said: ‘I will emigrate for the sake of my Lord. Verily, He is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise.’ And

We bestowed on him (Ibrahim), Ishaq (Isaac) and Ya'qub (Jacob), and ordained among his offspring Prophethood and the Book [i.e. the Taurat (Torah) (to Musa), the Injeel (Gospel) (to Isa), the Qur'an (to Muhammad), all from the offspring of Ibrahim], and We granted him his reward in this world, and verily, in the Hereafter he is indeed among the righteous. (Surat al-Ankabut: 16-27)

Surat al-Ankabut is the last of the Mekkan chapters of the Qur'an that spoke about Ibrahim.³¹⁹ Below is a commentary of the verses related to the story of Ibrahim and the divine guidance given to the messenger in the midst of that. A look at his calling his people to the pure worship of Allah, belief in the messengers, the afterlife, and resurrection and accountability after death. Ibrahim called them to the plain simple truth that contains no complications or obscurity. He delivered his message in a clear and structured way, worth being contemplated carefully.

1. Al-Ankabut 16-27

Allah, Most High, said:

***'And remember when Ibrahim said to his people: 'Worship Allah (Alone), and fear Him. That is better for you, if only you knew.'* (verse 16)**

Allah, Most High, reminds His messenger Muhammad and all people of the affair of Ibrahim with his people, for Ibrahim is an excellent role model that should be followed and taken as an example.

a. 'Worship Allah (alone).'

Ibn Jarir mentioned, Allah tells His prophet, Muhammad, 'recall when Ibrahim told his people to worship Allah alone, abandoning all idols and gods besides him, for you have no god other than Allah.'³²⁰

The message of all the prophets, without exception, returns back to what Allah mentioned in the Qur'an, 'Worship Allah—you have no other god except Him.' (al-A'raf: 59). And His statement: 'We have not sent a messenger before you except that We revealed to him that there is no god except Me, so worship Me.' The whole religion is about belief in Allah and

³¹⁹ I.e. those revealed before the *hijrah* (migration) of the Prophet from Makkah to Madinah. (Translator)

³²⁰ Tafsir Ibn Jarir (18/372).

to worship Him alone. The religion is partly belief and partly action. The belief is monotheism and the action is to worship Him alone.

So if someone was to ask: can you summarise the religion of Islam in two words? The answer would be: Yes. It is to believe that there is no god except Allah and to worship Him. As for believing that Allah is the only true god, then that is something that the whole universe affirms. What is needed alongside that is to worship Him alone, for worship is complete humility and love, based on understanding, for knowledge comes before everything. Knowledge is the only path to the truth.

Ibrahim presented and explained the foundations of Islam in a clear and simple way, far from ambiguity and obscurity, so that those being addressed, given their different levels, can all understand. In this way, Ibrahim chose the clearest of words, so that people are not distracted by anything besides the key topic, leaving them no scope for misinterpretation or misunderstanding. He summarised his message by saying, ‘worship Allah and fear Him.’

This statement is the essence and core of faith: *tawhid* and worshipping Allah alone. A human is a worshipper by nature and has no choice but to worship. He will then either worship the one true God, or worship Satan, desires, idols, wealth, pleasures, or other ‘gods’ that that people worship.

The role of the prophets is thus to bring people back to the worship of the Lord of mankind alone. How beautiful is that statement of the noble companion, Rib’i ibn Amir, to Rustum, the leader of the Persians: ‘Allah sent us to take people out of the worship of creation to the worship of the Lord of creation.’

‘*Ibadah* (worship) is a broad concept that organises all matters of life. Every area of life is an area for worship and every action, if done sincerely for Allah, is considered worship. Customary actions become acts of worship when noble intentions are involved, just as acts of worship can end up being merely customary acts, when there is a lack of intention.³²¹

Allah praised Ibrahim in the Qur’an for his efforts in calling to Allah, describing him as an *ummah* (a whole nation by himself), full devoted to Allah. ‘Ibrahim was an *ummah*: devoutly obedient to God and true in

³²¹ Tafsir Surat Hud, p. 112.

faith. He was not an idolater. He was thankful for the blessings of God who chose him and guided him to a straight path.’ (al-Nahl: 120-121)

Allah described Ibrahim as having ‘ubudiyah (total servitude) to Allah. Allah says, ‘Indeed, this is how We reward the good-doers. He was truly one of Our faithful servants.’ (37:80-81). Allah describes him with the trait of *ihsan* (excellence), which is the highest levels of servitude, and means, as defined by the Prophet (peace be upon him), that one worships their Lord as though they see Him. If not, then they know that Allah sees them. Ibrahim called people to the servitude of Allah and he fulfilled it in his own self with perfection. He was sincere to Allah and did not direct any worship to other than Allah. His internal and external actions and speech was purely for Allah, as we shall see throughout his life.

Allah also praised Ibrahim alongside his children, describing them all as noble servants of Allah. ‘Remember Our servants Ibrahim, Isaac, and Jacob, all men of strength and vision. We caused them to be devoted to Us through their sincere remembrance of the Final Home (the Hereafter). With Us they will be among the elect, the truly good.’ (Saad: 45-47).

They were men of ‘strength’ in obeying Allah and men of ‘vision’ and insight in their deep understanding of Allah’s religion. So Allah described them as having sound knowledge and righteous deeds. Allah made the remembrance of the afterlife constant in their hearts, minds, and actions. Sincerity and awareness of Allah is their constant state.

b. ‘and have taqwa.’

Ibrahim emphasised taqwa in his message, because taqwa (mindfulness of Allah) is what truly keeps people upon the right path, protecting them from straying or weakening. It is also the root of all sincere traits and good action, that is not based on showing off.

Taqwa entails keeping a *wiqayah* (protection or barrier) from Allah’s punishment by doing good and avoiding sin. The one who ponders the Book of Allah Almighty finds that *taqwa* is from the things that the Qur’an has given so much attention to, encouraging people to give it importance. *Taqwa* comes in levels.

- Avoiding shirk
- Abstaining from major sins

- Keeping far away from minor sins

By achieving this third level, one has perfected *taqwa*. This is proven by what is reported from the Messenger (peace be upon him) that he said: ‘One will not attain the level of the *muttaqin* (people of complete *taqwa*) until he leaves that which is not sinful (but perhaps doubtful), for fear of falling into that which is sinful.’³²²

Taqwa is thus the highest level that the believer should seek to rise to, no matter how hard he must work to attain it.

The Definitions of Taqwa

Various definitions have been given for *taqwa*, but I will mention some definitions as a guide:

- Some said that *taqwa* is to obey Allah without disobeying Him, remember Him without forgetting Him, and thank Him without being ungrateful.
- Others said that *taqwa* means to abstain from insisting on sins and to abstain from being proud by doing good. The person of *taqwa* then does not insist on sinning, even if it is a minor sin, nor does he become proud and deluded when doing good, even if it is a great action.
- Some said that *taqwa* means to choose nothing else over Allah and to know that all matters are in the hands of Allah.
- While some others said that *taqwa* means that Allah does not see you involved in that which He has prohibited for you.

These definitions revolve around three main things:

- **Firstly:** To keep away from sins, both major and minor, since insistence upon minor sins can lead to major sins.
- **Secondly:** To be aware of anything that you say or do, just like the one who walks on a path full of thorns is cautious about every step that he takes. This analogy was drawn by some of the companions (may Allah be pleased with them). It is said that Umar ibn al-Khattab asked Ubay ibn Ka’b about *taqwa*, so he replied: ‘Have you not treaded a path that is full of thorns?’ He said, ‘I have.’ So he asked:

³²² Tirmidhi, No. 2451.

‘What did you do then?’ He said: ‘I gathered myself and took great care.’ He replied: ‘That is what *taqwa* is.’

- **Thirdly:** To not belittle any minor sin. it is reported that the Messenger (peace be upon him) passed by a date that was lying around, so he said: ‘I would have eaten it if I did not fear that it may be from *sadaqah*(charity).’³²³

It is also reported that some of them said: ‘Whoever wishes to be the most noble of people should have *taqwa* in Allah, whoever wishes to be the strongest of people should rely upon Allah, and whoever wishes to be the richest should have more trust in that which is in the hands of Allah than that which is in his own hand.’³²⁴

The difference between *‘ibadah* and *taqwa*

The aforementioned shows us the importance and seriousness of *taqwa*. We can also understand that to attain *taqwa*, five things are required: *eman* (faith), obedience, avoiding sins, *tawbah* (repentance), and *ikhlas* (sincerity). If one of these five is missing, then *taqwa* is incomplete.

From this we see that *taqwa* is not *‘ibadah* (worship), unlike what many people think. A person can worship a lot, but his worship does not raise him to the level of *taqwa*. In the Qur’an and Sunnah there are many proofs for this. Allah Almighty says:

- And [remember] when Ibrahim said to his people, ‘Worship Allah, and fear Him.’ (al-Ankabut:16)
- Indeed, We sent Nuh to his people [saying to him], ‘Warn your people before a painful punishment comes to them.’ Nuh proclaimed, ‘O my people! I am truly sent to you with a clear warning: worship Allah [alone], fear Him, and obey me.’ (Nuh:1-3)
- ‘O humanity! Worship your Lord, Who created you and those before you, so that you may become mindful [of Him].’ (al-Baqarah: 21)

Look then, may Allah grant you guidance, how these noble verses have distinguished between *‘ibadah* and *taqwa*. Nuh and Ibrahim both commanded their people with both *‘ibadah* and *taqwa*. In the third verse Allah

³²³ Bukhari (No: 950).

³²⁴ Fadl Hassan Abbas, *Khumasiyat Mukhtarah*, Dar Al-Nafais for Publishing, Amman, Jordan, 1st edition 2011, p. 28.

commands people to worship the One who created them and those before them, so that their '*ibadah* can allow them to reach the level of *taqwa*.³²⁵

In the purified Sunnah, the Prophet (peace be upon him) says:

'Beware of suspicion, for suspicion is the worst of false tales. Do not look for the faults of others. Do not spy on one another, and do not practise najsh (this means to be deceptive in trade, such as to offer a high price for something in order to allure another customer who is interested in the thing). Do not be jealous of one another and do not nurse enmity against one another. Do not sever ties with one another. Be, O slaves of Allah, brothers to one another. A Muslim is the brother of a Muslim. He should neither oppress him nor humiliate him. It is enough evil for a Muslim to look down upon his Muslim brother. All things of a Muslim are inviolable for his brother in Faith: his blood, his wealth and his honour. Allah does not look to your bodies nor to your faces but He looks to your hearts and your deeds. Piety is here! Piety is here! While saying so he pointed towards his chest.'³²⁶

From this honourable Hadith we understand that *taqwa* requires us to keep away from all the actions mentioned in the Hadith. Secondly, we understand that *taqwa* is a secret between a person and His Lord, which is why the Prophet pointed to his chest. This is further supported by the Qur'an in Allah's statement, 'So do not claim purity for yourselves. He knows best who is truly righteous.' (al-Najm: 32)

One of the most comprehensive verses that showed the reality of *taqwa* and showed that one cannot truly reap the fruits of *taqwa* until he upholds virtuous conduct and acts of worship, is the following verse:

'Righteousness is not in turning your faces towards the east or the west. Rather, the righteous are those who believe in Allah, the Last Day, the angels, the Books, and the prophets; who give charity out of their cherished wealth to relatives, orphans, the poor, [needy] travellers, beggars, and for freeing captives; who establish prayer, pay alms-tax (*zakat*), and keep the pledges they make; and who are patient in times of suffering, adversity, and in [the heat of] battle. It is they who are true [in faith], and it is they who are *muttaqun* (mindful of Allah).' (al-Baqarah: 177)

³²⁵ Ibid, p. 29.

³²⁶ Muslim, No. 2564.

Look at the noble traits and praiseworthy characteristics that the verse speaks of, and how it mentions the three foundations of the Shari'ah (Islam): *aqidah* (creed), *'ibadah* (worship), and *akhlaq* (conduct). It then detailed fifteen qualities and made *taqwa* the result of it as we see at the end of the verse, 'It is they who are true [in faith], and it is they who are *muttaqun* (mindful of Allah).' (al-Baqarah: 177)

We now can understand the secret, the wisdom for which Allah mentioned *taqwa* at the beginning of His Book, '*Alif-Lam-Mim*. This is the Book! There is no doubt about it—a guide for the *muttaqin* (those mindful of Allah).' (al-Baqarah:1-2)

O Allah, make use from the *muttaqin* who you described saying, 'That is Paradise, which We will grant to whoever is *taqi* (devout) among Our servants.' (Maryam: 63)

These verses really are worthy of careful contemplation. They describe the beautiful traits that every believer should take care of attaining and living by. Especially since it is the first verse in the Qur'an that explains the traits of the people of *taqwa*, which shows that it has a special significance. Its importance also stems from its description of the people who truly benefit from the Qur'an and are guided by it, reciting and pondering it.³²⁷

Allah Almighty says:

'*Alif-Lam-Mim*. This is the Book! There is no doubt about it—a guide for the *muttaqin* (those mindful of Allah), who believe in the unseen, establish prayer, and donate from what We have provided for them. Those who believe in what has been revealed to you [O Prophet] and what was revealed before you, and have sure faith in the Hereafter. It is they who are [truly] guided by their Lord, and it is they who will be successful.' (al-Baqarah: 1-5)

- The First Trait: 'Those who believe in the unseen'
- The Second Trait: 'establish prayer'
- The Third Trait: 'donate from what We have provided for them'
- The Fourth Trait: 'Those who believe in what has been revealed to you and what was revealed before you'
- The Fifth Trait: 'have sure faith (*yaqin*) in the hereafter.'

³²⁷ Khumasiyat Mukhtarah, p. 25.

After mentioning these traits, Allah mentions the reward of these people of *taqwa*. ‘They are upon guidance from their Lord and they are successful.’ So firstly they are firmly upon guidance, and guidance is one of the greatest blessings Allah gives. ‘Allah says: ‘As for those who are [rightly] guided, He increases them in guidance and blesses them with righteousness.’ (Muhammad: 17).

This is the first part of their reward. The second part is success. These people of *taqwa* have attained complete happiness in the means, the results, the beginning, and the end.³²⁸

The Qur’an has clarified the value of *taqwa* and made it a goal worth aiming for. Many scholars have also written about *taqwa*, showing its reality, consequences, and the traits of the people of *taqwa* that relate to both worship and manners, and all that which relates to this great divine value.

‘That is better for you, if only you knew.’

If you do this, you will attain goodness in this life and the next, and be protected from the evil of this life and the next. This verse encourages them to abandon ignorance and become aware of what benefits them, while at the same time affirming a reality, not merely moving emotions.

If you understand and affirm that obeying Allah, worshipping Him, and being mindful of Him is better, then you are a ‘*alim* (a person of knowledge). While if you think that these things are a burden, loss, or deficiency, then you are ignorant, even if you have achieved the highest academic qualifications. For the true measure of knowledge is obeying Allah, worshipping Him, and being mindful of Him, while knowing that sin and deviation from his path is the root of all evil and loss.

There is no hesitation then that this is what is better for us, because these are the words of our Creator who knows us better than we know ourselves. You therefore do not know, unless you know Allah and obey Him. You can only be guided if you take His path.³²⁹

³²⁸ Ibid, p. 37.

³²⁹ Tafsir al-Nabulsi (9/200).

2. Al-Ankabut 17

Allah, Most High, said:

‘You worship besides Allah only idols, simply creating lies [about them]. Those who you worship besides Allah have no power to give you provision, so seek your provision from Allah (alone), and worship Him (alone), and be grateful to Him. To Him you will be brought back.’ (al-Ankabut: 17)

1. ‘You worship besides Allah only idols.’

This verse restricts all the things they worship to nothing but idols that do not benefit or harm. Idols are things made out of stone which are viewed as sacred and holy, regardless of the exact type of stone or metal or other material used to make it. Sometimes it is made out of wood, with some even making idols out of dates, which are then eaten if they have no alternative to feed themselves, as related by Umar ibn al-Khattab. What mind finds it reasonable to use rock taken from a random mountain to build an idol, then to take that idol as a god that is worshipped? You are the one that made it. Of it falls over, you pick it up, if it breaks, you try to fix it. What sort of intellect can accept this?

2. ‘Simply creating lies.’

You worship nothing but idols that do not benefit or harm. And your justifications are nothing but false claims and lies. Ibrahim tells them that they are speaking about their gods as though they are living beings that can give, take, become angry or pleased. You treat your gods with extreme sanctity and deceive people into believing that they deserve to be treated like this, creating lies about Allah and attributing lies to Him.

3. ‘Those who you worship besides Allah have no power to give you provision,’

Ibrahim reminds them to think carefully about who brings them provision and rain. It certainly is not their idols which they made themselves. So direct your worship to the owner of all provision and obey Him.³³⁰

³³⁰ Tafsir al-Sha’rawi (18/11109).

4. ‘So seek your provision from Allah (alone),’

Seeking provision is the concern of all people, even more so those whose hearts are not filled with *iman* (firm faith). But seeking provision from Allah is a reality that we need to be reminded of. So Ibrahim clarifies to his people that provision must be sought from none other than Allah. He guided them towards what benefits them in this life and the next, for all wealth and provision is in the hands of Allah; He brings it, He facilitates its means, and He distributes it as He wills.

Every person has their provision already decreed for them. Allah knows it and has facilitated all the means through which they will attain what has been decreed for them; means which are a form of worship of Allah. At times, Allah grants people things without them taking the usually necessary means to attain them, but this is not the norm, but an exception to the rule. The rule is that we should take with permissible means to attain what we want.

If Allah decides to withhold provision from someone, then none will be able to bring it. This is a reality that every Muslim must be clear about. ‘Who can provide for you if He withholds His provision? Yet they persist in their defiance and aversion [from the truth].’ (al-Mulk: 21)

The matter of provision is a serious and quite dangerous in the life of humans. History and current reality show us that some people could become enslaved to others due to seeking provision. This is why the Qur’an brought us a sufficient clarification on the matter, to set humans free from enslavement and servitude to anyone other than Allah. It commands that provision should only be sought from Allah, since He is the creator and owner of all things.³³¹

The Qur’an mentions *rizq* (provision) alongside ‘*ibadah* (worship). ‘So seek your provision from Allah (alone), and worship Him, and be grateful to Him. To Him you will be brought back.’ This shows that the matter of *rizq* is an important one. Hence the Qur’an, in other verses reminds people that whatever they worship besides Allah cannot provide for them. ‘Those they worship beside God have no power to provide anything for them from the heavens or the earth: they can do nothing.’ (al-Nahl: 73)

³³¹ Al-Rizq fi al-Qur’an, p. 73.

- **Allah's Name: Al-Raziq and al-Razzaq**

Allah's Name Al-Raziq is mentioned five times in the Qur'an in the form of *tafdhil*, which means that He is described as the best of those who have this trait. 'He is the best of providers', as we see in Surat al-Ma'idah (v. 114), Surat al-Mu'minun (v. 72), and Surat al-Jumu'ah (v. 11).

While the name 'Al-Razzaq' is mentioned once in the Qur'an in Allah's statement: 'God is the Provider (*Al-Razzaq*), the Lord of Power, the Ever Mighty.' (al-Dhariyat: 58)

The meaning of this name is that Allah is responsible for providing for all His creation that which they sustain themselves with. His sustenance and mercy has encompassed all His creation, whether believer or disbeliever, ally or enemy. He grants sustenance to the weak who is unable to provide for himself, just as he does for the strong and wealthy. Allah said (al-Ankabut: 60): 'How many an animal there is that does not carry its provision. Allah gives provision to it as well as to you, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-knowing.' And He said (Hud: 6): 'There is no creature on the earth except that its sustenance is on Allah.'

Al-Sa'di said: 'Allah is Al-Razzaq (The Provider) for all His creation. His provision is of two types. The first is general for the righteous and corrupt, the first and last. This is provision for the bodies. The second form of provision is the provision (*rizq*) of the hearts, which are given life through knowledge and faith. Lawful (halal) provision which helps to perfect one's religion is also specific for the believers.'

5. 'And worship Him (alone), and be grateful to Him. To Him you will be brought back.'

Worshipping Allah, which is the fruit of knowing Him, is one of the greatest reasons of receiving provision, as Allah said (al-Dhariyat: 56-58): 'I have not created jinn or humans, except for them to worship Me. I do not want any sustenance from them, nor do I want them to feed Me. Allah is the Provider (*Al-Razzaq*), the Lord of Power, the Ever Mighty.' So Allah has not given people the responsibility of providing for themselves or others, but only to worship Him. He is the One that provides for all creation.

However, worship does not mean to perform the obvious rituals only, but to fulfil the meanings of servitude to Allah holistically in all areas of

life. This servitude to Allah leads one to having the strength and ability to seek various forms of lawful means of sustenance while fully relying upon Allah. This is a cause of provision being facilitated, because Allah commanded mankind and also secured their provision. So if they are sincere and honest with what they were commanded to do, they can expect that Allah grants them sufficiency, victory, and support.

‘And be grateful to Him.’

Thank Allah for creating you and giving you wealth, children, wives, family, and homes. He gave you health, senses, and granted you many favours. He facilitated all means through what He created for you on the earth and guided you. He created you upon the perfect fitrah, gave you intellect, and gave you the freedom to choose. Should we not be grateful to Him?

True gratitude (*shukr*) means that the we admit and praise Allah for His favours with our words, love Allah with our hearts, and obey and submit to Him with our actions.³³²

Whoever contemplates Ibrahim’s life sees that he was fully occupied with obeying Allah in words and deeds, out of gratitude to Allah for all His favours and for choosing him to be His prophet, messenger, and ally. ‘And Allah took Ibrahim as an ally.’

Showing *shukr* to Allah is also a cause of abundant *rizq* (provision), so whoever is thankful will protect this provision of his and cause it to increase. ‘Your Lord proclaimed that if you are thankful I shall give you more.’ (Ibrahim: 7). The matter of *shukr* is great in the sight of Allah, and this is something that Iblis realised, which is why he made it one of his major aims to cut people off from being thankful to Allah. ‘I will come at them from their front and their back, from their right and their left; and You will find that most of them are ungrateful.’ (al-A’raf: 17). And due to the high ranking of *shukr*, Allah informed us that those who are thankful to Allah are those who truly worship Him, whereas those who are not thankful, have not really worshipped Him. ‘And be thankful to Allah if it is Him that you truly worship.’ (al-Baqarah: 172)

The Qur’an mentions *shukr* (gratitude) as antithetical to *kufr* (disbelief or rejection).

³³² Tahdhib Madarij al-Salikin (2/611).

Allah, Most High, said:

‘And whoever is grateful, it is only for their own good. But whoever is ungrateful, surely my Lord is Self-Sufficient, Most Generous.’ (al-Naml: 40)

And Allah said:

‘If you disbelieve, then [know that] Allah is truly not in need of you, nor does He approve of disbelief from His servants. But if you become grateful, He will appreciate that from you.’ (al-Zumar: 7)

This is something that we notice in people’s lives; whoever is thankful to Allah, in words and deeds, receives increased blessings from Allah. Thankfulness is certainly a cause of increase, as Allah said: ‘If you are thankful, I will surely increase for you.’ (Ibrahim: 7)

‘To Him you will be brought back.’

You will be returned to Him on the Day of Judgment, each to be judged for their deeds. This is a warning from Ibrahim to his people and a sincere word of advice encouraging them to prepare for this inevitable moment in which they will return to their Creator.

3. Al-Ankabut 18

Allah, Most High, said:

‘And if you deny, then nations before you have denied (their messengers). And the duty of the Messenger is only to convey (the message) plainly.’

After showing them the falsehood of the disbelief that they are upon, Ibrahim clarified: ‘If you disbelieve, then you are not the first to do so.’ They are reminded of the fate of those who rejected before them, like the people of Nuh, ‘Ad, and Thamud who were destroyed by Allah, so expect the same consequences. As for our prophet, then his only role is to deliver the message clearly and without any ambiguity. A delivery which makes clear to you the misguidance that you are following and the truth that he is calling you to.

This verse also further clarifies a number of other things:

- a. That human beings are under the influence of the devil, inclining towards rejecting and opposing the truth, except for the few who Allah has mercy on. Man’s journey throughout history proves this

point. The Qur'an therefore clarifies, 'And if you deny, then nations before you have too denied (their messengers).'

- b. It confirms that man has the freedom to choose the religion that he is convinced with. But this choice will decide whether he ends up in eternal Paradise or in the fire of Hell. Hence, the verse makes clear, 'the duty of the Messenger is only to convey (the message) clearly.'

4. Al-Ankabut 19-20

Allah, Most High, said:

***'Have they not seen how Allah originates the creation then resurrects it? That is certainly easy for Allah. Say, 'Travel throughout the earth and see how He brought life into being: and He will bring the next life into being. God has power over all things.'* (al-Ankabut: 19-20)**

Allah, Most High, relates how Ibrahim encouraged people to contemplate their own creation and being, as this would make it clearer to them that resurrection is a reality that they will eventually face. For the One who is able to create such beautiful beings from nothing, will also be capable of bringing them back to life after they die. Some scholars said that these verses are an address to the nation of Muhammad (peace be upon him).

1. 'Have they not seen how Allah originates the creation then resurrects it? That is certainly easy for Allah.'

After clarifying and establishing the first principle, which is tawhid, then the second principle of prophethood, Allah confirmed the third principle of faith, and that is resurrection after death. These three principles are always mentioned together in the divine revelation.

'Have they not seen... ' When verses begin like this or similar to this, it implies that what is about to be mentioned next is an obvious and visible sign of the greatness of Allah. Allah is calling you to look and to think. At the same time this phrase is rhetorical, criticising those who do not use their senses to see and to contemplate, particularly addressing the disbelievers of Quraish and the people of Makkah in this case. They were not seeing – the sight of understanding – how Allah created them from nothing, creating them from a drop of sperm, from water and clay. This alone is enough in proving the possibility of resurrection, for resurrection is no

more special than original creation. They will then be brought back to life again after they were created from nothing.³³³

In summary, Ibrahim guides his people to belief in resurrection and the afterlife, which they reject, by contemplating over what they can see before their eyes in their incredible creation after they were nothing. He then gave them hearing, sight, and hearts. After living for some time, they die. And the One who originated and sustained all this, is surely capable of bringing them back to life, in fact this is even easier for Him. ‘And He is the One Who originates the creation then will resurrect it—which is even easier for Him.’ So if you can see Allah’s power in creating humans, animals, plants, and the rest of creation, then He is capable too of bringing them back alive.

‘How Allah originates the creation then resurrects it.’

Someone might say, ‘I have never witnessed my own creation, so how can God command us to see our original creation?’ Well, Allah has made human life a cycle of reproduction. So although you are not able to witness your own creation and early development, you can see the development of your children and grandchildren. You can see how it began, until he developed into a fully grown being that plays, laughs, yawns, speaks, smiles, eats, and drinks. A being with a body, a heart, a brain, lungs, legs, arms, and a soul.

Look closely at the phenomenon of the plant. It alone is a sufficient in making one prostrate to Allah out of obedience and certainty. For the seed that you plant has a cover, has a store of materials, and has the seed of a living organism. Through water, sustenance, and light, it grows into a tree with features that only Allah knows fully. You can see through the process of plant growth how God initiates His creation. Look at the egg that you perhaps ate this morning. Had it remained under its mother, it would have become a complete animal. Who turns this yellow and white liquid into an object that moves, chirps, and seeks the protection of his mother? He then grows further into a larger animal, that eventually becomes a delicious meat for you to eat.

³³³ Tafsir Muhammad Amin al-Harari (21/364).

Allah Almighty did not make clarity and understanding farfetched, but placed them in front of you; His signs are everywhere, as our Lord Almighty says: ‘And in the earth are signs for those with certainty.’ (al-Dhariyat: 20).

The Arabic word used in this verse is *yubdi’u*, which could mean to make apparent and clear (*ibda*), or it could mean to originate and begin (*ibtida*). Both meanings are correct, for Allah is the originator of all creation and He makes things clear to people as signs for them to reflect upon Allah’s power and greatness.

Some modern scientific theories say that the liver has five thousand functions, which means that it plays a vital role in the human body. It is a central informant, it can transform fatty substances into sugary substances, and it can convert sugary substances into fatty substances. This is what the liver alone does with the power of Allah Almighty. It also plays a major role in keeping the blood in the condition needed, for any fault in that regard would have a drastic impact on any person. Whoever’s liver fails, cannot live for more than three hours.

Then if you read about astronomy, you read about the emergence of new galaxies, about the disappearance of galaxies, about the expansion of some galaxies, and about black holes in outer space.

Returning to the point about resurrection, our Lord Almighty, in most of the verses of faith, mentions belief in the Last Day, alongside belief in Allah. This is because you will not be upright upon God’s commands unless you are certain of God’s existence, certain of His encompassing knowledge, and certain of the Last Day. Allah has deposited desires in these souls and given them an ability to act, so what else could discipline such souls that are filled with such desires?

It is the fear and awareness of Allah, and the fear of standing before Him to be taken to account. This is what keeps them disciplined and under control. It is narrated by Imam al-Tabarani in al-Mu’jam al-Kabir that Um Salamah said: ‘The Prophet asked one of his servants to come, but she took too long.’ He said: ‘Was it not for the fear of compensation on the Day of Judgment, I would have hit you with this *siwak* (tooth stick).’³³⁴

³³⁴ Tabarani (No: 889). Al-Busairi (d. 840 H) said: Its *isnad* (chain of transmission) is weak.

The truth of the Last Day has two proofs: textual and rational. The textual proof is what the Qur'an mentioned. As for the rational proof, it is that through the universe you know that the Creator of the universe is great, His names are beautiful, and His attributes are lofty. So it is not reasonable for Him to leave His servants like this, without reckoning or punishment or consequences, because this contradicts his justice and perfection. This world has people who are rich and poor, strong and weak, sick and healthy, and there are leaders and followers. What restrains the believer from killing and injustice? If all people were afraid of God Almighty, all their problems would end. But unfortunately, some transgress and some take what does not belong to them, due to their weak faith. Were they absolutely certain that they would pay a heavy price and not escape the punishment of Allah Almighty, they would be deterred and upright. It is therefore necessary that all people stand before the Lord of the worlds, for each person to be given what they deserve.³³⁵

‘That is certainly easy for Allah.’

Creating creation from nothing, then resurrecting them after death, are both easy for Allah. But Allah clarifies this matter so that we understand. We call know that doing something for the first time is hardest. It then gets easier and easier each time we do it. However, this is not the case with the Creator, and for Allah is the greatest example. He simply says, ‘be’ and it is. Everything is easy for him and His knowledge is eternal. But Allah reminds us of creation. Was He not the One that created this great vast universe? It is then not difficult for Him to bring life once again to the dead.

2. Say, ‘Travel throughout the earth and see how He brought life into being: and He will bring the next life into being. God has power over all things.’ (al-Ankabut: 20)

We showed in the previous verse how Ibrahim proved resurrection to his people through their own creation that they are witness to, after having been nothing. How they were then given hearing, sight, and hearts. How they go about their lives for a period until their death. The one who originated this can bring it back with ease. You know this well, so how can you reject resurrection when it is even easier for Allah?

³³⁵ Tafsir al-Nabulsi (9/207).

After showing them the proof that exists right in front of them in their own creation, he encouraged them to contemplate creation in every region of the earth. ‘Travel throughout the earth and see how He brings life into being: and He will bring the next life into being. God has power over all things.’ Look at the skies and the bright stars and planets in it. Look at the earth and its mountains and plains, wilderness and wasteland, trees and fruits, rivers and seas. All of this is a witness to the existence of its maker who says to anything, ‘be,’ and it becomes. Can the One who can do all this not bring life from the dead, when He is able to do all things? This is a divine call to travel around the earth and contemplate Allah’s creation.

Walking in the land opens the eyes and the heart to new scenes that one is not accustomed to, nor does one get tired of. There is an incredible sign in this, because the beautiful creation on the earth which we live is something that we seem to ignore. But when we travel and see different things, we suddenly awaken and start to notice things. We may have been ignoring those very same things in our own lands, or things even greater. We can even return home with a new sense and a new spirit that makes us search, reflect, and admire what we did not care about before this travel and absence. The amazing scenes of our homeland and its wonders perhaps returned to us after we were unaware of her. Glory be to the One who revealed the Qur’an, the One who knows the entrances to hearts and the secrets of souls.³³⁶

Say, ‘Travel throughout the earth and see how He brought life into being.’

The past tense ‘brought’ is used in this verse, because travelling through the earth makes one reflect on the things he sees that prove the origin of creation and how human life began. An example of this is the excavations that some scholars are tracking today, to know the origin of human life. How did it arise? How did it spread? How did it develop? However, they have still not reached anything about the secret of life. What is it? Where did it come from? What was the first living thing found? So this is a directive from God to search for the origin of life and to reflect over that and to infer the coming of the afterlife from it.

³³⁶ In the Shade of the Qur’an (5/2730).

The Qur'an addresses humans through the story of Ibrahim, like in these verses, in a way which suits the life of all generations of humanity, their varying levels, circumstances, and facilities. This way everyone benefits from this guidance given their circumstances and humanity continues to develop and grow.³³⁷ This is one of the main goals of the Qur'an in mentioning its stories.

‘And He will bring the next life into being.’

Just as we find a tree in the autumn its leaves turning yellow and becoming like dry wood. Then spring comes and the trees bloom, then leaf out, producing a sight that delights the onlookers. All this occurs under the control and will of God, Glory be to Him, alone, which is why the verse explicitly mentions Allah being the One that does this.

This reality of resurrection is one that the dwellers of the fire admit and confirm when they beg Allah to be let out of the punishment. ‘They will say, ‘Our Lord, twice You have caused us to be lifeless and twice You have brought us to life. Now we recognize our sins. Is there any way out?’ (Ghafir: 11)

‘God has power over all things.’

God Almighty begins life and restores it with this absolute power that is not bound by the limited perceptions of human beings, nor by what they consider to be laws by which they measure what is possible or impossible. Allah, Most High, has perfect power and complete unrestricted will. He does whatever He wills. His statement, ‘God has power over all things’, is an explanation of what preceded it. For whoever knows the power of God Almighty over all things, will not hesitate that He is able to resurrect people and bring them life after they died.

5. Al-Ankabut 21-23

Allah, Most High, said:

‘He punishes whom He will, and shows mercy to whom He will, and to Him you will be returned. And you cannot escape in the earth or in the heaven. And besides Allah you have neither any Wali (Protector or Guardian) nor any Helper. And those who disbelieve in the Ayat (proofs,

³³⁷ Ibid (5/2730).

evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) of Allah and the Meeting with Him, it is they who have no hope of My Mercy, and it is they who will (have) a painful torment.’ (al-Ankabut: 21-23)

‘He punishes whom He will, and shows mercy to whom He will, and to Him you will be returned.’

The people being addressed here are the disbelievers who turned their backs, so it was appropriate to first mention punishment. He punishes whoever He wills in this life and the next out of His wisdom and justice. And He shows mercy to whoever He wills, out of His mercy and virtue. He does what He wills, and none should question Him, as He is the Most Wise.

The word used here to mean returned is *tuqlabun*, which implies being forcefully returned to Allah, as it refers to being turned upside down (*qalb*). This is to remind them that no matter how much they transgress and oppress in this world, they will eventually return to their Creator and stand before Him. So remember this well, as there is nowhere to hide.

Everything that one attained in this life will come to an end, and new rules will apply, which only give consideration to how much one obeyed Allah and benefitted others. ‘When the Inevitable Event takes place, no one will be able to deny it has come. It will debase [some] and elevate [others].’ (al-Waqi’ah: 1-3)

People have many different measures in this life. There is a measure for beauty, wealth, lineage, status, intelligence, and strength. Measures which humans live by. However, the true eternal life which is to come has only one measure: what did you do sincerely for Allah?

‘And you cannot escape in the earth or in the heaven. And besides Allah you have neither any Wali (protector or guardian), nor any Nasir (helper).’ (al-Ankabut: 22)

It should never ever cross the mind that one can escape from judgment and standing in front of Allah on the Day of Resurrection. This is a reality which none can escape. You stand alone on that day, without anyone to support you or raise you, nor anyone to protect you from what is to come. The rope is loose at the moment while we remain alive, but when the time comes, that rope will be tightened; in Allah’s grasp.

Since none can escape on that day, it may cross someone's mind that they can rely on someone else's help or intercession to save them. But Allah made clear that there will be no support or help from anyone on that great day. The two things negated, *wali* and *nasir*, each have a meaning. The *wali* is someone who supports you out of love and intercedes for you at times of need. While the *nasir* is someone who defends and helps you with force and strength. Neither are of any use on that day, because none can overcome Allah, nor does Allah accept anyone's intercession, except those who He is pleased with for those that He is pleased with.

However, they could still have Allah as their *Wali* and *Nasir*, so if they want salvation, they should return to Allah now by believing in Him and obey His commands, for Allah is the supporter and helper of His sincere servants.

‘And those who disbelieve in the Ayat (proofs, signs, and revelations) of Allah and the meeting with Him, it is they who have no hope of My Mercy, and it is they who will (have) a painful torment.’ (al-Ankabut: 23)

This disbelief is the denial of the signs of God that indicate His greatness, such as the natural signs that prove God's power and draw attention to the wisdom of the Creator, the Almighty. Signs like the night and day, the sun and the moon, or the miracles that accompany the messengers through which God supports them and shows their truthfulness in being messengers of God. They disbelieved in the verses of the Qur'an that contain rulings. They also disbelieved in meeting God in the Hereafter. This means that they can only be in despair from Allah's mercy, since it is so far from them. Allah has cut off any hope for them for Allah's mercy, because they worshipped what does not benefit or harm, and they disbelieved in the One who controls all things.³³⁸

The disbelievers have completely abandoned the idea of an afterlife, being only concerned with this life. They lost hope in Allah's mercy, so only know the worldly life. They thus occupied themselves with disbelief and sin, because their hearts are empty of the fear of Allah's punishment. So Allah said: 'they who have no hope of My Mercy.' That is, they did nothing to attain Allah's mercy. Had they wanted it, they would have

³³⁸ Tafsir al-Sha'rawi (18/11123).

worked for it. For a person does not lose hope in Allah's mercy unless his heart disbelieves and is becomes cut off from Allah. Similarly, he only disbelieves when he no longer hopes for Allah's mercy, after which there is no more hope, except the inevitable: 'and it is they who will (have) a painful torment.'

After this lengthy discussion with the people of Ibrahim, but also directed at all those who reject resurrection after life, the response of Ibrahim's people is explained. Their reply shows us their reality and transgression using force and authority. So once again we see the trials that Ibrahim faced due to the firm stance that he took in making his allegiance to Allah alone.

6. Al-Ankabut 24

Allah, Most High, said:

The only answer Ibrahim's people gave was, 'Kill him or burn him!' but God saved him from the Fire: there truly are signs in this for people who believe. (al-Ankabut: 24)

This was all his people had to say despite Ibrahim's detailed reminders to his people using sound reasoning and clear arguments. This was their only response to the proofs that Ibrahim gave them. They realised the strength of his case and the misguidance of their beliefs and actions. Their response shows that they admit defeat and thus resort to threats and violence, as is the way of those who have no proof and no evidence.³³⁹

'But God saved him from the Fire. There truly are signs in this for people who believe.'

After Ibrahim was thrown into the fire, he was saved by Allah who made the fire cool and safe for him, as we explained in detail in Surat al-Anbiya (v. 69-70). In this there is a clear sign of Allah's power, the truthfulness of Ibrahim, and that Allah never neglects His believing servants. But it is the believers who truly benefit from such verses and signs.

There are three great signs here. The first is Ibrahim being saved from the fire; the second is that a group of transgressors could not overcome one

³³⁹ Al-Saif, p. 230.

man who Allah wanted to save; and the third is that even clear miracles cannot convince dead hearts.

7. Al-Ankabut 25

Allah, Most High, said:

‘And [Ibrahim (Ibrahim)] said: ‘You have taken (for worship) idols instead of Allah, and the love between you is only in the life of this world, but on the Day of Resurrection, you shall disown each other, and curse each other, and your abode will be the Fire, and you shall have no helper.’ (al-Ankabut: 25)

Before Ibrahim migrates, he gave his final words to his people. Words which manifest all the sorrow that his heart contains. In these final words he announces his dissociation from his people’s disbelief and idolatry.

And (Ibrahim) said: ‘You have taken (for worship) idols instead of Allah, and the love between you is only in the life of this world.’

You only loved and worshipped these idols, so that this can be a form of congregating and coming together for your people. Or this verse could mean that your love for one another is what led you to worshipping these idols. Since some of those you loved and respected worshipped idols, you decided to follow and do the same. But these idols of yours are nothing but symbols to which you are blindly and emotionally fanatical. There is no evidence or proof for what you do, as their idols do not deserve to be worshipped, glorified, or deified. Yet this is a phenomenon that unfortunately still exists among many nations and peoples.

‘But on the Day of Resurrection, you shall disown each other, and curse each other, and your abode will be the Fire, and you shall have no helper.’

Conditions will change on the Day of Resurrection, and ties between you will be cut. Affection will turn into hatred and hostility, because it was based on a corrupt and false foundation. As the Most High said: ‘Friends on that day will be enemies to one another, except for the righteous.’ (al-Zukhruf: 67). These noble verse revealed the fate of these people in the Hereafter. Their affection prompted them to preserve their idolatry at the expense of monotheism and the pure worship of God alone. They became

embroiled in the traps of Iblis, so on the Day of Resurrection there will only be enmity, curse, conflict, and division. The ones followed will deny any relation with those that followed them, and friends will reject and abandon one another. Each party accuses its friend of having led him astray, and every person led astray curses his companion who led him. That disbelief and manipulation will not benefit anything, nor ward off any punishment.³⁴⁰

Ibn al-Qayyim said: ‘This company that was built upon an element of love and the desire to attain certain goals, turns into enmity and regret on that day. As Allah said:

‘On that Day the evildoer will bite his own hand and say, ‘If only I had taken the same path as the Messenger. Woe to me! If only I had not taken so and so as a friend. He led me away from the Revelation after it reached me. Satan has always betrayed mankind.’ (al-Furqan: 27-29)

And Allah said:

‘Close friends are enemies on that day, except the righteous.’ (al-Zukhruf: 67)

This is the reality of any two who come together for a purpose. They maintain a good relationship so long as they are working together to attain their goal. But as soon as that purpose ceases, that relationship turns into sadness, hatred, and regret. This is what happens to those who work together for the dunya. Once the punishment strikes, they will feel nothing but hatred for each other and regret.³⁴¹

‘Your abode will be the Fire, and you shall have no helper.’

Unfortunately for them, the punishment does not end there. The enmity and regret is only the first stage of their punishment. They are then taken to the Fire where they will have none to help them. We notice here that Allah, Most High, did not say, ‘you do not have a helper *besides Allah*’, because this is a conversation that occurs in the afterlife when the opportunity to repent has ended and there is no return to the life of this world. So they have no help from Allah, nor from their allies that they worshipped.

Ibrahim made this clear to them. As for me, and the believers that followed me, then just as Allah saved me from the fire that you put me in,

³⁴⁰ Qutb, S. (5/2732).

³⁴¹ Madarij al-Salikin (1/455).

He will save me, and the believers, from the Fire in the afterlife with His mercy.

8. Al-Ankabut 26

Allah, Most High, said:

So Lot believed in him. And he (Ibrahim) said: ‘I will emigrate for the sake of my Lord. He is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise.’ (al-Ankabut: 26)

After Allah Almighty miraculously allowed Ibrahim to escape from the fire that the people of Iraq prepared for him, he migrated to the land of Sham in search of a homeland in which he would find the security and be able to worship Allah. a land where he is not fought for his belief, nor forced to worship what he does not believe in, nor tested for his religion. Somewhere he can spread pure monotheism and he call people to Islam.

‘So Lot believed in him.’

Lut (peace be upon him) had believed in Ibrahim after seeing the miracle of the being saved in the fire. This made him certain that Ibrahim is a prophet sent by Allah and that this was not a mere coincidence. This was a miracle made clear by the Creator. This is a lesson for all people, especially the believers, that a way out can come from the most difficult moments. The people of Iraq tried to burn Ibrahim alive, but this incident became a cause for Lut to believe, giving Ibrahim an additional strong believer to support him besides his wife Sarah. Imam al-Qurtubi said: ‘Lut was the first person to believe in Ibrahim after seeing the fire cool and safe.’

Al-Sha’rawi said: ‘This seems off-topic, since the story is about Ibrahim. But it clarifies the important relationship between Ibrahim and Lut, before swiftly returning to speak about Ibrahim and his next step.

And he (Ibrahim) said: ‘I will emigrate to my Lord.’

I am migrating to a place in which I can worship my Lord freely. This migration is ‘to’ Allah, because it is in the path of Allah and in line with what He loves. Ibrahim had already migrated to Allah with his heart and faith, before doing so with his body. This is so that his whole existence and being revolves around Allah and obeying Him.

Migrating to Allah to a land in which one can worship Allah is one of the greatest causes of success for the caller to Allah (*da’iyah*). Our father

Ibrahim, one of the greatest callers to Allah, is the first person to use this method. He left his homeland to Sham, along with his nephew Lut and wife Sarah, for the path of da'wah. He then also travelled to Egypt, before returning to Sham. He then went to Makkah where he left his son Ismail and his wife Hajar as is well known. This will be explained later by the will of Allah.

Through this *hijrah* (migration), Ibrahim placed another pillar from the pillars of the Ibrahimic faith. It teaches us that a Muslim must never remain in a land in which he is unable to worship Allah properly, nor able to publicise and speak about his religion truthfully, nor able to speak out against evil. Those who remain in such lands with disbelievers for some worldly goals, at the expense of their faith and religion, will be held to account for that, because they should have left such a land for one in which they can at least fulfil Allah's commands. Allah, Most High, said (al-Nisa: 97):

When the angels take the souls of those who have wronged themselves, they ask them, 'What circumstances were you in?' They reply, 'We were oppressed in this land,' and the angels say, 'But was God's earth not spacious enough for you to migrate to some other place?' These people will have Hell as their refuge, an evil destination.

'Those who have wronged themselves', are those who remain in lands which lead them to committing sin, without making an effort to migrate. However, there is an exception to this ruling in the verses that follow for those who are genuinely unable to.

But not so the truly helpless men, women, and children who have no means in their power nor any way to leave. God may well pardon these, for He is most pardoning and most forgiving. (al-Nisa:98-99)

As for the young men who are able to migrate, then generally no excuse is given to them.

Hijrah should also be done purely for Allah, not for some worldly personal goals. As the Prophet (peace be upon him) said in the well-known authentic Hadith: 'Actions are by intention, and each person will be given according to their intention. Whoever's migration is for a worldly matter or a woman he wants to marry, then his migration will be rewarded accordingly.'³⁴²

³⁴² Bukhari (Hadith No: 1)

Allah has promised those who migrate in his path that doors will be opened and matters facilitated for them in terms of their wealth and other needs. That is if he remains alive. If he was die during this migration, then he will attain the greatest of reward kept for him in a life far greater than this one. Allah said:

Whoever emigrates in the cause of Allah will find many safe havens and bountiful resources throughout the earth. Those who leave their homes and die while emigrating to Allah and His Messenger—their reward has already been secured with Allah. God is most forgiving and most merciful. (al-Nisa: 100)

In his statement, ‘I am migrating to my Lord’, there is an indication towards the trials that faith in Allah comes with. Hijrah to Allah means to direct ourselves towards Him and to abandon anything that gets in the way of the path of the believer towards faith. This means even being willing to overstep family, wealth, and homeland, not concerned about what harm may cause him in this life.

There is a message in this for the believers who were under Quraish suffering all forms of hardship and oppression. They were in a state of migration to Allah, even if their bodies were still present in their lands. If they then leave their lands, this would also be a migration. So the believer is always in a state of migration to Allah, so long as he remains firm upon the path of truth and goodness. He abandons (makes *hajr*, from the word *hijrah*) of all things that are evil and corrupt. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

‘The [true] Muslim is the one who does not harm other Muslims with his tongue or hand. And the *muhajir* (migrant) is the one who abandons (*hajr*) what Allah has forbidden.’³⁴³

The hijrah of Lut with his uncle Ibrahim was a blessed one. It led him to the path of prophethood and he became one of Allah’s chosen servants.

‘He is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise.’

Since the aim of Ibrahim’s hijrah was to proclaim Allah’s religion and establish its authority, it was appropriate to use Allah’s Names, ‘All-Mighty, the All-Wise’. This means that He has all the power and might,

³⁴³ Bukhari (Hadith No: 6484)

and is able to guide you if He wanted to. But He is the Wise, so He decided and knows whether that is the right decision or not. The name Al-Aziz is also suitable in relation to their attempt to burn him. It is like He is saying, 'I am migrating to One who is Mighty and Great. None can cause any harm without His permission.'

Al-Hakim, the Most-Wise. Ibrahim knows that Allah will guide him to a place in which he can settle to call to Allah and spread the message to people who are willing to hear and deserve to be guided. Al-Hakim is the one who knows all things, all details, their origins, and their consequences, placing all things in their appropriate place.

When Ibrahim (peace be upon him) withdrew himself from his people and left them in the state they were in, Allah did not mention that He destroyed them with any specific torment, but only mentioned Ibrahim's migration and leaving his people. As for what is mentioned in Biblical scriptures that God sent mosquitoes to his people, who drank their blood, ate their flesh, and destroyed them all, then this needs to be backed with sound evidence, which we do not have. Had Allah eradicated them, He would have mentioned this, like He mentioned the destruction of the previous disbelieving nations.

Perhaps one reason behind that is the mercy and gentleness of Ibrahim, who did not supplicate against his people as others did. Perhaps Allah did not want to send a general punishment for his sake. This view can be supported by Ibrahim's dialogue with the angels when they were about to destroy Lut's people. He argued with them and defended them, though they were not his people. Allah knows best.

9. Al-Ankabut 27

Allah, Most High, said:

***'And We bestowed on him Isaac and Jacob, and ordained among his offspring Prophethood and the Book. We granted him his reward in this world, and in the Hereafter, he is indeed among the righteous.'* (Surat al-Ankabut: 27)**

Allah Almighty comforted Ibrahim in his loneliness, and provided him with righteous offspring after he became old in age. He lived on until his eyes were comforted by seeing his grandson Jacob, son of Isaac. The

Almighty gave him Ishmael before that from Hajar, but it seems that the verses were silent about his mention here, because he lived with his mother in Makkah, since he was an infant, far from Ibrahim. So Ibrahim was not as close to him as he was with Isaac and Jacob, peace be upon them.

The word used, translated here as ‘We bestowed on him’ is ‘*wahabna*’, which comes from the Arabic word *hiba*, which means gift. This means that a righteous child is a great gift from Allah. whoever has been blessed with such a child should prostrate to Allah and thank Allah for this great blessing. There is no blessing greater than being gifted with a righteous child who worship Allah and teaches people after you.

So no doubt Ibrahim was given a great blessing in Isaac and Jacob who were both prophets and leaders guiding by Allah’s command. They were inspired to do good, establish prayer, give zakat, and were described as being ‘*abidin* (worshippers).

‘And [We] ordained among his offspring Prophethood and the Book.’

No prophet came after Ibrahim except from his offspring, nor was any book revealed except upon his offspring, until the final book sent to the final messenger Muhammad (peace be upon him). This itself is a great virtue for Ibrahim, that the sources of guidance, mercy, happiness, and salvation, are in his offspring. People are guided and led to the straight path through them.

The prophets of Bani Israel are from the lineage of Ya’qub ibn Ishaq ibn Ibrahim. Allah, Most High, said:

We blessed him with Isaac and Jacob. We guided them all as We previously guided Noah and those among his descendants: David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Musa, and Harun. This is how We reward the good-doers. Likewise, [We guided] Zachariah, Yahya, Isa, and Elias, who were all of the righteous. [We also guided] Ishmael, Al-Yasa, Jonah, and Lot, favouring each over other people [of their time]. And [We favoured] some of their forefathers, their descendants, and their brothers. We chose them and guided them to the Straight Path. This is Allah’s guidance with which He guides whoever He wills of His servants. Had they associated others with Him [in worship], their [good] deeds would have been wasted. Those were the ones to whom We gave the Scripture, wisdom, and prophethood. But if

these [pagans] disbelieve in this [message], then We have already entrusted it to a people who will never disbelieve in it. (Surat al-An'am, 6:84-89)

Muhammad (peace be upon him) came from the offspring of Ismail ibn Ibrahim, so the final messenger was too from the lineage of Ibrahim. This makes Ibrahim the father of the prophets and the father of all the believers that came after him in terms of revelation and pure faith that Ibrahim was sent with. The books sent to the prophets from his children are: the Qur'an, the Injil, the Torah, and the Zabur.

'We granted him his reward in this world, and in the Hereafter, he will be among the righteous.'

Ibn Kathir said: 'Allah combined for him the joy of this life and contentment in the afterlife. In this life, he was given vast provision, a comfortable home, a source of water, a righteous wife, the praise and love of people, as Ibn Abbas, Mujahid, and Qatadah said. All this while fulfilling Allah's rights from all angles, as Allah said: 'And Ibrahim who fulfilled.' (al-Najm: 37). That is, He fulfilled all that he was commanded and completed the obedience of his Lord. This is why Allah said: 'We granted him his reward in this world, and in the Hereafter, he will be among the righteous.' And Allah said: 'Ibrahim was an *ummah* (a leader) devoutly obedient to God and true in faith. He was not an idolater. He was thankful for the blessings of God who chose him and guided him to a straight path. We granted him goodness in this world, and in the Hereafter, he will be among the righteous' (al-Nahl: 120-121)

Al-Sa'di said regarding the current verse: 'He was granted a wife with exceptional beauty, vast wealth, and children that he was content with. He was given knowledge of Allah, His love, and constantly turned to Him. In fact, he and Muhammad (peace be upon them) are the leaders of the righteous and the highest in rank without exception.'³⁴⁴

Al-Razi said: 'When Ibrahim upheld *tawhid* to begin with, Allah protected him from punishment in this life, which is the fire that he was put into. Then when he persisted upon *tawhid* despite people's rejection and harm, he was granted great reward again in this life, such as blessing him with children.

³⁴⁴ Tafsir al-Sa'di, p.1311.

There is a subtle and interesting point in this verse, and that is that Allah turned each of the circumstances of Ibrahim into their opposites. When his people tried to burn him in the fire, and he was alone, Allah turned the tables and filled the earth with his offspring and followers. When his people and relatives were astray and misguided, including Azar, Allah gave him relatives who are guided and leaders of guidance, giving them prophethood and scriptures. Initially, he had no wealth or status, the peak of worldly pleasure, Allah gave him both status and vast wealth. He was given praise until the Day of Judgment by having his name recited when we send peace and blessings upon the prophet. He became known as the Shaykh of the Prophets, after he was belittled and referred to by some who said: ‘We heard a boy called Ibrahim mention them.’ (al-Anbiya: 60). This way of speaking about someone is only done when referring to someone who is unknown.³⁴⁵

This status that was attained by the father of the prophets, Ibrahim, is because of the purity of *tawhid* that he attained and called to. Allah mentioned his life and efforts in the Qur’an, and related to us his stances in defending his faith. All the prophets are upon his path. However, Ibrahim stood out with his firmness in calling to pure monotheism, his vast knowledge, continued patience, and comprehensiveness of his message.³⁴⁶

³⁴⁵ Al-Tafsir al-Kabir (25/57).

³⁴⁶ Al-Tadabbur w al-Bayan, Muhammad b. Abd al-Rahman al-Maghrawi (26/71).

Section 6:

The Story of Ibrahim in Surat al-Saffat

Allah, Most High, said:

‘Ibrahim was of the same faith: he came to his Lord with a sound heart. He said to his father and his people, ‘What are you worshipping? How can you choose false gods instead of the true God? So what is your opinion about the Lord of all the Worlds? He later looked up to the stars, then said, ‘I am really sick.’ so [his people] turned away from him and left.

Then he [stealthily] advanced towards their gods, and said [mockingly], ‘Will you not eat [your offerings]? What is wrong with you that you cannot speak?’ Then he swiftly turned on them, striking them with his right hand. His people hurried towards him, but he said, ‘How can you worship things you carve with your own hands, when it is God who has created you and all that you do?’ They said, ‘Build a furnace and throw him into the blazing fire.’ They wanted to harm him, but We made them inferior.

He said, ‘I will go to my Lord: He is sure to guide me. Lord, grant me a righteous son.’ So We gave him good news of a forbearing son. When the boy was old enough to work with his father, Ibrahim said, ‘My son, I have seen myself sacrificing you in a dream. What do you think?’ He said, ‘Father, do as you are commanded and, God willing, you will find me steadfast.’ When they had both submitted to God, and he had laid his son down on his forehead, We called out to him, ‘O Ibrahim, you have fulfilled the dream.’ This is how We reward those who do good. This was truly a revealing test. We ransomed his son with a great sacrifice, and We let him be praised by later generations: ‘Peace be upon Ibrahim!’ This is how We reward those who do good: truly he was one of Our faithful servants. We gave Ibrahim the good news of Isaac; a prophet and a righteous man. We blessed him and Isaac as well. Some of their descendants did good, while others clearly wronged themselves. (al-Saffat: 83-113)

The story of Ibrahim in Surat al-Saffat comes in two main sections. The first speaks about Ibrahim calling his people to Islam and the incident of destroying their idols. This has been repeated in other chapters. The second section is one only spoken of in this chapter, and that is the incident of the sacrifice, covered here in all its stages, showing the historic submission of this great scholar of faith.

1. Al-Saffat 83-87

Allah, Most High, said:

Ibrahim was of the same faith: he came to his Lord with a sound heart. He said to his father and his people, ‘What are you worshipping? How can you choose false gods instead of the true God? So what do you think about the Lord of all the Worlds? (al-Saffat: 83-87)

‘Ibrahim was of the same faith.’

After Allah mentioned saving His prophet Nuh, he followed that up by mentioning that Ibrahim was one of his followers in faith, making a swift turn to the story of Ibrahim. He is from the followers of Nuh despite the long period between the two prophets. But he remains one of his followers as they shared the same divine faith.

The Arabic word *shi’a* used in the verse, ‘Ibrahim was one of his (Nuh’s) *shi’a*’, means supporter and follower. This word is used instead of other words that imply help and support, because the word *shi’a* makes clear that they share the same views and beliefs, even if they are not together in the same place or same time. While the word *nusrah*, for instance, implies a support that is physical and direct, something clearly not intended in this case.

‘He came to his Lord with a sound heart.’

This is a very simple and clear description of the heart, for purity of actions and uprightness upon the truth can only stem from a clean and pure heart. This pure heart disliked the state of his people and disapproved of all that which opposes the human fitrah. After Allah’s support, the secret behind Ibrahim’s success is the pure condition of his heart. A heart that is sincere towards its Lord, pure from anything that nullifies or contradicts *tawhid*, *iman*, and *ikhlas*. He is pure from all the defects that can poison a

heart. It was with this heart that he lived his life, called to the message of Islam, and faced his enemies.³⁴⁷

His heart completely submitted to servitude the of Allah and directed itself to Allah, removing the excessive love or fear of anything else besides Allah from his heart. Inwardly and outwardly, he was dedicated to Allah.

‘He said to his father and his people, ‘What are you worshipping?’

Ibrahim made it clear that he denounced their idols and idolatry. His rhetorical question is even more effective than explicitly criticising them, because it implies that the ignorance they are upon should be clear for anyone to see.

‘How can you choose false gods instead of the true God?’

Lying is one of the worst things a person can commit. However, lying is of varying levels, depending on the importance of the thing being lied about. Since we are speaking about the Lord of the World, Allah, the worst lie, is to lie about Him and claim that He has partners. Likewise, the greater the person you lie about, the worst the lie. Hence, falsely attributing things to the Prophet is a grave sin. Similarly, those who falsely accused the mother of believers, Aisha, of what Allah declared her innocent of in Surat al-Nur (verse 11 onwards), commit one of the greatest sins, because they are lying against the mother of believers.

So this question directed at Ibrahim’s father and his people intends to make clear that their false gods are one of the greatest lies against God. How can they ignore the truth of monotheism and live by the lie of idolatry?

‘So what do you think about the Lord of all the Worlds?’

What do you think about Allah? how can you deceive yourself by turning away from the worship of Allah alone, when He is the Lord of the universe? This is similar to Allah’s statement, ‘O man, What has emboldened you against your Lord, the Most Generous?’ (al-Infitar: 6). What gave you the courage to go against Him? A wise man said: ‘It is as though Allah give us the answer in the question itself. It is your generosity, my Lord that, lured me.’ Similarly, how can they do what they do when the proof against them is so clear, and they know that Allah is the Lord of the World.

³⁴⁷ Al-Khalidi (1/400).

‘So what do you think about the Lord of all the Worlds?’ This statement carries so many meaning. Having associated partners with Him and neglected to worship Him as He deserves, what do you expect He will do to you? This is a stern threat of a severe punishment as a result of their idolatrous beliefs and actions. What did you think about your Lord? Does He have some deficiency for you to worship others beside Him?

The scene then moves straight to the incident of breaking their idols, which has already been clarified in Surat al-Anbiya and Surat al-Shu’ara.

2. Al-Saffat 88-93

Allah, Most High, said:

He later looked up to the stars, then said, ‘I am really sick.’ so [his people] turned away from him and left. Then he [stealthily] advanced towards their gods, and said [mockingly], ‘Will you not eat [your offerings]? What is wrong with you that you cannot speak?’ Then he swiftly turned on them, striking them with his right hand. (al-Saffat: 88-93)

It is narrated that this was a day of celebration for them (some said that it was the day of Nowruz). People went out to the gardens and parks, leaving fruits and foods by their idols for blessing, before returning later on to it eat. After Ibrahim lost complete hope in them, he decided to carry out his plan on this day on which they worship their idols. He used the excuse of sickness to avoid joining them, but the sickness that he was referring to was his being sick and agitated at their insistence on their disbelief. So when he was invited to participate in their rituals, he looked up at the starts.

‘He later looked up to the stars.’

This was not a swift look, but a long look of contemplation. This look was alluded to in another verse in Allah’s statement:

We also showed Ibrahim the wonders of the heavens and the earth, so he would be sure in faith. When the night grew dark upon him, he saw a star and said, ‘This is my Lord!’ But when it set, he said, ‘I do not love things that set.’ Then when he saw the moon rising, he said, ‘This one is my Lord!’ But when it disappeared, he said, ‘If my Lord does not guide me, I will certainly be one of the misguided people.’ Then when he saw the sun shining, he said, ‘This must be my Lord—it is the greatest!’ But

again when it set, he declared, ‘O my people! I totally reject whatever you associate [with Allah in worship]. I have turned my face towards the One Who has originated the heavens and the earth—being upright—and I am not one of the polytheists.’ (Surat al-An’am: 75-79)

It was certainly a long look of careful consideration, in which he contemplated the wonders of the sky, the sun, moon, and stars. He contemplated the great power of the Creator of this all and explained to his people that these stars cannot be taken as gods that are worshipped.

He said: ‘I am really sick.’

He was sick of their worshipping others besides Allah. he was no longer able to take their insistence on idolatry. It seems like his people invited him to participate in their festival, but they left him alone when they thought that he was physically ill, and went on.

There is an authentic Hadith narrated by Abu Hurayra, in which the Prophet said: ‘Ibrahim only ever spoke three minor lies, two of them for the sake of Allah. He said, ‘I am sick’ and he said, ‘It was the leader of them [idols] that did it.’ And he said to the oppressive king about his wife Sarah that she was his sister.’

This hadith has been explained by many scholars who clarified that these three instances were not actual lies, though they seemed like minor lies at face value. That is because everything Ibrahim said was true. He was indeed sick, but not the sickness that they understood. Rather, he became sick when he saw what they were upon, and this increased closer to the time of their festivals on which their idolatry strengthens.

So although these words seemed like lies, but it is an approach called ‘*ma’aridh*’ (a type of euphemism) in which a person says something true, but that is likely to be understood differently by the listener. At times of hardship or need, one can resort to such methods of speaking so that they do not fall into outright lies. So notice how Ibrahim used this, despite being in very difficult circumstances. As some said, ‘Euphemisms are a sufficient alternative to ever needing to lie.’

Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276 H) said:

A concession has been given to use euphemisms, and some said that it is a sufficient alternative to ever needing to lie. An example of this, is

Ibrahim saying that his wife was his sister, intending that all believers are brothers. He also said, ‘it was the leader of them [idols] that did it [destroyed them]’, but mentioned the condition of them speaking. If they can speak, then speak to them. As for his statement, ‘I am sick’, then it means that he will eventually become sick, as the one that dies, will sooner or later become sick. Like Allah said to His prophet: ‘You are dead and they are too’, to mean that you will all eventually die.³⁴⁸

‘So [his people] turned away from him and left. Then he [stealthily] advanced towards their gods, and said [mockingly], ‘Will you not eat [your offerings]? What is wrong with you that you cannot speak?’

They left to go to their celebration and partake in their rituals. He quickly and quietly entered upon the idols and found their food offerings in front of the idols. He then mockingly brought the food closer and addressed the idols, saying, ‘eat’, knowing that they cannot eat, drink, or speak, nor do they sense what is happening before them. He continued to address them, ‘why do you not speak?’

‘Then he swiftly turned on them, striking them with his right hand.’

Ibrahim then smashed the idols using a strong tool that he held in his hand. He did so using his right hand, the stronger hand of most people, not that he necessarily broke them with his bare hands. He destroyed all their idols, except one of them, as explained in Surat al-Anbiya (verse 58).

Ibrahim knew what he was doing and has prepared what to do for when they realise. He was not just breaking their idols to get rid of them. He wanted to break that barrier that existed between him and his people. He left the bigger idol for a reason clearly mentioned; ‘perhaps they could refer to him.’ They can consult this idol then when they return and ask him about what happened in his presence. He was there, so he must have seen the one who broke the other idols. So each of Ibrahim’s steps was well calculated. The details of this event have already been spoken of in Surat al-Anbiya.

It is also interesting to note that using the right hand is from the teachings of Ibrahim. This is something that most humans do anyway, whether religiously or just naturally. Islam then came and made one of its etiquettes

³⁴⁸ Ta’wil Mukhtalif al-Hadith, p. 81.

to use the right hand during worship and for other noble tasks, as explained by the Prophet (peace be upon him) in a number of reports. The scholars of hadith mentioned this prophetic principle for many discussions in their books, such as eating and drinking using the right hand, entering the mosque using the right foot,³⁴⁹ beginning with the right during purification³⁵⁰, and this was the consistent practise of the Prophet.³⁵¹

3. Al-Saffat 94-96

Allah, Most High, said:

His people hurried towards him, but he said, ‘How can you worship things you carve with your own hands, when it is God who has created you and all that you do?’ (al-Saffat: 94-96)

‘His people hurried towards him,’

They came rushing in large numbers, angrily, making plenty of noise, heading towards their idols. Ibrahim was alone, but he was a believer who knew his path. He had a clear outlook on the truth and knew what he believed in with confidence. He is therefore stronger than them in all their numbers without sound faith, nor clear knowledge.

He said, ‘How can you worship things you carve with your own hands, when it is God who has created you and all that you do?’

Ibrahim debated them using reason and common sense, but these people were not interested in reason. He reminds them that they are the ones that carved these idols and made them. How then can you take them as gods when you are stronger than them? Can a human make his own god, then worship him, and ask him to protect him from harm?

He told them that Allah created them and their actions, so he alone is worthy of worship. Since there is no creator except Him, there should be none worthy of worship except Him. ‘And all that you do’, is a reference to the carving of their idols, though it refers to all human actions.

³⁴⁹ Bukhari (No: 416).

³⁵⁰ Bukhari (No: 401).

³⁵¹ Bukhari (No: 166).

They did not listen to what he had to say and decided to take him to trial so that he would be punished. However, he is the one that ended up overcoming them with his words of truth and sound reasoning.

4. Al-Saffat 97-98

Allah, Most High, said:

They said, 'Build a furnace and throw him into the blazing fire.' They wanted to harm him, but We made them inferior. (al-Saffat: 97-98)

This is the way of oppressors, the way of metal and fire. When they run out of things to say and have no argument for their claims, they resort to force. They wanted to build a high furnace for him to be thrown into. But Ibrahim did not shake. His heart remained firm, unshaken by the fires that appeared before him, nor by the screaming masses. He would simply repeat: '*hasbi-Allah wa ni'ma al-Wakil*' (Allah is sufficient for us, and He is the best Protector).

In Sahih al-Bukhari, it is narrated that Ibn Abbas said: '*Hasbi-Allah wa ni'ma al-Wakil*'. A word that was said by Ibrahim when he was thrown into the fire and Muhammad said it when people said: 'the people have gathered to face you, so fear them. But this only increased them in faith, and they said: Allah is sufficient for us, and He is the best Protector.' (al-Imran: 173)³⁵²

'They wanted to harm him, but We made them inferior.'

What are people's plots going to do if Allah wants otherwise? What can these weak tyrants do when Allah is protecting His chosen servants? After they thought they overcame Ibrahim and finally got rid of him, after they managed to throw him into the fire. But very quickly the reality became apparent and people saw this great miracle that Allah wanted them to witness. For if Allah wanted to, He could have saved Ibrahim from being caught altogether and allowed him to escape. But had this happened, they would have had an excuse; had we caught him, we would have burnt him, or had the rain not come down, we would have burnt him. But here he is before your very eyes, stood in the blazing fire, while not being harmed

³⁵² Sahih al-Bukhari (No: 4563).

one bit, after the call of truth was made: ‘O fire, become cool and safe for Ibrahim.’

The fire maintains its nature, so this command did not make the fire itself cool, but only made it cool and safe for Ibrahim. This is similar to the cursed tree, ‘Al-Zaqqum’, which appears green, but is really a fire that burns them. Thus, Allah made them the inferior ones, as He does with all the enemies of his prophets and righteous servants.³⁵³ Allah, Most High, said:

‘And whoever is mindful of Allah, He will make a way out for them, and provide for them from sources they could never imagine.’ (al-Talaq: 2-3)

So congratulations for the sincere ones who follow Allah’s guidance, for they always have Allah by their side.

5. Al-Saffat 99-101

Allah, Most High, said:

He said, ‘I will go to my Lord: He is sure to guide me. Lord, grant me a righteous son.’ So We gave him good news of a forbearing son. (al-Saffat: 99-101)

This brings us to the end of a phase in Ibrahim’s life. He turns his back on it, and sets off on journey towards a new stage in his life. He leaves behind his father, his family, his people, his homeland, and everything that connects him to this land. He leaves that all behind to migrate to Allah, submitting himself to Allah, certain that Allah will guide him aright.

Until this stage, Ibrahim was alone, without any children. So having left everything behind, he directed himself to his Lord and prayed for righteous believing offspring.

‘Lord, grant me a righteous son. So We gave him good news of a forbearing son.’

On his way from Iraq to Sham, Ibrahim felt that he needed righteous children to support him and to continue his message. The natural feeling of the desire for fatherhood. He thus prayed to Allah for righteous sons who were righteous in their knowledge, character, and capable of calling to Allah. He was shortly after given what he asked for.

³⁵³ Tafsir al-Sha’rawi (20/12796).

Ibn Kathir said: ‘This son was Ismael, for he was the first son that Ibrahim was given, and he is older than Isaac according to the consensus of Muslims and People of the Book. In fact, their scriptures say that Ismael was born when Ibrahim was 86 years old, while Isaac was born when Ibrahim was 99 years old. Their scriptures also make it clear that he was commanded to sacrifice his only son, but they later claimed that this was Isaac. This is not possible, because it contradicts their own scriptures.

The reason they made this claim is that Isaac is their forefather, while Ismael is the father of the Arabs. Out of envy they thus tampered with their won scripture. For it was Ismael that Ibrahim took to Makkah with his mother, and an ‘only’ child is one with no siblings. Additionally, testing a person with their eldest child is a greater trial, thus more appropriate.

A group of scholars argued that the son that was to be sacrificed was Isaac. This view is attributed to some of the early scholars, and even some of the companions. However, there is no proof for this in the Qur’an or Sunnah, and I can only see this being something that was taken from Biblical scriptures, and simply accepted without questioning. But the book of Allah shows that it was Ismael, because it mentioned the news of a forbearing son that was to be slaughtered. Then after that, he said: ‘We also gave him the good news of Isaac, a righteous prophet.’ (al-Saffat: 112). When the angels gave Ibrahim the good news of Isaac, they said: ‘We give you the good news of a knowledgeable son.’ (al-Hijr: 53). And Allah said: ‘We gave her good news of the birth of Isaac, and, after him, Jacob.’ (Hud: 71). This means that they will have a grandson named Jacob, which means that Isaac will have children. It thus makes no sense for him to be commanded to slaughter him as a child, when he has already been old that Isaac will have offspring. While Ismael was described as being forbearing, because it fits the context of the trial he and his father faced.³⁵⁴

Allah answered Ibrahim’s prayer and gave him good tidings of a forbearing boy. Forbearance means to use reason, to have patience, insight, and temperance. There is no doubt that forbearance is one of the fundamental foundations for success in da’wah. This boy when his father was old, with great eagerness for a son, and having big hopes for him in the

³⁵⁴ Tafsir Ibn Kathir (7/27).

future. Additionally, Allah gave him a sound mind, intelligence, and wisdom, which made the love of Ismael's parents for him great.

So the news that was given to Ibrahim mentioned three things; that he would be gifted with a child, a boy, and one who reaches the age of *hilm* (forbearance), for this trait is not one that can be ascribed to a baby or small child.

As we mentioned, the boy that Ibrahim was informed of was Ismael. Ismael is a non-Arab name, which according to al-Zabidi means, 'obedient to Allah' in Syriac. This is why those who are called Ismael are often given the kunya, Abu Muti', which means father of obedient one. According to al-Fairuzabadi, Ismael was the first to ever be given this name. Other linguists have held different views on what exactly Ismael means.

The Story of Ibrahim's Marriage to Hajar, the Mother of Ismael

After residing in the blessed lands of Palestine, for a period that only Allah knows, Ibrahim entered Egypt. Since he was a prophet who calls to Allah, every step of his was in the path of delivering the message of Allah to the people.

One of the events of this trip was that Hajar was gifted to Sarah, the wife of Ibrahim. She then became Ibrahim's second wife after that and the mother of Ismael.

Our information about this trip come from a Hadith reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim in their Sahih, related by Abu Hurayra that the Prophet said:

'Ibrahim only ever spoke three minor lies, two of them for the sake of Allah. He said, 'I am sick' and he said, 'It was the leader of them [idols] that did it.' And he said to the oppressive king about his wife Sarah that she was his sister.'

We have already explained the meaning of this hadith earlier on.

The narration continues:

'While Ibrahim and Sarah (his wife) were on a journey they passed by the territory of a tyrant. Someone said to the tyrant, 'This man (i.e. Ibrahim) is accompanied by a beautiful lady.' So, he sent for Ibrahim and asked him about Sarah saying, 'Who is this lady?' Ibrahim said, 'She is my sister.' Ibrahim went to Sarah and said, 'O Sarah! There are no believers

on the surface of the earth except you and me. This man asked me about you and I have told him that you are my sister, so don't contradict my statement.' The tyrant then called Sarah and when she went to him, he tried to take hold of her with his hand, but (his hand got stiff and) he was confounded. He asked Sarah, 'Pray to Allah for me, and I shall not harm you.' So Sarah asked Allah to cure him and he got cured. He tried to take hold of her for the second time, but (his hand got as stiff as or stiffer than before and) was more confounded. He again requested Sarah, 'Pray to Allah for me, and I will not harm you.' Sarah asked Allah again and he became alright. He then called one of his guards (who had brought her) and said, 'You have not brought me a human being but have brought me a devil.' The tyrant then gave Hajar as a girl-servant to Sarah. Sarah came back (to Ibrahim) while he was praying. Ibrahim, gesturing with his hand, asked, 'What happened?' She replied, 'Allah has spoiled the evil plot of the disbeliever and gave me Hajar as a servant.' Abu Huraira then said: 'That is your mother, *O Bani Ma' al-Sama* (literally, children of rain water; i.e. the Arabs, the descendants of Ishmael, Hajar's son).³⁵⁵

This incredible incident occurred in Egypt and it shows the great virtue of Sarah. Another hadith explicitly mentions that Hajar was Egyptian, which further proves this point.

Muslim and others narrated from Abu Dharr al-Ghifari that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

'You will soon conquer Egypt, a land known as the land of al-Qirat. So when you conquer it, treat its inhabitants well. For there lies upon you the responsibility of a covenant and family-ties', or he said, 'marriage relations'. He said: 'When you see two people falling into dispute over the space of a brick, than leave it.' Abu Dharr said: 'I saw Abd al-Rahman b. Shurahbil b. Hasanah and his brother Rabi'a disputing over the space of a brick. So I left that land.'³⁵⁶

This hadith shows that there is a family relationship between the Arabs and Egyptians. The scholars said that a Qirat is part of a golden dinar or silver dirham. The Egyptians use it a lot. The reason for the family tie is that Hajar, the mother of Ismael, is Egyptian. This means that the Egyptians are

³⁵⁵ Bukhari (No: 2217) and Muslim (No: 2371).

³⁵⁶ Muslim (No: 2543).

like uncles of the people of Makkah and Hijaz. They also have marriage relations, because the ruler of Egypt, al-Muqawqis, gifted him Mariyyah al-Qibtīyyah (or Mary the Copt). She was the mother of Ibrahim, the son of the Prophet Muhammad. The prophet therefore reminded the companions to treat well those who they had some close or distant relationship with.

The narrations mentioned give us a number of points of benefit:

- The name of Ibrahim’s wife is Sarah.
- Sarah was one of the best and most beautiful women.
- This ruler was a corrupt tyrant who did not control his desire for women and would partake in illicit relations.
- He had a gang whose job was to fetch women and bring them to him wilfully or forcefully, so that he can fulfil his corrupt desires. A trait of all corrupt governments and systems throughout history.
- When the tyrant then brought her, Allah showed him a sign and miracle, to protect Sarah and take Hajar with her.
- Ibrahim told Sarah to say that she is his sister. He meant the brotherhood of faith, because the believers are nothing but brothers and sisters, even if they are married. So Ibrahim was truthful in what he said.
- Ibrahim is a prophet, guided by Allah through revelation. Allah is the one that told him to send Sarah, so he did so with the confidence and certainty that she would be under protection of Allah.
- Allah protected Sarah from the immorality of the king, honouring her, and showing that tyrant a sign of God’s power and ability, and the inability of that tyrant. So when he extended his hand to her the first time, Allah disabled it, so the king was unable to move or control it. He was surprised as this was the first time that something like this happened to him. He asked Sarah to pray to her Lord to release his hand and promised not to harm her if she did. When she did, the king attempted to grab her again, and a third time. At this point the king knew that he could not reach her and that there was some power that protected her from him.
- The king wanted to honour Sarah by gifting her a servant who was Hajar. Ibrahim then raised her and honoured Hajar by marrying her.

- While Sarah was away, Ibrahim was praying to Allah and seeking His help in protecting his wife. Sarah returned to him while he was praying. The sunnah of the prophet Muhammad at times of worry or difficulty was always to resort to prayer.
- One of Sarah's supplications was, 'O Allah, if you know that I believe in you and your messenger, and protected my privates except from my husband, then do not allow this disbeliever to harm me.' Her du'a was accepted by Allah.
- Ibrahim was happy to see the return of Sarah, keen to know what happened. He did not even wait to complete his prayer, but indicated with his hand, 'what happened'. He did not speak with words because he was in prayer.
- Sarah's reply indicated her firm faith in Allah, for she attributed the protection and support to Allah. She said: 'Allah has spoiled the evil plot of the disbeliever and gave me Hajar as a servant.'
- Abu Hurayra added a useful note after he completed narrating the prophetic hadith, stating that Hajar is the mother of the Arabs. That is because her son Ismael, is the father of the Arabs, which makes her the mother of the Arabs.
- Abu Hurayra referred to them as, Bani Ma' al-Sama, which literally means, children of rain water. That is because the Arabs relied upon rain water for farming and so on.

These are some of the key benefits that can be taken from the wonderful Hadith.

We should also be wary of what is claimed in the Torah of the Jews, that the reason for Ibrahim's migration to Egypt was to seek worldly provision. That is because Sham at that time was a fertile land with plenty of provision. Rather, his migration was for religious reasons, to call to worshipping Allah alone, and Egypt was more prepared at that time to receive the message of truth and spread it amongst people.

What was mentioned in the books of the Jews about the story of Ibrahim and Sarah with the king of Egypt contradicts what was mentioned in the Islamic account of that story. One must beware of what the Jews added to their scriptures regarding Ibrahim (peace be upon him). They claimed some unacceptable characteristics and vile deeds to Ibrahim, claiming that



he feared for his life, showed a lack of protective jealousy for his wife, and even made money in return for risking his wife's honour. These are all false claims that cannot be attributed to any prophet, let alone Ibrahim, the father of the prophets.

Hajar in Sham and the Birth of Ismael

Ibrahim went with his wife Sarah from Egypt to Palestine, and lived along with their servant Hajar. Sarah could not have any children and Ibrahim reached old age without any children, so Sarah decided to gift Hajar to Ibrahim, so that perhaps she could bear a child for him.

What was also interesting is that Hajar loved her masters and respected them so much. She saw the purity of their personalities, so accepted their faith and believing in Allah with sincerity. She became connected to Allah, grateful to Him for guiding her to Islam, and devout with her prayers.

Sarah and Hajar had a strong relationship with one another, worshipping Allah together. Hajar was extremely grateful to Allah for saving her from a society of misguidance and placed her in a blessed home built upon sound faith and tawhid.

Sarah was aware of the du'a of Ibrahim, 'My Lord, grant me a righteous child.' So with contentment she offered Hajar to Ibrahim as a gift hoping that perhaps he would have a child with her, and that is exactly what happened. The beautiful gift that is Ismael was born, and Ibrahim's eyes were filled with delight and his heart full of praise for Allah for answering his prayer that he so much wanted. Thus a new marital life sets off with Ibrahim, Hajar, and their son Ismael. Then Allah's wisdom dictated that Ibrahim take Hajar and his son Ismael to the mother of cities, Makkah.

Some of the exegetes claimed that the reason for taking Hajar and Ismael to Makkah was Sarah's jealousy, who told Ibrahim to get rid of Hajar. The scholars who held this view include Ibn al-Qayyim, who said in *Zad al-Ma'ad*: 'Sarah became extremely jealous of Hajar and her son Ismael. She was initially a slave, but when she gave birth to Ismael, Sarah's jealousy became severe, so Allah, out of His mercy, ordered Ibrahim to take Hajar to Makkah for a period of time, so that Sarah's natural jealousy would cool.'³⁵⁷

³⁵⁷ Al-Hayat al-Zawjyah, p. 223.

However, we believe that Sarah is above that. She was a pious and righteous woman under the companionship of Ibrahim. She learnt a lot from him and lived a life of piety with him. It is therefore unlikely that she would allow jealousy to overtake her to such an extent that she request him to distance a small child for no good reason. Rather, as Shaykh al-Sawi said, this trip was from Allah's wisdom; He revealed to Ibrahim to take them to the holy land of Makkah, which He made blessed for all mankind.

Once again, one should be careful of reports related in biblical scriptures about Sarah finding severe jealousy and wanting Hajar to leave, after she had a child, so much that she could no longer look at Hajar and Ismael in their home. They claim that she was the one that told Ibrahim to send them somewhere far away, and he listened to her.

We do not accept these opinions, because they are not proven through any authentic prophetic report. That goes for all prophetic stories, we can only accept historical claims that are backed up with evidence; a clear Quranic verse or authentic Hadith. Additionally, Sarah's faith is far greater than the way she was depicted in these biblical stories, for she is the one that gifted Hajar to Ibrahim in the hope that he would be given a child. Had she then wanted Ibrahim to get rid of his son and for Hajar to be sent away, she would have been unjust. And Ibrahim would have been unfair if he sent Hajar away for such a reason. These claims can therefore not be accepted on multiple grounds.³⁵⁸

Hajar and Ismael in Hijaz

Ibrahim went to Hijaz with Hajar and Ismael, leaving them in a valley that was without cultivation, as per the command of Allah. When he left them, he turned to Allah with sincerity and humility, praying for their protection, as we shall see in a Hadith later on. The stronger view is that the Ka'bah was not yet built when Ibrahim left Hajar and Ismael in that place, and that the town of Makkah was not yet built. We shall discuss this later on. But through revelation, Ibrahim was aware that this location would soon become the place of the Ka'bah and the sacred city.

³⁵⁸ Al-Khalidi (1/385).

The details of taking Hajar and Ismael in that valley was related in an authentic hadith from the prophet (peace be upon him). Imam al-Bukhari narrated from Ibn Abbas that he said:

‘The first woman to use a girdle was the mother of Ismael. so that she might hide her tracks from Sarah. Ibrahim brought her and her son Ishmael while she was suckling him, to a place near the Ka`bah under a tree on the spot of Zamzam, at the highest place in the mosque. During those days there was nobody in Mecca, nor was there any water.’

So he made them sit over there and placed near them a leather bag containing some dates, and a small water-skin containing some water, and set out homeward. Ishmael’s mother followed him saying, ‘O Ibrahim! Where are you going, leaving us in this valley where there is no person whose company we may enjoy, nor is there anything?’ She repeated that to him several times, but he did not look back at her. Then she asked him, ‘Has Allah ordered you to do so?’ He said, ‘Yes.’ She said, ‘Then He will not neglect us,’ and returned while Ibrahim proceeded onwards, and on reaching the Thaniyah where they could not see him, he faced the Ka`bah, and raising both hands, invoked Allah saying the following prayers: ‘Our Lord, I have established some of my offspring in an uncultivated valley, close to Your Sacred House, Lord, so that they may keep up the prayer. Make people’s hearts turn to them, and provide them with produce, so that they may be thankful.’³⁵⁹

Ishmael’s mother went on suckling Ishmael and drinking from the water (she had). When the water in the water-skin had all been used up, she became thirsty and her child also became thirsty. She started looking at him curling up in agony. She left him, for she could not endure looking at him, and found that the mountain of Safa was the nearest mountain to her on that land. She stood on it and started looking at the valley keenly so that she might see somebody, but she could not see anybody. Then she descended from Safa and when she reached the valley, she tucked up her robe and ran in the valley like a person in distress and trouble, till she crossed the valley and reached the Marwa mountain where she stood and started looking, expecting to see somebody, but she could not see anybody. She repeated that (running between Safa and Marwa) seven times.’ The

³⁵⁹ This prayer is mentioned in Surat Ibrahim, verse 37.

Prophet (ﷺ) said, ‘This is the source of the tradition of people walking between them (i.e. Safa and Marwa).’ When she reached the Marwa (for the last time) she heard a voice and she told herself to be quiet and listened attentively. She heard the voice again and said, ‘O, (whoever you may be)! You have made me hear your voice; have you got something to help me?’

And behold, she saw an angel at the place of Zamzam, digging the earth with his heel (or his wing), until water flowed from that place. She started to make something like a basin around it, using her hand in this way, and started filling her water-skin with water with her hands, and the water was flowing out after she had scooped some of it.’ The Prophet (ﷺ) added, ‘May Allah have mercy on Ishmael’s mother! Had she let Zamzam flow without trying to control it, or had she not scooped from that water to fill her water-skin, Zamzam would have been a stream flowing on the surface of the earth.’ The Prophet (ﷺ) then said, ‘Then she drank (water) and suckled her child. The angel said to her, ‘Don’t be afraid of being neglected, for this is the House of Allah which will be built by this boy and his father, and Allah never neglects His people.’

The House (i.e. Ka’bah) at that time was on a high place resembling a hillock, and when torrents came, they flowed to its right and left. She lived in that way until some people from the tribe of Jurhum, passing by Kada’, passed by her and her child. They landed in the lower part of Mecca where they saw a bird that had the habit of flying around water and not leaving it. They said, ‘This bird must be flying around water, though we know that there is no water in this valley.’ They sent one or two messengers who discovered the source of water, and returned to inform them of the water. So, they all came. Ishmael’s mother was sitting near the water. They asked her, ‘Do you allow us to stay with you?’ She replied, ‘Yes, but you have no right to the water.’ They agreed to that. The Prophet (ﷺ) further said, ‘Ishmael’s mother was pleased with the whole situation as she enjoyed the company of people. So, they settled there, and later on they sent for their families who came and settled with them, so some families became permanent residents there. The child (Ishmael) grew up and learnt Arabic from them and his virtues caused them to love and admire him as he grew up. When he reached the age of puberty they made him marry a woman from amongst them. After that Ishmael’s mother had died.

Ibrahim Visits Ismael

‘Ibrahim came after Ishmael’s marriage in order to see his family that he had left before, but he did not find Ishmael there. When he asked Ishmael’s wife about him, she replied, ‘He has gone in search of our livelihood.’ Then he asked her about their way of living and their condition, and she replied, ‘We are living in misery; we are living in hardship and destitution,’ complaining to him. He said, ‘When your husband returns, convey my greetings to him and tell him to change the threshold of the gate (of his house). When Ishmael came, he seemed to have felt something unusual, so he asked his wife, ‘Has anyone visited you?’ She replied, ‘Yes, an old man of so-and-so description came and asked me about you and I informed him, and he asked about our state of living, and I told him that we were living in a hardship and poverty.’ On that Ishmael said, ‘Did he advise you anything?’ She replied, ‘Yes, he told me to convey his greetings to you and to tell you to change the threshold of your gate.’ Ishmael said, ‘That was my father, and he has ordered me to divorce you. Go back to your family.’ So, Ishmael divorced her and married another woman from amongst them (i.e. Jurhum).

Ibrahim was again away for a period, as Allah willed, then visited again, but did not find Ishmael. So he entered with Ishmael’s wife and asked her about Ishmael. She said, ‘He has gone in search of our livelihood.’ Ibrahim asked her, ‘How are you getting on?’ He asked her about their sustenance and living. She replied, ‘We are prosperous and well-off.’ Then she thanked Allah. Ibrahim said, ‘What kind of food do you eat?’ She said, ‘Meat.’ He said, ‘What do you drink?’ She said, ‘Water.’ He said, ‘O Allah! Bless their meat and water.’ The Prophet added, ‘At that time they did not have grain, and if they had grain, he would have also invoked Allah to bless it.’ The Prophet added, ‘If somebody has only these two things as his sustenance, his health and disposition will be badly affected, unless he lives in Mecca.’

The Prophet said, ‘Then Ibrahim said to Ishmael’s wife, ‘When your husband comes, give my regards to him and tell him that he should keep firm the threshold of his gate.’ When Ishmael came back, he asked his wife, ‘Did anyone visit?’ She replied, ‘Yes, a good-looking old man came.’ She praised him and added, ‘He asked about you, and I informed him, and

he asked about our livelihood and I told him that we were in a good condition.’ Ishmael asked her, ‘Did he give you any advice?’ She said, ‘Yes, he told me to give his regards to you and ordered that you should keep firm the threshold of your gate.’ On that Ishmael said, ‘That was my father, and you are the threshold (of the gate). He has ordered me to keep you.’

Ibrahim Meets Ismael and they Build the Ka’bah

‘Then Ibrahim went away for a period, as long as Allah willed, and called on them again afterwards. He saw Ishmael under a tree near Zamzam, sharpening his arrows. When he saw Ibrahim, he rose up to welcome him and they greeted each other as a father does with his son and a son does with his father. Ibrahim said, ‘O Ishmael! Allah has given me an order.’ Ishmael said, ‘Do what your Lord has ordered you to do.’ Ibrahim asked, ‘Will you help me?’ Ishmael said, ‘I will help you.’ Ibrahim said, ‘Allah has ordered me to build a house here, pointing to a hillock higher than the land surrounding it.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) added, ‘Then they raised the foundations of the House (i.e. the Ka’bah). Ishmael brought the stones and Ibrahim was building. When the walls became high, Ishmael brought this stone and placed it for Ibrahim who stood on it and carried on building, while Ishmael was handing him the stones. Both of them were saying, ‘O our Lord! Accept (this service) from us, You are the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing.’ Then both of them went on building and going round the Ka’bah saying: ‘O our Lord ! Accept from us; You are the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing.’³⁶⁰

This is an authentic Hadith narrated to us by the Prophet (peace be upon him), speaking at length about the story of Ibrahim, Ismael, and Hajar (peace be upon them all).

The Vision of Slaughtering Ismael and Building the Ka’bah

Did this vision take place during Ibrahim’s third visit to Makkah in which he met Ismael and built the Ka’bah with him, or was the vision of the sacrifice something that occurred some other time? We do not have explicit texts that specify this issue, so we cannot be certain, and Allah knows best.

³⁶⁰ Bukhari (No: 3364).

However, there is a *mawquf* report (statement of a companion), not *marfu'* (a statement of the Prophet), narrated by al-Fakahani, that Ali b. Abi Talib said: 'Ibrahim would visit Hajar each month on the Buraq. He would come during the day, then return later to his home in Sham.'³⁶¹

Perhaps the building of the Ka'bah and the vision of the sacrifice both occurred in that same visit, after being away for so many years. They built the House, Ibrahim announced the Hajj, he saw the vision of the sacrifice, which gave us the 'Udhiyah, Eid al-Adha, and the pilgrimage of Hajj. Perhaps this view is closest to being correct.

Polygyny in the Previous Nations

Polygyny was widespread in the previous nations and societies. Islam then came and affirmed it is part of its law. Allah, Most High, said: 'You may marry whichever women seem good to you, two, three, or four. If you fear that you cannot be equitable [to them], then marry only one.' (al-Nisa: 3). There is great wisdom in polygyny, especially when there is a need for it, such as when a woman is infertile, as we saw with Sarah. Polygyny is therefore often a sound solution, much better than divorcing the first wife to marry another one. So for this reason, and other reasons, polygyny is a divine solution and legislation until the Day of Judgment.

Polygyny is found in the Jewish faith and the early Christians, until it was outlawed by the church later on. It is also widespread in today's world except in countries in which men openly or secretly have girlfriends or mistresses. Then came an even greater disaster that we witness today and that is abstaining from marriage altogether, because there are alternative ways to fulfil sexual desires, without the burden of marriage and taking care of a family. Then things continued to get worse with sexually perverted lifestyles that are becoming societally and legally more and more acceptable.

We ask Allah to not destroy us due to the doings of the foolish ones amongst us, and we ask that He protects us from fitnah, open and hidden, and to save us from the harms of modern day *jahiliyah* (ignorance and backwardness).

³⁶¹ Ibn Hajar, Fath al-Bari, (6/287).

A Mother's Custody of Her Child

Hajar was initially surprised when Ibrahim left her with her son Ismael, especially in such circumstances. However, when she knew that this was Allah's command, she submitted and trusted that Allah would not neglect them.

Ismael stayed with his mother who took care of all his affairs, including food, drink, clothes, and comfort. She took on this great responsibility at such a sensitive age. She nurtured him, taught him, and protected him from harm. Humans, out of all creation, are most in need of care at a young age, for longer periods of time. This is why Allah instilled natural feelings of motherhood and parental instincts, especially in mothers. Allah also made it an obligation upon parents to take care of their children. And a mother's care for her child at a young is of utmost importance, hence Allah obliged mothers to breastfeed their children if they are able to. He said: 'Mothers suckle their children for two whole years, if they wish to complete the term, and clothing and maintenance must be borne by the father in a fair manner.' (al-Baqarah: 233)

The mother's custody of her child has accompanied mankind since its infancy, and will remain with it until the end of it. All laws, regulations, and customs approved it, except for the purely materialists that have lost their humanity, such as communism, which removed children from their mothers. Their extinction was therefore inevitable. The laws of today grant mothers leave from work for the custody of her children, so that they may enjoy kindness, tenderness, and good care and attention. Something that began with Eve and her children, then Hajar and her son Ismail, Sarah and her son Isaac, and the rest Humanity. This is one of the reasons for giving mothers preference and the highest status.³⁶²

6. Al-Saffat 102

Allah, Most High, said:

***'When the boy was old enough to work with his father, Ibrahim said, 'My son, I have seen myself sacrificing you in a dream. What do you think?' He said, 'Father, do as you are commanded and, God willing, you will find me steadfast.'* (al-Saffat: 102)**

³⁶² M. M. al-Zuhaili, p. 149.



Ismael continued to grow until he reached an age in which he was able to work. He became the greatly beloved son of his parents, and this love increased with the days and grew over the years. One day, his father saw, in a dream, that he was slaughtering his son. This was now another trial from Allah Almighty. He already passed the test of smashing idols and being thrown into the fire, maintain exceptional trust in Allah. these were somewhat clear trials, because their idols were false gods that needed to be exposed, and the punishment that resulted was part of the patience required by all callers to Allah.

He also passed the trial of the migration, leaving his hometown, and facing the tyrant of Egypt. But it was now time for a different type of test in which Allah revealed that Ibrahim should slaughter his son. The wisdom behind this test, as mentioned by Imam Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyah, is that the first child is always most beloved to the parents. So when Ibrahim prayed for a child, he became attached to him, taking up part of his heart. However, Ibrahim is the close friend (*khalil*) of Allah, and this means that his heart should be entirely devoted to Allah alone. So to test the strength of this love for Allah and submission to Him, Ibrahim was tested with this great trial.

So when Ibrahim went ahead to slaughter his son, it became clear that the love of Allah in his heart was far greater than his love for his son. Ibrahim had passed the test and Allah replaced him with a great ram for sacrifice instead. So we can see throughout that the aim was never for Ibrahim to slaughter Ismael, since Allah did not allow that to happen. The aim was only for Ibrahim slaughter his added love for his son that could have impacted his rank with Allah.

‘When the boy was old enough to work with his father, Ibrahim said, ‘My son, I have seen myself sacrificing you in a dream. What do you think?’

Ibrahim, distanced from his family and homeland, having reached old age with years of hoping for a child, is finally gifted what he wanted. As this boy that he loves so much begins to grow and mature, and he has barely been able to spend the time that he hoped for with his only child. Suddenly, he sees a divinely revealed dream in which he sees himself slaughtering his son, knowing that it is a sign from Allah to sacrifice.

So what happened? He does not hesitate one moment. The only feeling he has is the feeling of submission to Allah and contentment, without asking any questions.

‘When the boy was old enough to work with his father, Ibrahim said, ‘My son, I have seen myself sacrificing you in a dream. What do you think?’ He says these words with total control and awareness of the task that lies ahead of him. The words of a believer that is not shaken by the severity of the moment. The matter is serious. He is not being told to send his only son to participate in a battle or some other task that could cause his death. He is being told to handle slaughtering his only child by himself with his own two hands. Despite that, he responded the way he did, even consulting his believing son, so that he only goes ahead with fulfilling the task, while he too has submitted to Allah’s command. He wanted a righteous response for his son, and this is exactly what his son showed.

‘When the boy was old enough to work with his father.’

This verse shows that Ismael was accompanying his father and working with him. This has a great impact in breaking possible barriers that can exist between fathers and sons. The son feels closer to his father, and vice versa. He is thus more likely to consult him at times difficulty and disclose his feelings to him. In front of us is a personality that draws the lines of proper fatherhood and nurturing with teenage sons, which is such a critical phase. It is a risky at age at which fathers should be close to their children; something that can only be done through companionship and good natural interaction.

Ismael became a young wise man, working with his father to call to Allah, guide mankind, and in general affairs of life.

Ibrahim said, ‘My son, I see myself sacrificing you in a dream. What do you think?’

Ibrahim addresses his son beautifully, showing him that he is not doing this to be rough or harsh, but only because it is the will of his Lord. This teaches us to always word things appropriately to prepare people mentally for major topics that we are about to disclose or discuss with them. Shaykh Abd al-Fattah Abu Ghuddah said: ‘If you have to mention something undesirable, a great calamity, or the death of a friend or relative, or something like that, it is appropriate for you to mentally prepare the listener, to reduce

the severity of the impact of what happened. So when informing of someone's death for instance, you say: 'I was informed that so-and-so became extremely ill, and his condition worsened. I heard that he has passed away, may Allah have mercy on him.'³⁶³

The present tense is used by Ibrahim, 'I see myself', which implies that this vision was one that Ibrahim saw more than once, as stated by al-Baydawi and al-Alusi. It is narrated that Muqatil said: 'Ibrahim saw the vision for three consecutive days.' Regardless of the number of times, the present tense implies repetition. It also shows that this was a clear dream, so much that it is like seeing it right now in the present.

The dreams of prophets are a form of revelation and therefore true. Their eyes sleep when they sleep, but their hearts remain awake as mentioned in the hadith of Anas ibn Malik who said in the story of the Isra and Mi'raj: 'The prophet's eyes were asleep, but not his heart. And this is the case with the prophets; their eyes sleep, but their hearts do not.'³⁶⁴

Aisha said: 'The Prophet would not pray more than eleven units (rak'as) of prayer, whether inside or outside Ramadan. He would pray four units, and do not ask about how long and excellent they are. Then he would pray another four units, and do not ask about how long and excellent they are. Then he would pray three units. I asked him, 'O messenger of Allah, do you sleep before praying the witr prayer?' He replied: 'My eyes sleep, but my heart does not.'³⁶⁵

Being tested through a dream is even more challenging, but it showed the sound faith and greatness of Ibrahim (peace be upon him).

'What do you think?' He said, 'Father, do as you are commanded.'

Ibrahim presented the matter to his son and consulted him, although this was a command of Allah which he had to implement. That is because consultation makes it easier for him to accept the matter and submit to Allah's will. It also informs Ibrahim the extent to which his son is following Allah's *shari'ah*, shows Ibrahim's confidence in his own son's judgment and discipline, and gives comfort to Ibrahim that his son will support him in implementing Allah's command. Ibrahim therefore shows good conduct

³⁶³ Adab al-Kalam, p. 327.

³⁶⁴ Bukhari (No: 7517).

³⁶⁵ Bukhari (No: 3569).

and manners by presenting the matter to his son in the form of consulting as opposed to forcing. In the end, everything that they hoped for occurred.

Despite Ismael's young age, he did not hesitate to respectfully encourage his father to obey Allah's command. He knew that the dream of prophet's is true and that this was a divine vision. Ismael said, 'God willing, you will find me steadfast.' He did not attribute the strength and patience to himself or his own discipline, but rather was clear about referring it to Allah, and that nothing can be attained without His will and help.

This dialogue between these two great prophets shows their exceptional level of respect, noble manners, and total confidence in Allah's will and command.

7. Al-Saffat 103

Allah, Most High, said:

***'When they had both submitted to God, and he had laid his son down on his forehead. We called out to him, 'O Ibrahim, you have fulfilled the dream.' This is how We reward those who do good (the muhsinin). This was truly a revealing test.'* (al-Saffat: 103-106)**

Ibrahim was prepared to slaughter his son, putting everything in place, certain that this is a divine command. His son too was certain that what they are doing is correct. They submitted to Allah's command, despite all the possible whispers of Satan. After all, it was just a dream, and dreams do not need to be taken seriously. He only saw himself slaughtering his son in a dream, it was not a direct command from Allah. furthermore, how could Allah command anyone to commit such a major sin and kill their own child. This is surely a false dream, not a command from Allah. This whispering from the devil in the ears of Ibrahim, Ismael, and Hajar was constant. However, she stoned him seven times, for she knew that her husband only works within the boundaries of Allah's command.

The throwing of the stones repeatedly is a symbol for stoning one of the greatest sources of evil and sin, that is Iblis. This beautiful symbol re-occurs each year when the pilgrims come close to completing their rituals of Hajj, testifying that they will purify themselves, abstain from all the plots and traps of this source of evil, and keep away from sin.

So with great faith and patience, Ibrahim and Ismael fully submitted to Allah's command, and Ismael was turned on his face, with nothing left to do, but to slaughter him. It was at that stage that they had completed Allah's will.

It is reported that Ibn Abbas said:

When Ibrahim decided to slaughter his son and turned him on his side, the son said: 'O father, tighten me up, so that I will not be disturbed, and hold your clothes together so that none of my blood spills on you, thus saddening my mother when she sees it. Sharpen your blade and be quick to cut my throat, so that death is easier for me.' So Ibrahim said: 'What a noble servant you are, my son, when it comes to the command of God.'

Then he held him to his chest, kissed him, and bid him farewell. He then passed the knife over his neck, but the knife did not cut. The One who took away the ability of burning from the fire into which Ibrahim was thrown into, took away the ability of cutting from the knife that Ibrahim passed over the neck of his son Ismail. So Ismail said: 'Father, turn me on my face, because if you look at me, your mercy for me may prevent you from God's command. So Ibrahim did so, then again ran the knife over the neck of his obedient son, but again the blade did not cut.

What mattered in this incident was that the trial of submission and total obedience to Allah had been passed. There was therefore no need for the sacrifice to take place, as Allah does not want to torture His servants through trials, but only for them to be firmly patient and put Allah before anything else. This is exactly what Ibrahim and Ismael did.

***'We called out to him, 'O Ibrahim, you have fulfilled the dream.' This is how We reward those who do good (the muhsinin). This was truly a revealing test.'* (al-Saffat: 104-105)**

Ibrahim fulfilled the command. Allah wanted him to place nothing before Allah, not even his beloved only child. This is how Allah rewards his chosen servants by testing them with such great trials, and granting them the ability to fulfil Allah's command. This then raises their station in this life and the next, thus earning the greatest reward. That is what Ibrahim and Ismael deserved, because they had attained the highest level of faith, the level of ihsan (excellence), hence the Arabic word used is, *muhsinin* (those who do good).

So once again, Ibrahim showed us how Allah's promise is manifested. 'However, is mindful of Allah, will be given a way out by Him.' (al-Talaq: 2)

'This was truly a revealing test.'

Allah explained that this was truly a great test, to be tested with the most beloved person to you. Despite this, Ibrahim succeeded, and allowed nothing to get in the way of obeying his Lord. This revealed Ibrahim's perfect submission and love for Allah, showing him worthy of being Allah's close friend (*khalil*).

In this test, there is a story and a lesson for every believer, because every believer must be tested and be put in a difficult circumstances with difficult choices to make. This is to show his faith, his obedience, his love, his piety, and his fear of Allah. If he prefers God's pleasure over the world, he succeeds and the world comes to him wilfully or reluctantly.

Ibn Hibban narrated from Aisha that she said: The Messenger of Allah (may God's prayers and peace be upon him) said: 'Whoever seeks Allah's pleasure despite the wrath of people, Allah will be pleased with him and make people pleased with him. While the one who seeks people's satisfaction despite Allah's wrath, Allah will be angry with him and make the people dissatisfied with him.'³⁶⁶

8. Al-Saffat 107

Allah, Most High, said:

***'We ransomed his son with a great sacrifice.'* (al-Saffat: 107)**

Imam Ahmad narrated from Ibn Abbas that he said:

'When Ibrahim was commanded to perform the pilgrimage, Satan appeared before him at the place of Sa'y and raced him, but Ibrahim beat him. Then Jibril took him to Jamrat al-Aqabah, where Satan appeared again, so Ibrahim threw seven stones at him, until he went. He then appeared again at the middle Jamarat at which Ibrahim again threw seven stones at him. Then when he turned Ismael on his forehead as Ismael was wearing white clothes, so Ismael said: 'Father, take this off, and use it to cover my body with when I die, for I do not have any other clothes.' When Ibrahim was

³⁶⁶ Ibn Hibban (No: 716).

about to do that, he was called from behind, ‘O Ibrahim, you have fulfilled the dream.’ Ibrahim turned to see a great ram with horns for sacrifice.³⁶⁷

It is also narrated that Ibn Abbas said regarding Allah’s statement, ‘We ransomed him with a great sacrifice’:

‘A ram came to him from Jannah that had grazed for forty years. Ibrahim sent his son to track this ram who went to the first Jamrah at which he threw seven stones at it before it got away. He caught up with him at the greater Jamrah and threw seven stones. He then took it and slaughtered it at Mina. By Allah, at the beginning of Islam, the head of the ram was still hanging by its horns on the drainpipe of the Ka’bah and it had dried up.’³⁶⁸

The sunnah of sacrifice then continued on Eid al-Adha as a reminder for this great event that shows the meaning of true faith, the beauty of obedience, and the greatness of submission. This event is one the Muslims commemorate to remember its father Ibrahim whose religion we follow. We have inherited his lineage and his faith. It is to understand the nature of sound faith upon which this religion is built, and to know that submission to Allah’s will is the essence of this life.

There are different views describing this ram, most scholars say that it was a big white ram with horns. Mujahid said: ‘Because it will definitely be accepted.’ Other said: ‘because it came from Allah.’ Others said: ‘It did not come from any lineage, but was created from nothing.’³⁶⁹

Many other narrations are reported in this regard, but they need to be studied thoroughly according to the principles of the Muhaddithin. Imam Abu Hanifa used this verse as a proof to say that whoever made an oath that he will slaughter his son, must sacrifice a sheep.

Shaykh al-Sa’di added that this sacrifice was described as being great, because of the high status of Ismael that it ransomed, because it involved such a great act of worship, and because this became a sunnah until the Day of Judgment.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁷ Musnad Ahmad (No: 2794).

³⁶⁸ Tafsir Ibn Jarir (19/603).

³⁶⁹ Sindi, p. 212.

³⁷⁰ Tafsir al-Sa’di, p. 1477.

Who is the Sacrificed Son?

There is no doubt that Ismael was the son that Ibrahim was commanded to sacrifice. The statements of many scholars support this, as well as many proofs, some that we have already mentioned:

1. The saying of the bedouin to the prophet, ‘O son of the two slaughtered ones.’ And the Prophet confirmed this statement. Meaning Ismael and Abdullah his father.
2. Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal said: ‘The correct view is that Ismael is the sacrifice, as the majority of the *salaf* (early) and *khalaf* (later) scholars said.’
3. Ibn Taymiyah said that there is no hesitation that Ismael was the sacrifice because the clear proofs from the Qur’an and Sunnah support this. He said that this is the view of the majority of scholars.
4. The Qur’an in its context and order of verses is a sufficient proof for the fact that Ismael was the sacrifice. This is further supported by the prophetic reports and some of the biblical transmissions. These proofs put together are enough to say with certainty that Ismael was the son that Ibrahim was commanded to sacrifice. As Ibn Kathir said: ‘This is without doubt the correct view.’
5. Imam Ibn al-Qayyim said that there are more than twenty reasons that show that the claim that Isaac was the sacrifice is false. And that Ismael being the sacrifice is the correct view held by the scholars of the companions, the tabi’in, and those that came after them.³⁷¹
6. Al-Biqā’i said: ‘This son was Ismael without doubt, for a number of reasons. The fact that he was described as *halim* (forbearing), while Isaac was described as being knowledgeable in Surat al-Hijr. Secondly, because this du’a was before the hijrah when Ibrahim was younger and hoping for a child. Ismael was then given to him. Furthermore, Ismael was the one in Makkah, the place the slaughter took place, which led to this being a continued part of the rituals of Hajj in Mina, just as the actions of his mother in Makkah was when he was close to dying of thirst. On the other hand, the good news of Isaac was unexpected, for he had reached old age and so had his

³⁷¹ Zad al-Ma’ad (1/71).

wife, hence he questioned the glad tidings for him. It is also not reported that Isaac ever left his mother on Jerusalem.

It should be noted that this in no way reduces the great status of Isaac (peace be upon him), as Allah attributed knowledge, prophethood, and blessing to Isaac, and made him one of his great chosen servants. Allah, Most High, said: ‘Remember Our servants Ibrahim, Isaac, and Jacob, all men of strength and vision. We caused them to be devoted to Us through their sincere remembrance of the Final Home. In Our sight they are truly among the chosen and the finest.’ (Saad: 45-47)

The Qur’an Talks About Ismael

The name of Ismael is repeated twelve times in the Qur’an over eight different chapters: al-Baqarah, al-Imran, al-Nisa, al-An’am, Ibrahim, Maryam, al-Anbiya, and Saad. His name is usually mentioned alongside the names of other prophets from the children of Ibrahim, Isaac, Jacob, Dawud, Sulaiman, Yusuf, Musa, Harun, Zakariyyah, Yahya, Isa, Ilyas, al-Yasa’, Yunus, and Lut. Before them Nuh too (peace be upon them all). The ones mentioned in this set of verses are eighteen prophets altogether.

In Surat Ibrahim, his name is mentioned once in verse 39, which mentions Ibrahim’s thanks and gratitude to Allah for being gifted Ismael and Isaac at old age. In Surat Maryam his name is also mentioned once, when he was praised for his honesty, keeping to promises, chosen to be a prophet and messenger, and for commanding his family to establish prayer and give zakat. He was someone who Allah was pleased with. Allah said:

‘Mention too, in the Book, the story of Ishmael. He was true to his promise, a messenger and a prophet. He commanded his household to pray and give alms (zakat), and his Lord was well pleased with him.’ (Maryam: 54-55)

Allah thus praised him for a number of traits:

- **Truthfulness and Being True to His Promise**

Imam al-Tabari said in his commentary of this verse: ‘Allah says to His prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), ‘Mention, O Muhammad, in the Book, Ismael son of Ibrahim, and relate his story. He would never break

his promises. If he promised his Lord or any person something, he would fulfil his promise.³⁷²

One of the greatest promises that he fulfilled was his patience in being slaughtered, when he said, ‘You will find me, by Allah’s will, amongst the patient.’ He kept to his promise as Allah informed us. He also fulfilled his promise of helping his father to build the Ka’bah, when Ibrahim said: ‘O Ismael, your Lord has commanded me to build a house.’ He replied: ‘Obey your Lord.’ He said: ‘He has commanded that you help me.’ He replied: ‘I will do so then.’ As Allah related to us in His Book, that is what he did: ‘When Ibrahim and Ismael raised the foundations of the House.’ (al-Baqarah: 127)

This praiseworthy trait is one that all prophets have. But Ismael was specifically mentioned as having it, because he was known for it and it manifested in him in some of the greatest and most severe situations.

- **His Concern for Da’wah and Reform (*Islah*)**

He began by teaching his own household, calling them to establish prayer (which involves sincerity to the Creator) and to give zakat (which involves kindness to the creation). He thus completed himself and others, starting with those closest to him, because they are most worthy and a priority, so that they can be a good example for others. Allah similarly commanded His prophet with the same: ‘Command your family to pray, and be patient in doing so. We do not ask you for provision, but the final victory is for the people of taqwa.’ (Taha: 132). He also commanded the believers generally to do the same:

‘Believers, guard yourselves and your families against a Fire fuelled by people and stones, over which stand angels, stern and strong; angels who never disobey God’s commands to them, but do as they are ordered.’ (al-Tahrim: 6)

This way, Ismael combined between righteousness and reform, calling people to Allah, starting with his household, then the believers at large.

- **Allah Being Pleased With Him**

Since Ismael was so keen and concerned about Allah being pleased with him, Allah was pleased with him and made him one of his close chosen

³⁷² Tafsir al-Tabari (15/561)

servants and allies. Al-Razi said: ‘This is the highest form of praise, because it shows that he is successful and has attained the highest levels in all his worship.’³⁷³

- **Patience**

His name was mentioned in Surat al-Anbiya in verse 85 alongside Idris and Dhul Kifl. Allah said: ‘And Ismael, Idris, and Dhul Kifl, all were from the patient. We entered them into Our mercy. They were from the righteous.’ (al-Anbiya: 85-86). He was described as being patient, along with other prophets. Patience means to discipline oneself to do the things that it may not like and to take harm for the sake of Allah. To be patient upon doing good, patient in abstaining from sin, and to be patient when faced with Allah’s painful decree. These prophets had all these types of patience, hence deserved the title ‘patient.’

- **Being From the Best**

Allah Almighty testified, in His Book, that Ismael was one of the greatest, saying: ‘Mention in the Book: Ismael, al-Yasa’, and Dhul Kifl. All of them were from the best.’ (Saad: 48). That is, they were free from the traits of evil. Allah commanded His messenger to remember them with good and praise them, because they were from the best people that Allah chose, blessing them with the best traits and noble qualities.

- **A Prophet and Messenger**

Allah, Most High, said: ‘Mention in the Book, Ismael. He was true to his promise, a prophet and messenger.’ (Maryam: 54). Allah sent him to the tribe of Jurhum, and his message to them was the same message as his father’s. This shows that Allah chose Ismael to be a messenger to the people that he was living amongst in Makkah. This itself shows the greatness of Ismael, because Allah only chooses the most competent to deliver His message. ‘Allah knows where to place His message.’ (al-An’am: 124)

Through studying the Qur’an, it becomes clear that it is possible for more than one messenger to be sent to different places at the same time, such as the case with Ibrahim, Ismael, and Lut. Lut was also a messenger, as Allah said, ‘And Lut was one of the messengers.’ (al-Saffat: 33). Ibrahim was in one place and Lut in another, as Allah tell us:

³⁷³ Tafsir al-Razi (21/233).

When Our messengers brought the good news [of the birth of a son] to Ibrahim, they told him, ‘We are about to destroy the people of that town. They are wrongdoers.’ Ibrahim said, ‘But Lut lives there.’ They answered, ‘We know well who lives there. We shall save him and his household, except for his wife; she will be with those who stay behind.’ (al-Ankabut: 31-32)

In fact, it is possible for there to be more than one messenger in the same place, as we see with Musa and Harun. Allah said: ‘Go and tell him, ‘We are your Lord’s messengers, so send the Children of Israel with us and do not oppress them. We have brought you a sign from your Lord. Peace be upon whoever follows the right guidance.’ (Taha: 47)

Additionally, the content of Ismael’s message is the same as that of Ibrahim; calling to the one oneness of Allah, worshipping Him alone, and teaching people proper worship, noble manners, and good treatment.

- **Forbearance**

‘We gave him the good news of a forbearing boy.’ (al-Saffat: 101). This means that he was patient, calm, and disciplined, all traits of those who are wise.

- **Strength and Firm Resolve**

We can see from his story that Ismael was a strong man, both physically, mentally, and spiritually. ‘When Ibrahim and Ismael raised the foundations of the House (the Ka’bah).’ (al-Baqarah: 127). This no doubt requires physical strength. He was also known for being a good archer and spiritually strong. Let alone the strength of his faith and creed when he said, ‘Father do as you have been commanded. You will find me, by Allah’s will amongst the patient.’

- **One of Allah’s Preferred and Chosen Servants**

Allah, Most High, informed us that Ismael, as well as other prophets and messengers, were preferred over the rest of creation. ‘Ishmael, Al-Yasa, Jonah, and Lot. We favoured each one of them over other people.’ (al-An’am: 86). Ismael was given this preference from a number of angles:

- His faith and sound belief
- His obedience to Allah
- Being a prophet and messenger

- His prophetic lineage
- His is the grandfather of the seal of the prophets and messengers, Muhammad.

These are just some of the ways in which Allah preferred him over mankind.

- **A Gift from Allah**

Allah, Most High, said: ‘All praise is for Allah who has blessed me with Ismael and Isaac in my old age. My Lord is indeed the Hearer of [all] prayers.’ (Ibrahim: 39). This was Allah’s gift to Ibrahim after his continued sincere du’a, as Allah related: ‘He said, ‘I will go to my Lord: He is sure to guide me. Lord, grant me a righteous son.’ So We gave him good news of a forbearing son.’ (al-Saffat: 99-101)

Whoever extensively reads and contemplates the Quranic verses will notice many excellent qualities that Ismael has been described with.

Prophet Ismael in Hadith Literature

We have already mentioned the story of Ibrahim with the King of Egypt, his story with Hajar and taking her to Makkah, his visit to Hajar and her son, the faith that Hajar maintained, and the Prophet’s reminder to treat the people of Egypt well. We mentioned the story of Zamzam, and the building of the Ka’bah by Ibrahim and Ismael.

We have other sound prophetic narrations that mentioned Ibrahim, including:

a. Ibrahim seeks refuge in Allah for his sons Ismael and Isaac.

Ibn Abbas narrates that the Prophet used to seek refuge with Allah for Al-Hasan and Al-Husain and say: ‘Your forefather (i.e. Ibrahim) used to seek refuge with Allah for Ishmael and Isaac by reciting the following: ‘O Allah! I seek refuge with Your Perfect Words from every devil, any poisonous pests, and from every evil, harmful, envious eye.’³⁷⁴

أعوذ بكلماتِ الله التَّامَّةِ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْطَانٍ وَهَامَّةٍ وَمِنْ كُلِّ عَيْنٍ لَامَّةٍ

³⁷⁴ Bukhari (No: 3371).

b. Ismael was an excellent archer

Salamah ibn al-Akwa' said: 'The Prophet passed by some people of the tribe of Bani Aslam who were practicing archery. The Prophet said, 'O Children of Ismael, shoot, as your father Ismael was a great archer. Keep on throwing arrows and I am with Bani so-and-so. So one of the parties ceased throwing. Allah's Messenger said, 'Why do you not throw?' They replied, 'How can we throw when you are on their side?' So the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, 'Throw, and I am with all of you.'³⁷⁵

c. Ismael was the first to speak pure Arabic

In the long hadith mentioned earlier narrated by Ibn Abbas in which the tribe of Jurhum came to settle in Makkah, so he mixed with them and learnt Arabic from them.

Ali ibn Abi Talib also narrated that the Prophet said: 'The first spoke with pure Arabic was Ismael when he was fourteen years old.'³⁷⁶

Ibn Hajar said in Fath al-Bari: 'This means he was the first relatively speaking, not entirely. He was the first to speak the clear eloquent Arabic, which Allah inspired him to speak with, beyond the foundations of the Arabic language that he originally learnt from the tribe of Jurhum.'³⁷⁷

Al-Daylami said: 'Allah made Ismael speak with it.'

The author of al-Misbah said: 'It is said *al-arab al-aribah* are the ones that spoke Arabic in the language of Ya'rib ibn Qahtan, which is the original ancient Arabic. While *al-arab al-musta'ribah* are the Arabs who spoke the language of Ismael the son of Ibrahim (peace be upon them). This is the language of the people of Hijaz and its surroundings.'³⁷⁸

d. Kinanah are From the Descendants of Ismael

Wathilah ibn al-Asqa' narrated that the Prophet said: 'Allah chose Ismael from the children of Ibrahim; He chose Kinanah from the children of Ismael; He chose Quraish from Kinanah; He chose Bani Hashim from Quraish; and he chose me from Bani Hashim.'

³⁷⁵ Bukhari (No: 2899).

³⁷⁶ There is some debate regarding this matter, due to the status of the authenticity of this Hadith and other reports on this matter, and Allah knows best. (translator)

³⁷⁷ Fath al-Bari (6/403).

³⁷⁸ Fayd al-Qadir (3/92).

e. Ibrahim and Ismael Never Drew Superstitious Lots

Ibn `Abbas said: ‘When Allah’s Messenger (peace be upon him) came to Mecca, he refused to enter the Ka’bah with idols in it. He ordered that the idols be taken out. So they were taken out. The people took out images of Ibrahim and Ishmael holding *azlam* (superstitious lots) in their hands. Allah’s Messenger said, ‘May Allah curse these people. By Allah, both Ibrahim and Ishmael never used these *azlam*.’ Then he entered the Ka’bah and said Takbir at its corners but did not pray in it.³⁷⁹

Ismael in the Books of History

Ismael the son of Ibrahim was born in Palestine approximately in the year 1794 BC, most likely in an area called Bi’r al-Sabu’. His father was eighty six years old and had already been in Palestine for around ten years before Ismael was born. He had no children before that, so prayed to Allah to grant him children. Allah granted him his wish, so Ismael was Ibrahim’s eldest child. He was also the son that Allah commanded Ibrahim to slaughter. At that time he was still an only child, before Isaac was born.

The mother of Ismael is Hajar; an Egyptian woman who lived in the palace of one of the Pharaoh’s of Egypt, before she was gifted to Sarah in the story we mentioned earlier. Ibrahim travelled with her to Palestine and she gave birth to Ismael. He was originally raised in Palestine, but Ibrahim then took Hajar and Ismael to settle in Makkah. Some Arab tribes then came to Makkah and settled there too.

When Ismael grew a little older, he married a woman whose name is not clear. Some said it was Umarah bint Sa’d ibn Usamah, other said, Juda bint Sa’d, others said, ‘Huba bint As’ad ibn Amlaq, and others said, Riba or Maribah. Either way, Ismael eventually divorced her and married another woman called Ra’lah bint Mudad ibn Amr al-Jurhumi. She stayed with him and gave birth to twelve sons and one daughter; they are today the fathers of the Arabs, for Ismael is the grandfather of the Arabs. Some added that he married a third woman called Sama bint Muhalhal ibn Sa’d ibn Awf.³⁸⁰

The books of history also mentioned that Ismael was the first to speak eloquent Arabic, after he had learnt the language from the people of Jurhum

³⁷⁹ Bukhari (No: 1601).

³⁸⁰ ‘Alam al-Adyan, p. 308.

who settled in Makkah after him, the ‘Amaliq, and the people of Yemen, the early Arabs before Ibrahim.

When the tribe of Jurhum settled in Makkah, each household gifted Ismael with one or two sheep, until he had a herd of sheep. He was still young at that point, with the children of Jurhum. When he became a young man, he took care of his herd and would hunt, like the people who lived with him. Hajar and Ismael would regularly be visited by Ibrahim who would spend time with them and give them comfort, until the story of the sacrifice occurred and the Ka’bah was built as we mentioned earlier.

It is narrated that Ismael lived for 137 years, before he passed away and was buried next to his mother Hajar in the Hijr, by the Ka’bah.³⁸¹

Ismael stayed close to his father whenever he did stay in Makkah, and the divine revelation sent to Ismael was connected to the one sent to Ibrahim. Some of the legislation that applied to them both included: hijrah, polygyny, the mother’s custody, prayer, circumcision, building the Ka’bah, *tawaf*, *i’tikaf*, establishing safety in Makkah, Hajj rituals, the test of slaughter, consultation, obeying Allah and submitting to Him, slaughter and sacrifice, walking between Safa and Marwa, throwing the jamarat, and purifying the sacred mosque. Some of these will be expanded on a little later by the will of Allah.

After building the honourable Ka’bah and raising its foundations by Ibrahim and Ismail, peace be upon them, Ismail stayed with his mother in Mecca, while would return repeatedly to Jerusalem and Palestine, to his wife Sarah, then later his son Isaac too.

As for Ismail, he was a permanent resident of Makkah and he was the first to take charge of the affairs of the Sacred House of God. After his death his son Nabet took over its affairs, then his uncles from Bani Jurhum. Their king Mudad ibn Amr was the first to take charge of the House, then his son Al-Harith, then Amr ibn Al-Harith. Then its authority continued in Bani Jurhum as long as they adhered to the pure religion of Islam. They venerated Makkah and its Sacred House, did not allow any transgression or injustice. The Arabs did not shed blood in it, did not cut trees or expel animals. They did not kill anyone and the entire Haram was secure and safe. However, the rulers of the Ka’bah from Jurhum could not maintain

³⁸¹ Ibid, p. 310.

taking proper care of the Ka'bah. Rather, they transgressed, killed, spread corruption, and oppress those who visited or passed by. This continued until Allah afflicted them and many of them perished. The guardianship of the House continued with them for about 300 years, until it was taken by the Amalekites under the leadership of Al-Sumaidi' ibn Huber after they defeated Jurhum. The Amalekites then raised the building of the Ka'bah, making it bigger than what it was when first built by Ibrahim.

The guardianship of the Ka'bah then moved to Iyad ibn Nizar ibn Ma'ad. Many wars took place between Mudar ibn Nizar and Iyad, and victory was for Mudar who banished Iyad and those with him in Makkah towards Iraq. Its guardianship then went to Khuza'ah, then Qusay ibn Kilab, then eventually to Quraish, specifically Bani Abd al-Dar and Bani Abd Manaf. Then they agreed that providing food and drink for the pilgrims would be taken care of by Bani Abd Manaf and the guardianship and cloak would be under the care of Bani Abd al-Dar, and it continued like this for a long time.

Then when the prophet conquered Makkah, the provision for the pilgrims was under the authority of al-Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib and Bani Abd Manaf, at Zamzam. The key of the Ka'bah was with Uthman ibn Abi Talhah, who was from Ban Abd al-Dar. The Prophet requested it from him to enter the Ka'bah, destroy the idols, and pray in it. He also took out the Maqam of Ibrahim. Allah, Most High, revealed: 'Allah commands you to deliver trust to their owners.' (al-Nisa: 58). So the Prophet called Uthman ibn Abi Talhah and his cousin Shaybah ibn Abi Talhah and gave them the key and guardianship of the Ka'bah.³⁸²

The Prophet then said to them: 'Take it forever. None will take it off you except a transgressor.' The key thus remained in the hands of Bani Shaybah until this day.

The great scholar, Sayid Sulaiman al-Nadwi, in his book, *Tarikh Ard al-Qur'an* (The History of the Land) of the Qur'an, spoke about the children of Hajar and Ismael, his children, and the tribes that branched from Ismael, such as Al Ghassan, al-Aws, and al-Khazraj from the Ansar, and Quraish and its roots. Whoever wants more detail on this topic should refer to this book.

³⁸² Tafsir al-Qurtubi (6/423).

The First Person to Corrupt the Religion of Ismael

Abu Hurayra said that he heard the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) say to Aktham ibn al-Jawn al-Khuza'i: 'O Aktham, I saw Amr ibn Luhay ibn Qama'ah ibn Khindif dragging his intestines in the Fire. I have not seen anyone resemble him as much as you do. Aktham said: 'Perhaps my resembling him will harm me O messenger of Allah?' The Prophet said: 'No. you are a believer and he is a disbeliever. He was the first to change the religion of Ismael. He placed idols, introduced *bahirah*, *sa'ibah*, *wasilah*, and *al-hami* (these are all different practices through which they sacrificed animals for their idols).'³⁸³

9. Al-Saffat 107-113

Allah, Most High, said:

'And We let him be praised by later generations: 'Peace be upon Ibrahim!' This is how We reward those who do good: truly he was one of Our faithful servants. We gave Ibrahim the good news of Isaac; a prophet and a righteous man. We blessed him and Isaac as well. Some of their descendants did good, while others clearly wronged themselves.'
(al-Saffat: 108-113)

Ibrahim continues to be mentioned with praise throughout the ages, since his time. He is the father of the prophets and a leader worth an entire nation himself. He is the father of this Muslim nation in particular, since it is the one that inherited his religion. Allah has obliged this nation to lead humanity through the religion of Ibrahim.

Shaykh Mustafa al-Adawi said: 'We let Ibrahim be praised by later nations. Every nation that came after him praised him. Even the Jews and Christians attribute themselves to him. But Allah said: 'Ibrahim was not a Jew, nor a Christian, but he was a pure Muslim, and he was not an idolator.' (al-Imran: 67)

Perhaps this praise, and Allah knows best, is Allah accepting the prayer of Ibrahim when he said: 'Bless me with honourable mention among later generations.' (al-Shu'ara: 84). Another manifestation of this praise is his constant noble mention in the Qur'an. Additionally, we always mention his

³⁸³ Musnad al-Bazzar (No: 8991)



name in every single prayer and pray that Allah blesses him and his family. We do the same in our morning and evening supplications (*adhkar*).³⁸⁴

‘Peace be upon Ibrahim! This is how We reward those who do good.’

Ibrahim is most worthy of this prayer, due to his goodness in all areas of life. His whole life revolved around pleasing and obeying Allah, fulfilling the rights of his Creator and the rights of creation. So not only do we send peace and blessings upon him in our daily prayers, but Allah has mentioned His peace and honourable greeting to Ibrahim in the Qur’an that we recite until the Day of Judgment.

‘Truly he was one of Our faithful servants. We gave Ibrahim the good news of Isaac; a prophet and a righteous man. We blessed him and Isaac as well. Some of their descendants did good, while others clearly wronged themselves.’

This is the type of reward that Allah has promised every believer. He was then given the good news of another son, Isaac, and told that his son will be a blessed prophet and righteous man. They were blessed in their knowledge, their deeds, and their offspring. So three great nations arose from the offspring of Ibrahim. The Arabs from the children of Ismael, the Children of Israel (Jacob), and the Romans from the children of Isaac. However, some of their descendants did good, while others clearly wronged themselves, even to the extent of disbelief. This is just to clarify that just because Allah blessed Ibrahim and his children, this does not negate that some of his descendants did not follow in his footsteps.

³⁸⁴ Adawi, M. The Stories of the Prophets (2/252).

Chapter 3

Ibrahim's Discussion with the Tyrant King



Section 1: Ibrahim's Discussion with the Tyrant King and Asking Him How He Brings Life to the Dead.

Section 2: The Story of Ibrahim in Surat al-Tawbah, al-Zukhruf, and al-Mumtahinah.

Section 3: Ibrahim's Discussion with the Angles.

Section 1:

Ibrahim's Discussion with the Tyrant King and Asking Him How He Brings Life to the Dead.

Allah sent Ibrahim to his people in Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq and parts of some bordering countries). He called them to pure monotheism and warned them against the widespread practices of worshipping idols, stars, and planets. However, they belied and rejected him. Despite that, he continued to deliver the message, using a variety of methods, to take them out of darkness into light.

Ibrahim was extremely successful in discussing with his people and debating them, making him a case worthy of study by all researchers, preachers, and reformers, especially since Allah commanded us to follow his guidance and his ways, saying: 'Who but a fool would forsake the religion of Ibrahim? We have chosen him in this world and he will rank among the righteous in the Hereafter.' (al-Baqarah: 130)

In this chapter, we clarify Ibrahim's dialogue with the king on bringing life to the dead.

1. Ibrahim's Dialogue With the King on Bringing Life to the Dead.

'[Prophet], have you not seen the man who disputed with Ibrahim about his Lord, because God had given him power to rule? When Ibrahim said, 'It is my Lord who gives life and death,' he said, 'I too give life and death.' So Ibrahim said, 'God brings the sun from the east; so bring it from the west.' The disbeliever was dumbfounded. God does not guide those who do evil.' (al-Baqarah: 258)

1. The Relevance of this Verse to the One Before it

When Allah explained in the verse before this one that He is the ally of the believers, taking them from darkness to light, and that the *taghut* is the ally of the disbelievers, who take them from light to darkness, leading them into eternal Hellfire. As Allah said:

‘God is the ally of those who believe: He brings them out of the depths of darkness and into the light. As for the disbelievers, their allies are the *ta-ghut* (the devil or false gods) who take them from the light into the depths of darkness, they are the inhabitants of the Fire, and there they will remain.’ (al-Baqarah: 257)

Allah then showed us an example of His support for His allies in the story of the one who disputed with Ibrahim. It is like He said, look at how Ibrahim, because he was an ally of Allah, was led to arguments and statements that were guided, protecting him from doubts that are thrown at him. He thus remains upon the light of truth from his Lord. While the disbeliever, an ally of the devil, is blinded from the truth, into the darkness of doubts, uncertainty, and falsehood.

So, after this verse that speaks about the allies of Allah, He showed examples of this in the verses that follow, beginning with the verse straight after it.

2. When Did This Dispute Take Place?

Ibrahim’s message was delivered in a gradual way. He first began with those nearest to him, such as his father, then his people. He then moved on to a wider circle of people, until eventually reaching the king, the leader of people. When he spread his message initially, he became known and his message became known, most likely having already reached the king. This was therefore the time to invite the king directly to Islam.

However, the scholars of *tafsir* have differed over exactly when this debate took place between Ibrahim and the king, whose name was Nimrod, according to three main views;

- a. Some believed that the debate took place before Ibrahim was thrown into the fire by his people. This view was held by Abu al-Su’ud and al-Zamakhshari.
- b. Ibn Jarir al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir in their commentaries argued that this occurred after Ibrahim was thrown into the fire. This view is also attributed to al-Suddi.
- c. Other scholars did not come to a conclusion on this matter and felt that it was difficult to conclude either view with certainty. These

scholars include al-Alusi, al-Razi, Abu Hayyan, al-Khazin, and al-Qurtubi.

They also differed over whether this occurred before or after the breaking of the idols. It is narrated that Muqatil and al-Rabi said it occurred before he was thrown into the fire, but after he broke the idols. While Ja'far al-Sadiq and al-Suddi are reported to have said it occurred after the event of the fire.

The Preferred Opinion

This debate took place after Ibrahim was placed into the fire and was saved from it. This is because the wording of the Qur'an implies that his being thrown into the fire was the result of breaking the idols. No verse suggests or implies that he was thrown into it due to his debate with the king. The story does not mention the king speaking to him or debating him before the verdict to burn him. The king himself was shocked to see that he was saved from the fire, as this was clearly an unnatural occurrence, so there was no point in trying to overcome him through force. Instead, he thought perhaps the best way to make Ibrahim change his mind and return to his senses is to debate him.

3. Who is This King and Where Was His Kingdom?

Who is this king that Ibrahim debated? What are the manifestations of his kingdom? What is the story of his claim to divinity? What is the name of his kingdom and his capital? How did things end for him?

These are questions that the Qur'an does not answer, nor does the Sunnah of the prophet. It is therefore one of the intentional objectives of the Qur'an to leave these things unanswered, because none of the authentic sources mention anything about them.

However, we do have detailed answers to these questions in biblical scriptures and history books. They say that the name of the king was Nimrod, the King of Babylon. Allah destroyed him through a mosquito that went into his brain through his nose and continued to agitate him, so much that he would tell someone to strike him in the head for the pain to go. There further details mentioned too.

However, we take caution with these traditions, and do not accept them with confidence. Instead, we deal with the verses of the Qur'an and



understand them the way the companions did, while remaining silent about what they remained silent about. What sufficed them also suffices us. So all we say about this king is that he was a disbeliever who claimed divinity, and was worshipped by his people. So Ibrahim went to him, debated him, and established the proof against him and silenced him.

4. The Worship of Kings and Multiple Gods in the Books of History

The books of history speak about polytheism and the worship of kings, in the past and present. They mentioned that Ibrahim's society worshipped multiple gods of different types, including idols, planets, stars, the sun, the moon, and those who worshipped Nimrod the tyrant. This is not a surprise at all, because these idolatrous societies accepted the idea of multiple gods, despite the battles that existed between these gods.

These societies are therefore filled with hundreds of gods, a god for crops, a god of war, a god of love, a god of wine, a god of rain, a god of hunting, a god of curing specific illnesses, as well as many other gods. Some worship certain gods until rivers flow, while others are worshipped so that they can be protected from their harm, and so on. Human gods also tend to have a special place in the hearts of such polytheists.

The distorted Torah claims that the tyrants are the descendants of God's children, like the tyrants claimed from ancient times to the present day. Similarly, this was claimed by the pharaohs in Egypt, the Roman emperors, the kings of Babylon, the Persians, the emperors of China, the kings of India, up until the emperors of Japan before World War II.

What is really strange is that Mao Zedong, the instigator of the atheistic communist revolution in China and its leader, said to a correspondent from the British newspaper, the Observer, in 1970 after conducting a long investigation with him: 'If there is no God, yet the people need a god to worship, then why should I not be this god? I have provided the people of China with services that no human has provided and reformed China in an unparalleled way. It is my right, then, to be worshipped by these people. Why do you criticise me for making myself a god for the people of China?'

The same situation existed nearly four thousand years ago during the time of Ibrahim (peace be upon him). Nimrod made himself a god. He was therefore stunned that one of his people, one of his servants, could stand up

and tell him that he is not a god. How dare this man deny his divinity, when all the people know it is true? If he was an ordinary man, he would probably have ordered that he be killed immediately. But this was Ibrahim, the one who was thrown into the fire and came out of it unharmed, preserved by the One, the Omnipotent. So the king was unable to kill him.

‘[Prophet], have you not seen the man who disputed with Ibrahim about his Lord, because God had given him power to rule?’

‘Have you seen’ or ‘have you not seen’ can be used to refer to literal sight with the eyes or to mean ‘have you thought about’ or ‘reflected upon’ or ‘did you hear?’ In this case it is of course not referring to literal sight, because this event occurred long before the Prophet existed. So the Prophet is being commanded to contemplate this story and see how ignorance and falsehood can spread so wide, but how the truth eventually always prevails.

It is said that this king was Nimrod, son of Canaan, son of Kush, son of Sham, son of Noah, as narrated from Mujahid and other scholars. His name is not mentioned in the verse, because his mention does not contribute towards the message being delivered. Since the Qur’an and Sunnah both do not mention his name, it is appropriate to remain silent about this matter. Perhaps the Qur’an does mention his name to almost belittle him, as well due to the fact that the aim is for people to take lessons from these stories, something that is not impacted by knowing his exact name. This way, this can be applied to every tyrant who treads the same path as this tyrant here.

This king falsely disputed Ibrahim about Allah’s attributes, while Ibrahim was calling him to the worship of the one true God.

‘Because God had given him power to rule.’

This king did not actually negate the existence of Allah altogether. Rather, he negated that Allah alone is worthy of worship and He alone controls the universe, a bit like the ignorant people of pre-Islamic Arabia who admitted that there was an All-Powerful God, yet worshipped other gods alongside Allah. He also rejected that authority and rule should be for Allah alone, but believed that it was his rule that must be enforced on earth.

The cause of his arrogance and rejection is the same reason that should have made him thankful to Allah; that is that Allah gave him power and



authority. However, power leads the ungrateful to transgress, go astray, and misguide others. They only rule, because the Owner of power gave them some power, but not to transgress. For the kings are, like all people, only servants of Allah who are obliged to follow His commands and guidance.

Another lesson we can take away from this verse is that blessings can sometimes be a cause of transgression, since this man only disobeyed Allah and oppressed because Allah gave him kingdom and power. This is why illnesses, poverty, and calamities, can sometimes be a blessing for us from Allah, because blessings, wealth, and pleasure can lead us to transgress and forget Allah, Most High.

‘When Ibrahim said, ‘It is my Lord who gives life and death,’

It seems like this was a reply to a question that the tyrant asked Ibrahim. Like Musa’s reply, when Pharaoh asked him, ‘Who is your Lord, O Musa?’ He replied, ‘our Lord is He who gave everything its [perfect] form, then guided it.’ (Taha: 50). Musa used creation and guidance to prove God’s existence. Ibrahim did the same when he said, as in Surat al-Shu’ara, ‘He is the One that created me, and He guides me.’

In this scenario, Ibrahim used causing life and death as a clear proof for Allah; a proof that is only rejected by one who’s heart is sealed. The present tense, ‘gives life and death’ is used, because it implies continuity. Allah is constantly bringing some to life and taking the life of others away.

The reason Ibrahim specifically focused on these attributes of Allah, amongst His many great attributes, glory be the Him, is that is the clearest sign of divinity. There is no life without a causer and no death without a causer. This is the reality of life; things that are dependent and not eternal, depend on something else to originate them and bring them into being. There must be someone that maintains these planets, send the winds, clouds, and rains. Someone that created these animals that live then die.

This is why Ibrahim said, ‘It is my Lord who gives life and death.’ This then leads us to knowing that He can be the only One worthy of worship. Ibrahim reminded the tyrant king of his human weakness that make him unworthy of being divine and unworthy of being worshipped, because he is unable to create life or cause death to whoever he wills.

However, this arrogant king, since he has complete ownership of his followers, he felt like he was in control of life and death too, giving and taking it from whoever he wills.

He said, ‘I too give life and death.’

He either said this out of pure arrogance or to deceive his people, or both. Some scholars mentioned that he brought to people, killed one of them and kept the other alive, to show that he can give life and death. However, it is clear that he did not cause these things. He did not bring life, but merely decided to not kill someone and to kill another. He knows that he cannot bring life or death, but he did so out of pride. How can one compare bringing life from nothing to someone who simply chooses not to kill a living person? How can you compare causing death to anyone with a word with to one who needs to use natural means to kill a living person?

Nonetheless, Ibrahim decided to challenge the king with something that is clear and visible for all to see, in the presence of all his slaves and followers.

So Ibrahim said, ‘God brings the sun from the east; so bring it from the west.’

This challenge shows Ibrahim’s sharpness and intelligence. It was not that the king’s first reply was satisfactory, but Ibrahim wanted to silence him with an argument that he would be unable to deceive his followers with.

Scholars differed: was Ibrahim moving from one argument to another or was this all part of one argument?

Al-Zamakhshari took the first view, saying: ‘A response to this was possible, but when Ibrahim heard his silly reply, he did not bother responding, but moved on to an argument which he has no hope with at all. This shows that there is no harm in moving from one argument to another.’³⁸⁵

Abu Hayyan said, in *al-Bahr al-Muhit*: ‘What al-Zamakhshari means is that Ibrahim could easily have responded to the king by asking him to bring life to the man that he had just killed. This would have completed the first argument.’³⁸⁶

³⁸⁵ Tafsir al-Zamakhshari (1/489).

³⁸⁶ (2/300).

The second view says that this is not an example of moving from one argument to another, but rather this is all part of the same point being made by Ibrahim. Ibn Kathir says: ‘When [the king] made his arrogant reply, Ibrahim said, ‘God brings the sun from the east; so bring it from the west.’ That is, if you claim to give life and death, then you are in control of creation, including humans, animals, and planets. In that case, this sun that rises every day from the east, so make it rise from the west, if you are God.’³⁸⁷

This interpretation is better than what many logicians claimed about Ibrahim moving from a proof to one that is clearer or better. This is not the case. Rather, the first point was more like a premise for the second one, both together nullify Nimrod’s claim.

Al-Biqā’i alluded to the quality of Ibrahim’s rhetorical abilities saying that Ibrahim did not get caught up debating the weak deceptive response of the king. Rather, he moved from the proof that relates to life, to one that relates to the horizon and universe, challenging him with its greatest planet. So outwardly it appears like he is moving to another argument, but in reality, he is simply affirming the first point.

Al-Alusi said: ‘If you admit that Allah brings life and death, yet misunderstood or intentionally avoided the point being made, then let us settle this with a further point, ‘God brings the sun from the east.’ So he connected the second statement to the first and developed the first point using the second one.’³⁸⁸

We can also learn from this debate that one of the roles of the messengers is to defend the truth and nullify falsehood through sound reasoning and dialogue. It also shows that a person should learn effective methods of debate and rhetoric, because they are a means to establishing the truth and overcoming falsehood.

The proofs that Ibrahim used with his opponent are that Allah causes life and death and that He controls the sun. Two natural realities and phenomena that occur on a daily basis before our eyes. Understanding them does not require extensive knowledge, nor prolonged contemplation. Allah is more merciful than to make the only means to true faith and guidance, complicated knowledge that many people do not have access to. Instead,

³⁸⁷ Tafsir Ibn Kathir (1/686).

³⁸⁸ Ruh al-Ma’ani (3/19).

Allah has made the truth visible through basic understanding and use of reason to ponder truths that all people have equal access to, as it fits with their nature. Truths than can only be ignored by one who is completely blind or too arrogant to accept.

The matter of belief is the same as every vital matter upon which human life depends. Living beings have a natural instinct to eat, drink, breathe, and reproduce. These are not things that can only be attained through extensive research and years of experience, otherwise living beings are destined for destruction. Faith is as vital to man as food, drink, and air, no less. Therefore, Allah makes the path to sound faith and guidance easily accessible through the pure nature that He created us and the clear signs that He has scattered all over the universe.³⁸⁹

‘The disbeliever was dumbfounded.’

He was gobsmacked and unable to respond. This comes as no surprise, because his only ally is the devil, while Ibrahim’s ally is Allah. It is almost like the scene pictures this proud tyrant thinking about another response to give just to get out of this embarrassing situation, but he was simply unable to say anything without making things worse for himself. All this while people look on knowing that the king has just been humiliated. His arguments have been shattered and it has become even clearer for anyone to see that there is no way this person can claim to be God, nor does he have any share to divinity. The reality of tawhid thus became clear, and Allah gave victory to His ally, making him an example for the messengers and believers that come after him.

‘God does not guide those who do evil.’

This noble verse is concluded with this beautiful ending that is appropriate for the discussion that preceded. We can take several things from this:

- Those who knowingly refuse the truth are oppressing themselves, because they block the path of guidance, not allowing it to reach their hearts. They oppress their people by encouraging, or even forcing them, to follow misguidance. They also transgress against the truth itself by rejecting it.

³⁸⁹ In the Shade of the Qur’an (1/229).

- Their oppression actually precedes their misguidance, because their desires are what make them claim what they have no right to. They are further dragged into seeking these desires by Shaytan, so they cross all boundaries. They then end up in total misguidance which acts as a barrier for the truth to enter their cold hard hearts.
- When transgression settles in the heart, no argument they hear will any longer be effective. In fact, it could increase them in stubbornness. Allah therefore did not decree guidance for those who insists on their oppression, whether individuals or groups, but Allah is the ally of the righteous.

We can also take from this verse that the more a person oppresses, the further he is from being guided. Because Allah linked their misguidance to their oppression, which shows that this is the cause. The stronger the cause, the stronger the consequence.

Thus we see this concise story mentioned in a way which makes us live the event that occurred, delivering a strong message with many meanings in only few words.

Ibn al-Qayyim said: ‘Whoever contemplates the rhetoric contained in this verse will find the greatest proofs presented in the most concise way.’³⁹⁰

Ibrahim’s Most Important Traits During This Incident

Some of Ibrahim’s traits that this dialogue showed include:

a. Constant Attachment to Allah

Ibrahim remained attached to Allah, certain that Allah is with him in all things, in secret and open, at times of strength and weakness, alive or dead. This is especially so when he is working towards delivering the divine message, when there is a need for effort, sacrifice, and martyrdom. It is clear to see that Ibrahim’s devotion and attachment to Allah is what raised him to such a high status, becoming a great example for attaining Allah’s support and victory over his enemies.

Throughout the dialogue we can sense Ibrahim’s sound beliefs and firm faith in Allah, ‘my Lord gives life and death.’ He does not sugar-coat the truth, whether standing before the powerful or his own family, not

³⁹⁰ Al-Sawa’iq al-Mursalah (2/490).

concerned for anything but the truth, willing to sacrifice his own children and his nation.

The incredible thing is that when we contemplate the three verses before the debate, we find the creed that Ibrahim called to, fought for, and risked his life for, summarised by Ayat al-Kursi, the greatest verse in the Qur'an. Calling to Allah's oneness is therefore the greatest priority for him. Starting with reforming beliefs is the correct way towards a comprehensive and proper reform.

b. Vast Knowledge

Allah gave Ibrahim knowledge and certainty not given to any messenger, except Muhammad (peace be upon them). This quality is visible in all his dialogues, but became more obvious here in his precise choice of arguments. His choice to speak about Allah's attribute of causing life and death to form the basis of his argument shows the depth of his knowledge and sound understanding. This remains a reality beyond the abilities of human knowledge until today.

c. The Expert Debater

Allah chose Ibrahim to face this tyrant king who claim divinity, so he debated him and silence him, shocking him with the soundness of his arguments.

The Personality of the King

The king who is called Nimrod son of Canaan in the books of history, is an obvious example in the history of oppressive tyrants. His kingdom expanded across the east and west, and according to some historians, his rule lasted more than four hundred years. Clearly, the extent of his kingdom and the duration of his rule, as well as people's total submission to him, all that led to his becoming arrogant and boastful, even claiming to be a god. He then tested people about their faith, so Allah sent Ibrahim to challenge him and expose his plots. Ibrahim showed people that he was a liar.

This brief dialogue was enough to give us an idea of the personality of this king as being someone who is: a disbeliever in Allah; a strong and oppressive king, deluded, but deceiving his people.



An Historical Miracle

This incident with Ibrahim was not mentioned in the Old Testament. Its mention in the Holy Qur'an is considered an aspect of the historical prophetic miracle that refutes the claim of those who said that the Qur'anic stories are derived from other ancient sources such as the Old Testament. Bearing in mind that if there is any similarity in the stories mentioned, then this is an argument for the authenticity of the Qur'an, not against it. That is because the source of all divine revelations is Allah Almighty. The difference is that Allah vowed to preserve this Qur'an entirely, so it remained preserved for more than fourteen centuries in the same language of its revelation, the Arabic language. Compare that to revelation that was not preserved in its original form, but later codified in languages other than the one it was originally revealed in, by largely unknown people, who were not infallible prophets. This exposed this divine revelation to distortion, forgery, and falsification.

An Attempt by Some Historians

Some historians attempted to review the Mesopotamian region during the period that Ibrahim lived, which is estimated to be around 1861-1686 BC, and they found that these dates correspond to the Babylonian civilization that extended between 1900 and 1300 BC, under the rule of a king named Nimrod son of Canaan. He ruled the Arameans in the land of Iraq and was the leading tyrant of his time, because he was the first to claim divinity. It is said that Nimrod was one of the descendants of Ham son of Noah (peace be upon him) and that he was a corrupt military commander. His kingdom expanded to include the cities of Akkad, Babylon, and Uruk. He built the city of Nineveh, which was located to the west of the city of Mosul in northern Iraq, and the city of Nimrud (Kalakh), which is located to the southeast of it, but no one can be certain of these claims.

2. Ibrahim Asks Allah How He Brings Life to the Dead

Allah, Most High, said:

And when Ibrahim said, 'My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead,' He said, 'Do you not believe, then?' 'Yes,' said Ibrahim, 'but just to put my heart at rest.' So God said, 'Take four birds and train them to

come back to you. Then place them on separate hilltops, call them back, and they will come flying to you; and know that God is all powerful and wise.’ (al-Baqarah: 260)

This verse is connected to the previous verses, because it is a third example that shows Allah’s ability to resurrect. The first being the dialogue between Ibrahim and the king, the second being the verse that follows in which Allah said, ‘Or take the one who passed by a ruined town. He said, ‘How will God give this life when it has died?’ So just as Allah created humans to begin with, he is able to bring them back to life in the afterlife. The Qur’an consistently mentions logical, rational, and natural proofs for resurrection and the afterlife.

Allah did not mention the name of the person who said, ‘How will God give this life when it has died?’ However, he did mention Ibrahim’s name in this verse, although both involve asking how Allah brings life to the dead. This is to honour Ibrahim by mentioning his name and to show how he went about asking this question, as a lesson for the rest of us.

The Reason for Ibrahim’s Question

Imam al-Nawawi mentioned that scholars have made several suggestions about the reasons for Ibrahim’s question:

- **The preferred view** is that he already had clear proof for this fact, but he simply wanted further certainty and contentment by seeing how Allah gives life. That is because knowledge that comes through reasoning and proof is still prone to doubt and uncertainty, unlike knowledge that is attained through direct senses. This is the position of Abu Mansur al-Azhari and others.
- **The second view** is that he wanted to see his status with Allah in terms of accepting his supplication. According to them, ‘do you not believe?’ means, ‘do you not already know your high status in My eyes?’
- **The third view** says that he wanted a higher level of certainty, not that he was ever in doubt. But he asked to be taken from certainty through knowledge (*ilm al-yaqin*) to certainty through direct sight (*ain al-yaqin*). Sahl ibn Abdullah al-Tustari said: ‘He asked for

sight of the truth to be unveiled for him, so that he can increase in the light of certainty (yaqin).³⁹¹

There is also a fourth opinion which says that when he proved to the idolators that Allah gives life and death, he asked Allah to show that clearly. Many other opinions exist that do not seem very strong.

When Ibrahim said, ‘My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead.’

Ibrahim was fully devoted to Allah, upon the straight path, always contemplating and seeking the truth in all matters. He asks his Lord to show him how He gives life to the dead, but says, ‘my Lord’, affirming that he knows that He is his creator, sustainer, and nurturer. He knows well that Allah is the creator of life and death, without a shadow of hesitation. But he asked to be shown *how* this happens, so that he can see with his eyes that which further confirms what he has believed with his heart and mind.

So this is the way of Ibrahim; to ask and search for the answers to the major questions of life, in search for more certainty that settles any questions that may arise. This verse shows us the concern Ibrahim for further investigating the realities of the divine creation of nature. This concern is not one of faith or uncertainty, but one with meanings beyond that. It is a spiritual desire to seek out some understanding of some of the divine powers and the desire to be in direct contact with it.

He said, ‘Do you not believe?’ Ibrahim replied, ‘I do, but just to put my heart at rest.’

That is, do you not think I am able to bring life to the dead? There is no doubt that Allah is aware of Ibrahim’s faith, but he wanted to reveal this on the tongue of Ibrahim. We can also see that Allah’s reply to Ibrahim is a gentle and merciful one, fitting the high status that Allah has honoured Ibrahim with.

It is quite common for Ibrahim to use methods of clarification to confirm theoretical realities, then reconfirms them through practical means. We saw this when he nullified the claim that planets are gods in front of his people, then when he challenged the king to change the path of the sun.

³⁹¹ Sharh Sahih Muslim (2/184).

We also saw this when he destroyed all the idols, except one. He does the same thing here in his request to Allah.

Ibrahim makes it clear that his faith is firm, but that he is only seeking to strengthen its firmness and see this reality. We say this, because putting the heart at rest and giving tranquility, implies that faith is already in it. Hence, when we read the verses in which Allah mentioned ‘tranquility’ (*tuma'ninah*) it is never a reference to people who have any doubt in their hearts. For instance, Allah says, ‘Allah only ordained this as a message of hope for you [believers] to put your hearts at rest. Victory comes only from God, the Mighty, the Wise.’ (al-Imran: 126). This is an address to the prophet and the faithful believers, and they were certainly not in any doubt.

We know that faith (*iman*) increases and decreases, and several things cause that. One of the things that increase *iman* is through knowledge of strong proofs. The stronger the proofs, the firmer the faith and the stronger the impact. ‘The one who saw is not like the one who only heard.’ Tranquility means that the heart settles and finds comfort in what it believes in.

What further proves this is Allah’s statement in different verses, ‘so that he can be from those who are certain’ (al-An’am: 75). And He said, ‘We have given Ibrahim sound judgement’ (al-Anbiya: 51). And Allah said, ‘Ibrahim was indeed an *ummah*.’ (al-Nahl: 120).

Add to this the statement of the Messenger (peace be upon him): ‘We are more likely to doubt than Ibrahim.’ In this hadith, the Prophet clearly negates any doubt from Ibrahim, because if Ibrahim had any doubt, then we are more doubtful. But since we have not doubted, then Ibrahim has not either. I am really not sure how this was missed by those people who claim that Ibrahim actually doubted. Had Allah known that Ibrahim doubted at all, He would have punished him or perhaps rebuked him. yet we see nothing but honour for Ibrahim from his Lord.

‘So Allah said, ‘Take four birds and train them to come back to you. Then place them on separate hilltops, call them back, and they will come flying to you.’

Allah responded to Ibrahim’s request, allowing him to see what he wanted. He told him to choose four birds, familiarise himself with their features, then to slaughter them and cut them into pieces. He was then told to scatter their parts across the surrounding mountains, then to call them



to come to him. Their parts will then come together and the birds will be alive once again. Ibrahim was shown the divine miracle of bringing life to the dead that occurs every single moment. But people only see its consequences.

This is indeed a miracle and a secret that the human mind is unable to comprehend. He may see it, like Ibrahim did, or he may believe it like every believer does, but he will never be able to understand its reality. It is the command and knowledge of Allah that humans are unable to encompass, for He is far above them and far greater. This incident that Ibrahim witnessed truly was an incredible one.

‘And know that God is all powerful and wise.’

This scene of bringing life to the four dead birds is a sign of Allah’s complete power, greatness, and wisdom. This lofty attributes become clear for all to see especially in the afterlife when Allah brings all back to life. This is so that we all know how precise Allah’s power and encompassing His dominion is, so that even small creature is under his complete control and guidance. ‘And know that God is all powerful and wise.’

- **Al-Aziz (The Powerful).** He is the Powerful One that none can get in the way of, nor harm. He is the One who does what He wills, gives life, causes death, and creates whatever He wills by simply commanding it to be. The name Al-Aziz is usually mentioned alongside the name Al-Hakim (The Wise).
- **Al-Hakim (The Wise).** His wisdom is complete. He has perfected all His creation. Nothing that He creates is random or useless, nor does He legislate arbitrarily. Rule belongs to Him in this life and the next. He judges in three things that no other being does: legislation belongs to Him, He decrees what He wills, and He is the judge of people in the afterlife. He has placed everything in its appropriate place in perfect proportion.

Section 2:

The Story of Ibrahim in Surat al-Tawbah, al-Zukhruf, and al-Mumtahinah.

1. The Story of Ibrahim in Surat al-Tawbah

Allah, Most High, said:

‘It is not [proper] for the Prophet and the believers to seek forgiveness for the polytheists, even if they were close relatives, after it has become clear to the believers that they are bound for the Hellfire. As for Ibrahim’s prayer for his father’s forgiveness, it was only in fulfilment of a promise he had made to him. But when it became clear to Ibrahim that his father was an enemy of Allah, he broke ties with him. Ibrahim was truly tender-hearted, forbearing.’ (al-Tawbah: 113-114)

The Commentary of Ibn Jarir al-Tabari:

‘The scholars of *tafsir* differed over the reason for this verse being revealed. Some said that it was revealed regarding Abu Talib, because the Prophet wanted to seek forgiveness for him after his death, so Allah forbade him from doing so. Others said that it was revealed regarding the Prophet’s mother, because he wanted to seek forgiveness for her, but was forbidden from doing so. Others said that it was revealed in relation to a group of believers who would seek forgiveness for their relatives who died as idolators.’³⁹²

When commenting on the meaning of the verses, Ibn Jarir said: ‘Allah has ruled that He will not forgive a polytheist, so it is not proper for the Muslims to ask their Lord to do that which they know He will not do. If they say that Ibrahim prayed for the forgiveness of his father who was a polytheist, then this was an exceptional case due to a promise that he had previously made to him.’³⁹³

³⁹² Tafsir al-Tabari (11/41).

³⁹³ Ibid (11/40).

Al-Qurtubi said: ‘This promise is referred to in Surat Maryam (v. 47), ‘I will pray to my Lord to forgive you.’ Ibn Atiyyah said: ‘This means that there is no case for the believers or excuse in what Ibrahim did with his father, because that was only to fulfil a promise made.’³⁹⁴

‘When it became clear to him that his father was an enemy of Allah.’ Ibn al-Arabi said: ‘That is, when his father died as a disbeliever, he broke ties with him. Some said, it became clear to him in the afterlife, but the first view is more accurate. Ata said: ‘I would not refrain from praying for a slave-girl who is pregnant with a child from fornication, because I saw that Allah did not prevent prayer except for the polytheists, saying, ‘It is not proper for the Prophet and the believers to seek forgiveness for the polytheists.’ And Ata has spoken the truth. This proves that forgiveness is possible for all sinners, so it is a good deed to pray for them and seek forgiveness for them. This is a refutation of the Qadariyah (rejectors of Qadar) who do not allow prayer over sinners and believe that Allah does not forgive them. But they have no response to this argument.’³⁹⁵

‘Ibrahim was truly tender-hearted, forbearing.’

Al-Razi said: ‘Allah described him with these two traits in this context, because Allah had described him as being soft and fearful. Those who are like this tend to be tender-hearted with their parents and children. So Allah clarified that despite his personality, he still broke ties with his father and become firm with him when he saw his insistence upon disbelief, so you should do the same. He also described him as being forbearing, since one who is like this controls himself at times of anger.’³⁹⁶

The Commentary of Shaykh al-Sa’di

It means that it is not befitting of the Prophet and the believers to seek forgiveness for the polytheists or disbelievers, ‘even if they were close relatives, after it has become clear to them that they are bound for the Hell-fire.’ That is because doing so at this stage is of no benefit, so not proper of the Prophet or the believers. Since if they die upon disbelief, the decree of

³⁹⁴ Tafsir al-Qurtubi (8/174).

³⁹⁵ ‘Aridhat al-Ahwadhi (11/252).

³⁹⁶ Tafsir al-Razi (16/217).

punishment upon them is confirmed and they will abide in the Fire forever, so no intercession or forgiveness sought will benefit them.³⁹⁷

Additionally, the Prophet and the believers with him must follow the will of their Lord in pleasure and anger, and shun the enemies of Allah. Seeking forgiveness for those who die upon disbelief contradicts this. And what Ibrahim did for his father was only due to a promise that he had previously given him when he said, ‘I shall seek forgiveness for you.’ And this was before he knew his father’s fate.

When it became clear to Ibrahim that his father is an enemy of Allah who will die upon disbelief, not benefitting from his constant reminders, ‘he broke ties with him’, out of obedience to his Lord. Even though Ibrahim is ‘truly tender-hearted and forbearing.’ He returns back to Allah in all his affairs, constantly remembers him, supplicates, seeks forgiveness, and repents to his Lord. He is forbearing and overlooks the mistreatment of the ignorant.³⁹⁸

The Prohibition of Seeking Forgiveness for the Disbelievers in the Prophetic Sunnah

Sa’id ibn al-Musayyab narrates that his father said:

When Abu Talib was on his death bed, the Prophet (ﷺ) went to him while Abu Jahl was sitting beside him. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, ‘Uncle! Say: ‘None has the right to be worshipped except Allah’, a word I will defend your case with before Allah. Abu Jahl and Abdullah ibn Umayyah said, ‘O Abu Talib! Will you leave the religion of Abdul Muttalib?’ They kept on saying this to him until the last thing he said to them before he died was: ‘I am on the religion of Abdul Muttalib.’ Then the Prophet said, ‘I will keep on asking for Allah’s Forgiveness for you unless I am forbidden from doing so.’ Then the following verse was revealed: ‘It is not proper for the Prophet and the believers to seek forgiveness for the polytheists, even if they were close relatives, after it has become clear to the believers that they are bound for the Hellfire.’ The other verse was also revealed: ‘(O Prophet!), you cannot guide who you like, but Allah guides whoever He wills.’ (Qur’an, 28:56)³⁹⁹

³⁹⁷ Tafsir al-Sa’di, p.353.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ Bukhari (No: 4772).

Ibrahim's Father on the Day of Judgment

Abu Huraira narrates that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

On the Day of Resurrection, Ibrahim will meet his father Azar whose face will be dark and covered with dust. He will say, 'Didn't I tell you not to disobey me?' His father will reply: 'Today I will not disobey you.' Ibrahim will say: 'O Lord! You promised me not to disgrace me on the Day of Resurrection; and what will be more disgraceful to me than cursing and dishonouring my father?' Then Allah will say: 'I have forbidden Paradise for the disbelievers.' Then he will be addressed, 'O Ibrahim, look at what is underneath your feet.' He will look and see a blood-stained hyena, which will be taken by the legs and thrown in the Fire.⁴⁰⁰

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah said: 'Since he died as a polytheist, he did not benefit from Ibrahim seeking forgiveness for him, despite Ibrahim's great status.'⁴⁰¹

The wisdom behind turning him into a hyena, is because hyenas are from the least intelligent animals, and his father too was from the most ignorant of people, because he rejected the truth that was clearly presented to him, instead opting to remain a disbeliever until death. Ibrahim showed incredible humility and was patient calling him to Allah, but he was too arrogant. So Allah treats him with humiliation on the Day of Judgment.

Finally, this Hadith shows that the greatness and nobility of a child, will not benefit the parent if he is not a Muslim.

2. The Story of Ibrahim in Surat al-Zukhruf

Allah, Most High, said:

[Remember, O Prophet], when Ibrahim said to his father and his people, 'I renounce what you worship. Except the One who created me, and it is He who will guide me.' And he left this enduring declaration among his descendants, so they may [always] turn back.' (al-Zukhruf: 28)

Quraish used to say that they were from the lineage of Ibrahim; which is true. They also claimed that they were following the religion of Ibrahim; and this is false. Ibrahim announced the word of monotheism clearly and

⁴⁰⁰ Bukhari (No: 3350).

⁴⁰¹ Majmu' al-Fatawa (1/146).

firmly, without any uncertainty. This is why he broke ties with his father and his people after he was almost killed and burnt. His religion is built upon tawhid and this was his greatest word of advice for his children, so *shirk* had no place at all in his religion.

This passage in this chapter returns them to this historical reality, so that they can test their claims against it. Then the verses go on to speak about their opposition to the message of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

The call of *tawhid* which the people of Quraish dislike, is the exact message of their father Ibrahim. The same call that he faced his father with and opposed their false creed. He did not give in to their inherited idol worship, just because he found his father doing so. In fact, he did not hesitate to announce that he will break ties with them altogether and renounce them and their worship, as the Qur'an relates to us, 'I renounce what you worship. Except the One who created me, and it is He who will guide me.'

It seems from the words of Ibrahim that they did not reject Allah altogether, but rather, they were worshipping other gods along with worshipping Allah. So he renounced everything that they worship, but made Allah the exception, describing Him with His attribute of creation that makes Him the only one worthy of worship. He then affirmed that since Allah is His creator, he trusts Him to also guide him to the best ways. This pure belief is one which Ibrahim upheld and announced to all creation, making it 'an enduring declaration among his descendants, so they may [always] turn back [to Allah].'

Ibrahim certainly had the greater share of affirming the word of tawhid and calling the later generations to it. Three of the greatest messengers of firm resolve from his offspring continued this message. Humanity knew monotheism before Ibrahim, but it was only after him that it settled on earth. Otherwise, Nuh, Hud, Salih, and other messengers, lived and preached tawhid. However, this call did not continue in their offspring until it was revived once again by Ibrahim, continuing until his final grandson and one who resembled him most, Muhammad (peace be upon him), the seal of all prophets. The Messenger of Allah then called to *tawhid* and made it the foundation of every aspect of our life.

The Commentary of Ibn Kathir

Allah informs us [in these verses] that His servant, close friend, and the leader of the monotheists, the father of the prophets that came after him, and the one who Quraish attribute themselves to in lineage and religion, that Ibrahim has renounced his father and people for their idol worship. So he said, ‘I renounce what you worship. Except the One who created me, and it is He who will guide me.’ And he left this enduring declaration among his descendants. This word, *la ilaha illa Allah* (none is worthy of worship except Allah), which means to worship Allah alone and to abandon the worship of anything else, was a word that endured among his descendants who follow his way, so that perhaps they may return to it.⁴⁰²

The Commentary of al-Sa’di

Allah informs us of Ibrahim, who Ahl al-Kitab (People of the Book, i.e. Jews and Christians) and the idolators claim to be following. So Allah explains his true religion to us that was inherited by his descendants. ‘[Remember, O Prophet], when Ibrahim said to his father and his people’, those that worshipped others besides Allah. ‘I renounce what you worship.’ I hate what you do, have abandoned it, and am an enemy to it and those who do so. ‘Except the One who created me.’ I am an ally to Him and hope that He will guide me to knowing the truth and acting upon it. Just as He created me and takes care of all the affairs of my life, ‘He will guide me’, to that which perfects my religion and afterlife.

‘And he left this enduring declaration.’ This praiseworthy declaration is essence of all good; the sincere worship of Allah alone and renouncing the worship of anything besides Him. ‘Among his descendants, so they may [always] turn back.’ This message continued in his offspring, so that they may always return back to it, because it is well known to be the message of Ibrahim. It was his advice to his children and the advice of some of his children to theirs, such as Isaac and Jacob, as Allah mentioned in Surat al-Baqarah (verse 130 onwards). This declaration then continued in his descendants, until they were afflicted with luxury and love of this world, so they transgressed.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰² Tafsir Ibn Kathir (6/224).

⁴⁰³ Tafsir al-Sa’di, p. 1608.

The Commentary of Imam al-Shanqiti

Allah mentioned in this noble verse that Ibrahim, peace be upon him and upon our prophet, said to his father and his people, ‘I am free from all your gods that you worship other than Allah.’ He renounced all their gods, except the One that created him. This meaning was clarified in other parts of His Book. Allah, Most High, said: ‘Ibrahim said, ‘Those idols you have worshipped, you and your forefathers, are my enemies; not so the Lord of the Worlds, who created me, and so He who guides me.’ (al-Shu’ara: 75-78).

And Allah said:

Then when he saw the sun shining, he said, ‘This must be my Lord—it is the greatest!’ But again when it set, he declared, ‘O my people! I totally reject whatever you associate [with Allah in worship]. I have turned my face towards the One Who has originated the heavens and the earth—being upright—and I am not one of the polytheists.’ (al-An’am: 78-79)

This enmity and renouncement was also mentioned in Surat al-Mumtahinah. Allah said:

You have a good example in Ibrahim and his companions, when they said to their people, ‘We disown you and what you worship besides God! We renounce you! Until you believe in God alone, the enmity and hatred that has arisen between us will endure!’—except when Ibrahim said to his father, ‘I will pray for forgiveness for you, though I cannot protect you from God.’ [They prayed] ‘Lord, we have put our trust in You; we turn to You; You are our final destination. (al-Mumtahinah: 4)

The concept of seeking guidance from Allah, in his statement, ‘He will guide me’, is repeated in a number of places in the Qur’an, such as Surat al-Saffat (verse 99), ‘I am going to my Lord, He will guide me.’ As well as when he said, ‘If my Lord does not guide me, I will certainly be one of the misguided people.’ (al-An’am: 77).

Ibrahim made clear that he will only worship the one who created him. This is a reality that the Qur’an emphasises in several verses:

- ‘O humanity! Worship your Lord, Who created you and those before you, so that you may become mindful [of Him].’ (al-Baqarah: 21)
- ‘And fear the one who created you and all former generations.’ (al-Shu’ara: 184)

- 'Have the partners they assign to God created anything like His creation so that their creation is indistinguishable from His? Say, 'God is the Creator of all things: He is the One, the All Compelling.' (al-Ra'd: 16)
- 'Is one who creates like one who is created?' (al-Nahl: 17)
- 'It is He who has control over the heavens and earth and has no offspring—no one shares control with Him—and who created all things and made them to an exact measure. Yet they take as their gods things beneath Him that create nothing, and are themselves created, that can neither harm nor help themselves, and have no control over death, life, or resurrection.' (al-Furqan: 2-3)

Many other verses confirm the same thing.

This declaration is a reference to what Ibrahim said before that, 'I renounce what you worship. Except the One who created me, and it is He who will guide me.' That is because *la ilaha illa Allah*, involves negation and affirmation. The negation is renouncing all false gods and idols worshipped. Whereas affirmation is to single out Allah in all forms of worship in the way that they were legislated through His messengers.

'And he left this enduring declaration among his descendants.' Some said that this refers to Ibrahim leaving behind this declaration among his descendants, a view supported by the apparent context. Others said, it goes back to Allah. In case of the first view, it means that Ibrahim made this a lasting word in his descendants by doing two things:

1. His advice to his children to uphold it. A word of advice that the earlier generations passed on to the later generations, as Allah said:

'Who but a fool would forsake the religion of Ibrahim? We have chosen him in this world and he will rank among the righteous in the Hereafter. His Lord said to him, 'Submit.' He replied, 'I devote myself to the Lord of the Universe.' Ibrahim commanded his sons to do the same, as did Jacob: 'My sons, God has chosen [your] religion for you, so make sure you devote yourselves to Him, to your dying moment.' (al-Baqarah: 130-132)

2. The second thing that Ibrahim did was to ask Allah to give his offspring faith and righteousness. He said:
 - 'My Lord, make me and my offspring establish prayer.' (Ibrahim: 40)

- ‘Lord, protect me and my children from worshipping idols.’ (Ibrahim: 35)
- ‘Our Lord, make us submit (Muslim) to You; make our descendants into a community devoted to You. Show us how to worship and accept our repentance, for You are the Ever Relenting, the Most Merciful. Our Lord! Raise from among them a messenger who will recite to them Your revelations, teach them the Book and wisdom, and purify them. Indeed, You [alone] are the Almighty, All-Wise.’ (al-Baqarah: 128-129)

Allah accepted the prayers of Ibrahim in sending Muhammad (peace be upon him), which is why the Prophet said: ‘I am the prayer of Ibrahim.’⁴⁰⁴ And Allah made all the prophets after Ibrahim from his lineage, as He said in Surat al-Ankabut, ‘And We granted him Isaac and Jacob, and We placed in his offspring prophecy and the Book.’ (al-Ankabut: 27). He also said about Nuh and Ibrahim: ‘We sent Noah and Ibrahim, and gave prophethood and scripture to their offspring.’ (al-Hadid: 26)

If we take the second opinion, that the verse refers to Allah making this an enduring declaration, then the matter is clear. Allah clarified in this verse of Surat al-Zukhruf that He did not accept Ibrahim’s du’a for all his offspring, because the scholars agree that the disbelievers of Makkah who belied the messenger were from the lineage of Ibrahim. Yet they belied him and called him a magician, with many of them dying upon disbelief.

Allah makes this clear in His statement, Allah said, ‘I will certainly make you into a role model for the people.’ Ibrahim asked, ‘What about my offspring?’ Allah replied, ‘My covenant is not extended to the wrongdoers.’ (al-Baqarah: 124). This is made even clearer in His saying, ‘We blessed him (Ibrahim) and Isaac as well. But of their offspring are some who excel in doing good and others who are clearly unjust to themselves.’ (al-Saffat: 113)

So it is those who did good among them who have this word remain with them, but not the wrongdoers. Allah, Most High, said:

‘Do they envy [other] people for the bounty God has granted them? We gave the descendants of Ibrahim the Scripture and wisdom- and We gave

⁴⁰⁴ Mustadrak al-Hakim (No: 3566) and Silsilah al-Ahadith al-Sahihah (No: 1545).

them a great kingdom. But some of them believed in it and some turned away from it. Hell blazes fiercely enough.’ (al-Nisa: 54-55)

Allah further clarified in Surat al-Hadid that many of his descendants are misguided. ‘We sent Noah and Ibrahim, and gave prophethood and scripture to their offspring; among them there were some who were rightly guided, but many were rebellious.’ (al-Hadid: 26)

‘So they may [always] turn back.’ What is meant by this is that those descendants who are astray may perhaps return to the truth through the guidance of the believers of them. Because so long as the truth is alive in some of them, this leave some hope for those astray to return to it. This hope of course is in relation to humans, since they do not know who will be guided and who will be misguided.⁴⁰⁵

3. The Story of Ibrahim in Surat al-Mumtahinah

Allah, Most High, said:

You have a good example in Ibrahim and his companions, when they said to their people, ‘We disown you and what you worship besides God! We renounce you! Until you believe in God alone, the enmity and hatred that has arisen between us will endure!’—except when Ibrahim said to his father, ‘I will pray for forgiveness for you, though I cannot protect you from God.’ [They prayed] ‘Our Lord, we have put our trust in You; we turn to You; You are our final destination. Lord, do not make us a means of trial for those who have denied. Forgive us, Lord, for You are the Almighty, the All Wise.’ Truly, they are a good example for you [believers] to follow, a good example for whoever has hope in Allah and the Last Day. If anyone turns away, [remember] God is self-sufficing and worthy of all praise. God may still bring about affection between you and your present enemies. God is all powerful, God is most forgiving and merciful. Allah He does not forbid you to deal kindly and justly with anyone who has not fought you for your faith or driven you out of your homes: God loves the just. But God forbids you to take as allies those who have fought against you for your faith, driven you out of your homes, and helped others to drive you out: any of you who take them as allies will truly be wrongdoers. (al-Mumtahinah: 4-9)

⁴⁰⁵ Adwa al-Bayan (7/231-234).

These verses show an important example of *al-wala wa-l bara* (loyalty and disavowal) on the basis of faith. There is sound faith or monotheism without *wala* (loyalty) and *bara* (disavowal). In fact, the declaration of faith which is a prerequisite for entering Islam, is in reality *wala* and *bara*, half of it is loyalty and the other half is disavowal. *La ilaha* (there is no god) is a disavowal of all things that are worshipped besides Allah. *Illa Allah* (except Allah) is an affirmation of loyalty to the worship of Allah alone. This testimony means that there is no god worthy of worship except Allah.

Allah has commanded us follow the way of Ibrahim, the leader of monotheists, in his *wala* and *bara*, as we see from the verses before us and the commentary of scholars on them. The creed of *wala* and *bara* is not something merely said with the tongue, but it is a major reality with serious implications. It is for this that the prophets and their followers were harmed with imprisonment, deportation, and death. For it did the prophets leave their homelands and families to protect their faith and due to their enmity for disbelief and disbelievers, as we saw with Ibrahim (peace be upon him). It was this that caused the Prophet and his noble companions to be besieged in the fort of Abu Talib until they suffered.

You have a good example in Ibrahim and his companions, when they said to their people, ‘We disown you and what you worship besides God! We renounce you! Until you believe in God alone, the enmity and hatred that has arisen between us will endure!’—except when Ibrahim said to his father, ‘I will pray for forgiveness for you, though I cannot protect you from God.’ Our Lord, we have put our trust in You; we turn to You; You are our final destination.

The believer finds that he has a lineage, a long history, and an example that extends far back in time, returning to Ibrahim. Not only in the beliefs that he shares with him, but also in his experiences and challenges that he faced. He therefore feels that he has more experience than his own personal lived experience or the experiences of those around him. This long carriage of believers throughout history, marching under the flag of Allah, has been through what he is going through. He is merely a continuation of an enormous tree that was planted by Ibrahim (peace be upon him).

‘You have a good example in Ibrahim and his companions, when they said to their people, ‘We disown you and what you worship besides God! We renounce you! Until you believe in God alone, the enmity and hatred that has arisen between us will endure!’

O believers, there is an excellent example for you that you can follow in Ibrahim and the believers that were with him. You have been commanded to follow Ibrahim and his religion, and Ibrahim has been through similar challenges to the ones being faced by the Muhajirin. Ibrahim and those with him, not only renounced the false beliefs of the disbelievers, but renounced the disbelievers altogether in explicit terms.

We have our own beliefs that oppose yours, and our worship that opposes yours. We will even abandon those that you do which have an element of truth in it, so that it does not contaminate our sound beliefs. That is because the believers are allies of Allah, so they love and hate for the sake of Allah. And the disbelievers have been described as enemies of Allah, ‘On the day when the enemies of Allah will be gathered for the fire, all driven in ranks.’ (Fussilat: 19). The enemy of Allah is therefore the enemy of the true believers.

There is no limit to the ‘enmity and hatred’ that is between us, so long as you remain upon disbelief. That is because we are on completely opposite sides, and belief can never come together with disbelief. A complete disavowal of them, their beliefs, and their religious practices. This is the undisputed reality that all believers go through in every generation until the Day of Judgment. And we have an excellent role model in this stance that was taken by Ibrahim and the believers that were with him.

‘Until you believe in God alone.’ This enmity will end the moment you believe in Allah alone, and the hatred will turn into love and loyalty. So, believers, follow the way of Ibrahim and act upon all the requirements of pure monotheism in everything that you do.⁴⁰⁶

‘Except when Ibrahim said to his father, ‘I will pray for forgiveness for you, though I cannot protect you from God.’

Follow Ibrahim in his disavowal of his people, but do not follow him in his seeking forgiveness for his father. That is because Ibrahim had promised

⁴⁰⁶ Tafsir al-Sa’di, p. 1814.

his father that he will pray for his forgiveness, while clarifying that he will not be able to save him from Allah's punishment if he disobeys Allah and associates partners with him. Therefore, when it became clear to Ibrahim that his father is insistent upon disbelief, he disavowed him. Allah said:

'As for Ibrahim's prayer for his father's forgiveness, it was only in fulfilment of a promise he had made to him. But when it became clear to Ibrahim that his father was an enemy of Allah, he broke ties with him. Ibrahim was truly tender-hearted, forbearing.' (al-Tawbah: 114)

'Our Lord, we have put our trust in You; we turn to You; and You are our final destination.'

In this prayer of Ibrahim, he relies fully upon Allah, leaving all his affairs to Him, and always turning back to Allah.⁴⁰⁷

'We have put our trust in you', to help us and to protect us from Allah harm. This trust (*tawakkul*) is an action of the heart, while the limbs act. 'We turn to You', obeying You and doing all that which brings us closer to You. 'You are our final destination.' We return to You on the Day of Judgment, so we do our best to prepare for that return.

This complete submission to Allah is a clear trait of faith in Ibrahim, presented to us, his Muslim children, as a lesson from these stories.

'Lord, do not make us a means of trial (*fitnah*) for those who have denied. Forgive us, Lord, for You are the Almighty, the All Wise.'

This is the prayer of Ibrahim and the prayer of the believers. But how can a believer be a trial for the disbeliever. This can be so in two cases:

1. If the believers are beaten in a war by the disbelievers, this becomes a *fitnah* for the disbeliever, because he will say, 'had they been true believers and had God been on their side, they would not have lost.' This is a test.
2. The disbeliever can also face *fitnah* if he sees the believers committing sin and not following the guidance of Allah. This will make them belittle Islam and not want to be part of it.

This, unfortunately, is the reality of the Muslims today. They put others off Allah's religion instead of encouraging them to accept it. Hence our scholars said, 'this nation will never be successful except by what made

⁴⁰⁷ In the Shade of the Qur'an (6/3542).

the early Muslims successful.’ The believer must take responsibility for being a barrier between people and Islam, thus the du’a, ‘Lord, do not make us a fitnah (trial) for the disbelievers.’ Make us from those who follow Your commands, making people love Islam; not giving them a reason to turn away from Your faith. This shows us another reason for the importance of sticking to the teachings of this faith.

‘Forgive us, Lord, for You are the Almighty, the All Wise.’

Ibrahim says because he knows the level of servitude that Allah is worthy of. He knows that the weakness of humans does not allow them to fulfil the right of Allah and thank Him for His blessings as He deserves. He thus prays for forgiveness from his Lord, as an example for us that come after him. He then appropriately concludes his prayer using some of Allah’s names and attributes that befit his supplication.

‘Truly, they are a good example for you [believers] to follow, a good example for whoever has hope in Allah and the Last Day. If anyone turns away, [remember] God is self-sufficing and worthy of all praise.’

Not any person can easily follow in the footsteps of Ibrahim. But only those who have ‘hope in Allah and the Last Day.’ Because strong faith and hoping for Allah’s reward makes all difficulties easy for the believer. It makes him want to follow Allah’s prophets, messengers, and His righteous servants, in all things, knowing that he is in need of doing so. It is such people who appreciate what Ibrahim and those with him went through and appreciate the importance of following in their footsteps.

As for whoever wants to turn away from this way and this path of guidance, then Allah is in no need for him, for ‘He is Al-Ghani (self-sufficing), Al-Hamid worthy of all praise.’ Two of Allah’s beautiful names. **Al-Ghani** is the one who is self-sufficient, in no need of any help, support, or anything from anyone. This is because Allah is perfect from all angles and in every way, so can therefore necessarily only be self-sufficient. He has complete control over the universe and can do whatever He wills. He is also the One that provides His servants with sufficiency through sound beliefs of the heart and divine knowledge.

A manifestation of His self-sufficiency is that He commands His servants to supplicate and pray to Him, promising that He will give them and respond to them. He grants them from His bounties. If all creation were

to come together to ask for something at the same time, and He gave each one what they requested, this will not decrease a single thing from His kingdom. He has no partner, no child, and no equal. He grants His righteous servants with an eternal Paradise which contains that which no eye has ever seen, nor ear has ever heard, nor even crossed any person's mind.

Al-Hamid is the One worthy of praise for all His words, actions, laws, and decree. Shaykh Abd al-Rahman al-Sa'di says, 'He is worthy of praise innately, for His names, attributes, and actions. He has the best names, the most perfect attributes, and most excellent actions. His actions are always between virtue and justice.'⁴⁰⁸

So the believers can see that this is a path that has been trodden by many before them. Praise be to Allah, who has taught them about their forefathers in faith and given them the most excellent examples to follow. This is a method often repeated in the Qur'an, so that the believer never feels alone, even if he is alone in a distant mountain. He will find less difficulty in treading a path that has already been taken.

Allah, Most High, then further reduces the burden upon the believers, laying down a key Islamic principle of international relations. He makes this enmity and war only in cases of battle and dispute. So that when things settle and the believers are not in a state of fighting, they should treat those worthy of it with excellence.

'God may still bring about affection between you and your present enemies. God is all powerful, God is most forgiving and merciful.'

Islam is a religion of peace, a theology of love, and a system which wishes to see the whole world being shaded under its shade and applying its guidance. It wants people to be gathered under Allah's banner as brothers who love one another. Nothing gets in the way of this except for the transgression of its enemies. If they maintained peace, Islam has no interest in dispute. Even at times of dispute, Islam still maintains the causes of love and goodness, through its clean manners and just dealings, in the hope that its enemies will one day realise that all good is only in accepting Islam. This verse alludes to this hope that reduces the burden on some of the souls of the Muhajirin (emigrants from Makkah) who are tired of the hardship of boycotting, enmity, and war with their families and tribes.

⁴⁰⁸ Al-Jalil, p. 372.

This hope will occur and the believers were certain that it will when they heard it, and that is what happened shortly afterwards with the conquest of Makkah, with Quraish entering Islam, all under one banner as brothers. This verse thus gives the good news of some of the polytheists who at the time were enemies of Islam, and that happened by Allah's grace.

'God is all powerful (Al-Qadir).'

Allah is able to do all things, including guiding the hearts and turning them from one state to another. Ibn al-Qayyim said: 'He is Al-Qadir who has complete power and thus guides whoever He wills and misguides whoever He wills. He makes the believer a believer, the disbeliever a disbeliever, the righteous one righteous, and the corrupt one corrupt. He made Ibrahim and his children leaders who call to Allah by His command, and made Pharaoh and his people leaders calling to the Hellfire. He created the heavens and earth in six days and did not tire one bit. All creation are in His grasp and under His control.'⁴⁰⁹

'God is most forgiving and merciful.'

No sin is too great for Allah to forgive, nor any flaw too great to be concealed by Him. Al-Ghafur (most forgiving) and Al-Rahim (merciful) are two of Allah's great attributes. Allah, Most High, said:

Say, '[God says], My servants who have harmed themselves by their own excess, do not despair of God's mercy. God forgives all sins: He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful. (al-Zumar: 53)

The hope of the enemies of Muslims becoming brother became a reality, as shown and explained in Surat al-Nasr.

'When Allah's help comes and the victory [over Mecca is achieved], and you see the people embracing Allah's faith in crowds, glorify the praise of your Lord and ask His forgiveness: He is always ready to accept repentance.' (Surat al-Nasr, Chapter 110)

Great numbers of disbelievers accepted Islam and firm faith settled in their hearts. They became close brothers of those who accepted Islam before them and fought in Allah's path.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁹ Tariq al-Hijratayn, p. 235.

⁴¹⁰ Fath al-Qadir (5/302).

‘Allah does not forbid you to deal kindly and justly with anyone who has not fought you for your faith or driven you out of your homes; God loves the just.’

When the verses were revealed commanding us to follow Ibrahim in his *wala* (loyalty) and *bara* (disavowal), and to show enmity to the believers, this had a major impact on the believers who acted upon this command in the most complete way. They cut off some of their families thinking that this is included in what Allah commanded. So Allah clarified to them that this is not required of them. Rather, Allah teaches them to be kind and treat well those who do not fight them for their faith, nor drive them out of their homes.

Keeping Ties With Non-Muslim Family

Asmaa, daughter of Abu Bakr said: ‘My mother came hoping [to be treated well], so I asked the Messenger of Allah whether I should keep ties with her.’ He said, ‘Yes.’ Sufyan ibn ‘Uyaynah said: ‘So Allah revealed, ‘Allah does not forbid you to deal kindly and justly with anyone who has not fought you for your faith.’⁴¹¹

Ibn Hajar said: ‘It means that she came hoping that her daughter would be good to her, fearing that her daughter may refuse her.’⁴¹² This is how most scholars interpreted it.

Al-Khattabi said: ‘This shows that non-Muslim family should be treated well, financially and in other ways, just like Muslim relatives. Some scholars used this as a proof to obligate upon a Muslim child financially supporting their non-Muslim parents.’⁴¹³

The Commentary of Imam al-Tabari

There is generality in Allah’s statement, ‘Allah does not forbid you to deal kindly and justly with anyone who has not fought you for your faith.’ It applies to all those who fall under this category regardless of their faith, whether they are relatives or not. That is because it is not forbidden, nor discouraged, for a believer from treating non-Muslims kindly.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹¹ Bukhari (No: 5978) and Muslim (No: 1003).

⁴¹² Fath al-Bari (5/292).

⁴¹³ Al-Maghrabi (34/381).

⁴¹⁴ Tafsir al-Tabari (28/65).

The Commentary of Shaykh Atiyyah Salim

If we refer to the generality of the wording of the verse, we find that it is explicit in including all those who do not stand against the Muslims with enmity. This is more applicable to the disbelievers than it is to the believers, because being good to the weak believers is something well known in Islam. So any claims of abrogation must be supported with strong evidence that overcomes this explicit and encompassing passage, while fulfilling the conditions of *naskh* (abrogation) known in the science of *usul al-tafsir*. What further supports that this verse is not abrogated is that al-Qurtubi reported that the majority of tafsir scholars believed it to be *muhkam* (upheld and binding). This is also the view of Ibn Jarir al-Tabari and this is what fits with the spirit of the Islamic Shari'ah.⁴¹⁵

'God loves the just.'

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'Those who are just will be seated upon pulpits of light, on the right side of *Al-Rahman* (The Merciful), and both His hands are *yamin* (right or honourable). Those who are fair with their judgement, their family, and those who are under them their authority.'⁴¹⁶

In another sound Hadith the Prophet mentioned the just ruler first as the seven types of people who will be under Allah's shade on the day on which there will be no shade except His shade.⁴¹⁷

Shaykh Muhammad Mutawalli al-Sha'rawi said about, his saying, 'to deal kindly and justly', that kindness (*birr*) relieves them from their needs, while justice (*qist*) relieves them from the humiliation of having to ask. He argued that the word *qist* in the Arabic language can refer to pieces or portions, so it is a command to give them a portion of your money that suffices them, so that you cover their needs and they are not forced into begging.⁴¹⁸

This verse then shows us the difference between the disbeliever who is at war with you and the one who is not. The prohibited type of loyalty refers to those disbelievers who are in a state of enmity with the Muslims. Kindness and generosity is different from the prohibited loyalty,

⁴¹⁵ Adwa al-Bayan (8/84) and Tafsir al-Maghrawi (34/380).

⁴¹⁶ Muslim (No: 1827).

⁴¹⁷ Muslim (No: 1031).

⁴¹⁸ Tafsir al-Sha'rawi (24/15129).

since Allah has not prohibited the believers from kindly treating those who they have no enmity with. This was the case with Khuza'ah, Muzainah, Aslam, Juhaynah, and Ghifar, who were all idolaters, but they inclined to the Prophet and wanted him to overcome Quraish. So this is a lesson for those who treat all disbelievers in the same way.

Similarly, in our time, some non-Muslims are supportive of Muslims and the affairs of Muslims, some even willing to struggle for the sake of their clear stances in standing up for the truth. Such people should be taken care of, treated well, and good relations kept with them. They should also be supported, financially and otherwise. Similarly, parents have a special status in being treated well, as well as one's wife who is from the People of the Book, treated with love and mercy, as any marital relationship should be.

We can see this in the story of the Prophet who loved his uncle Abu Talib and was saddened by his death, so Allah revealed, 'You cannot guide those you love, but Allah guides whoever He wills.' (al-Qasas: 46).

'But God only forbids you to take as allies those who have fought against you for your faith, driven you out of your homes, and helped others to drive you out; any of you who take them as allies will truly be wrongdoers.'

To have one of these three traits is sufficient for them to be taken as enemies, not worthy of our good treatment and kindness. That is, they fought against you for your faith, or drove you out of your homes, or helped others to drive you out. Some people claimed that the verse is abrogated, but this is not correct. Most scholars of *tafsir* have rejected the claim of abrogation, because the verse was revealed quite late on around the eight year after the Hijrah, and nothing was revealed after it to abrogate it.

The Commentary of Ibn al-Qayyim

When the verses were revealed about *wala* (loyalty) to the disbelievers, some of them thought that being good to them was part of being loyal to them, so Allah clarified to them that this is not the case. Rather, being good to them is a form of *ihsan* which He loves. But what is prohibited is to show them complete loyalty and love.

The Commentary of al-Shawkani

'But God only forbids you to take as allies those who have fought against you for your faith driven you out of your homes.' They are the

leaders of the disbelievers of Quraish. ‘And helped others to drive you out.’ They are the rest of the Makkans who supported Quraish. ‘Any of you who take them as allies will truly be wrongdoers.’ That is because they have taken as allies those worthy of enmity; the enemies of Allah, His Messenger, and His Book.⁴¹⁹

Shaykh Abd al-Rahman al-Sa’di said: ‘If this is complete *wala* (loyalty), then this is an act of disbelief that takes one out of the fold of Islam. Then there are levels below that, some severe, and some less so.’⁴²⁰

So in conclusion, we can see that the verses revealed here in Surat al-Mumtahinah provide us with the most balanced principle in dealing with people of a different faith. A principle that fit with the attitude of Islam and its outlook on human life. It makes the default state one of peace between Muslims and others. This default only changes when there is a need to protect ourselves from transgression or fear of betrayal after a peace treaty. Whether this be physical transgression or transgression which prevents freedom of faith and calling to Allah. Besides this, we seek peace, justice, and kindness to all people.

Furthermore, this principle makes the relationship between the believers and those who oppose them, one that revolves around faith, nothing else. The cause that the believers fight for, sacrifice for, and risk themselves for, is nothing but their faith. There is nothing else that they make a cause of dispute or rivalry for, except the freedom to believe, to call to Islam, and to establish Allah’s way on earth, raising the word of Allah.

This attitude is consistent with the content of Surat al-Mumtahinah which reinforces the importance of creed (*aqidah*), making it the only flag that Muslims should walk under. Whoever does, is one of them. Whoever fights them is their enemy. Whoever is peaceful towards them and leaves their faith and call alone, not turning people away from it, is treated with respect, justice, and goodness. The true believer thus only lives for his faith. He does not fight for worldly gains, nor tribalism, nationalism, or any other relation. Rather, battle and struggle is only to raise Allah’s word.

⁴¹⁹ Fath al-Qadir (5/303).

⁴²⁰ Tafsir al-Sa’di. P. 1816.

Section 3:

Ibrahim's Discussion with the Angles

1. Ibrahim's Discussion with the Angels in Surat Hud

Allah, Most High, said:

Our messengers came to Ibrahim with good news. They greeted him, saying, 'Peace.' He answered, 'Peace,' and without delay he brought in a roasted calf. But when he saw that their hands are not reaching for the food, he became suspicious and fearful of them. They reassured him, 'Do not be afraid! We are sent for the people of Lot.' His wife was standing [nearby] and laughed. We gave her good news of Isaac and, after him, of Jacob. She wondered, 'Oh, my! How can I have a child at this old age, and my husband here is an old man? This is truly an astonishing thing!' They said, 'Are you astonished by Allah's decree? May Allah's mercy and blessings be upon you, O people of this house. Indeed, He is Praiseworthy, Glorious.'

Then, when the fear left Ibrahim and the good news reached him, he pleaded with Us for Lot's people. Ibrahim is forbearing, devout, and repentant. 'O Ibrahim! Plead no more! Your Lord's decree has already come, and they will certainly be afflicted with a punishment that cannot be averted!'

The Qur'an has praised Ibrahim as child, a young man, and as a man. This continues into his old age in his new homeland. Allah blessed him with wealth, cattle, and a high status. Then the Angels pass by him bringing him good news. The Qur'an details the discussion between Ibrahim and the Angels in four different chapters, all Makkan chapters of the Qur'an, each taking a different angle. It is mentioned in Surat Hud, Surat al-Hijr, Surat al-Ankabut, and Surat al-Dhariyat.

Our messengers came to Ibrahim with good news. They greeted him, saying, 'Peace.' He answered, 'Peace,' and without delay he brought in a roasted calf.

The messengers sent here were angels. ‘Allah chooses messengers from the angels and from people.’ (al-Hajj: 75). There was at least three of them, though scholars differ over their exact number. Angels are from Allah’s greatest creation, mentioned consistently throughout the Qur’an. It is obligatory for us to believe in them, since belief in the angels is one of the six pillars of faith. Allah created angels from light, giving them the ability to appear in different forms. They have many different roles and never disobey any of Allah’s commands.

Allah has described some of their features of the angels in the Qur’an, such as their incredibly great wings, two, three, or four. Allah said, ‘All praise is for Allah, the creator of the heavens and the earth, who made angels messengers with wings—two, three, or four. He increases in creation whatever He wills. Indeed, Allah is Most Capable of everything.’ (Fatir: 1)

They are not to be described as male or female. They do not eat or drink. Like humans, they feel shyness. As the Prophet once said, ‘Should I not feel shy from a man who the angels are shy from.’⁴²¹

The three characteristics that are apparent in the angels in the story of Ibrahim are:

1. Their ability to appear in many different forms. In this case they came to Ibrahim in the form of human beings, and he did not recognise them initially. Then he felt even more suspicious when he saw that they were not eating, after which they clarified things to him.
2. They do not eat or drink. The scholars agree that angels do not eat or drink. We see this in this incident with Ibrahim.
3. They fulfil the various roles that Allah gives them. Some of the roles given to them in this event with Ibrahim is the delivery of news, the sending of punishment, and supporting Allah’s believing servants, as we shall see by the will of Allah.

Imam al-Shanqiti said: ‘These verses do not mention the good news that was brought to Ibrahim by the angels. However, they do mention the news of the birth of Isaac and Jacob. ‘We gave her good news of Isaac and, after him, of Jacob.’ Though this was directed at her, but it is good news for both the father and mother, as Allah said, ‘We gave him good news of

⁴²¹ Sahih Muslim (No: 2401). The Prophet here is referring to Uthman ibn Affan.

Isaac, a righteous prophet.’ (al-Saffat: 112). Allah also said, ‘They said, ‘do not be afraid’, and gave him good news of a forbearing son.’ (al-Dhariyat: 28). And Allah said, ‘They said, ‘do not fear. We came to give you the good news of a forbearing son.’ (al-Hijr: 53)

Others said that the news given to him was the destruction of Lut’s people, based on the verses that mention this, such as the verse here, ‘Do not be afraid! We are sent for the people of Lot.’ As well as the verses mentioned in Surat al-Hijr (v. 58-59), Surat al-Dhariyat (v. 32-33), and Surat al-Ankabut (v. 31). However, the better opinion is the first one, and this is supported by the last verses mentioned here. ‘When Our messengers brought the good news [of the birth of a son] to Ibrahim, they told him, ‘We are about to destroy the people of that town. They are wrongdoers.’ This verse shows that they mentioned the destruction of Lut’s people after they brought him the good news.⁴²²

They greeted him, saying, ‘Peace.’ He answered, ‘Peace.’

This shows that the greeting of *salam*, and responding with *salam*, is an old practice that was part of the religion of Ibrahim. This is the greeting of the believers, but also the greeting of the angels. Allah informs us in several verses of His Book that the angels greet the believers in the afterlife with *salam* too. ‘And the angels enter upon them through every door, [saying] peace be upon you for you have endured patiently, so how excellent is the ultimate dwelling!’ (al-Ra’d: 23-24). Similarly, in another verse, ‘Those who were mindful of their Lord will be led in successive groups to the Garden. When they arrive, they will find its gates wide open, and its keepers will say to them, ‘Peace be upon you. You have been good. Come in; you are here to stay.’ (al-Zumar: 73)

‘And without delay he brought in a roasted calf.’

In Surat al-Dhariyat, this calf was described as being fat. So he presented them with fat roasted calf. This swift act by Ibrahim shows his vast generosity, for he could have prepared something less than that and still been generous. But hosting guests is from the traits of good character, from the etiquettes of Islam, and from the characteristics of the prophets, messengers, and righteous men.⁴²³

⁴²² Adwa al-Bayan (3/29-30).

⁴²³ Al-Zuhaili, p.177.

Ibn Kathir mentioned that this verse shows an excellent hosting of guests in several ways:

- Greeting them with a warm welcome.
- Being quick to prepare for them, before asking them about the reason for their visit.
- Ibrahim prepared the best food that he had, not sufficing with the bare minimum.

He then brought the food close to them and spoke kindly to them, asking whether they would eat. For this, some people referred to Ibrahim as Abu al-Dhifan (father of guests), since he was apparently the first to host guests. Though it seems like he prepared a lot of food for only few people, this does not suggest that he was excessive or that food was wasted. Rather, he was generous while also not being extravagant.

But when he saw that their hands are not reaching for the food, he became suspicious and fearful of them. They reassured him, ‘Do not be afraid! We are sent for the people of Lot.’ (Hud: 70)

It was considered good manners for guests to eat from the food presented by the host, so when they did not reach out to eat all, this caused him to be a little suspicious and worried, something that can happen to all humans, including prophets. This is especially so, since the customs of the bedouins and rustic people is that they will not harm or betray someone’s whose food they have eaten as a guest. So if they refrain from eating, it can be a sign that they intend to do harm or do not trust him.

However, the guests noticed the worry on his face and thus reassured him by explaining who they were and why they came to visit. The only reason they did not eat, is because, as angels, they do not eat. They only came to destroy the deviated people of Lot’s town. This incident took place after Ibrahim’s migration from the land of the Chaldeans, in Iraq, his birthplace and residence to the land of Canaan, the land that God had blessed for the whole world.

‘His wife was standing [nearby] and laughed. We gave her good news of Isaac and, after him, of Jacob.’ (Hud: 71)

This verse speaks about the wife of Ibrahim who was standing by serving the guests along with her husband. Ibn al-Jawzi said that there are three scholarly views about where she was standing:

1. Behind a curtain, listening to their conversation. This is the view of Wabb.
2. Standing by serving the guests. This is the view of Mujahid and al-Suddi.
3. She was standing in prayer. This is the view of Muhammad ibn Ishaq.

What is meant by, ‘she laughed’, is that she smiled out of happiness, when she heard the news that she heard.

Abu Ja’far al-Tabari mentioned the different views of the scholars on the cause of her laughing, then said: ‘She laughed out of amazement, since she and her husband were serving their guests themselves, to honour them, yet they did not eat any of their food.’

Other said that she laughed at how unaware and oblivious Lot’s people were and at the punishment that was going to descend upon them. Others said that she laughed when she saw the worry on Ibrahim’s face. Others said that she laughed out of astonishment of being told that she would have a child at such an old age. Other scholars said that she laughed out of relief, when she heard the angels reassure Ibrahim; because she and Ibrahim both initially became worried and feared what could happen.

Al-Tabari then said: ‘The preferred view is that she laughed at the negligence and obliviousness of Lot’s people of the punishment befalling them.’ The he said: ‘The reason for choosing this opinion is that this was mentioned straight after their saying, ‘do not fear. We are sent for Lot’s people.’ So since it does not seem like she laughed at their reassurance, it leaves us with her laughing about the matter of Lot’s people.’⁴²⁴

As for Ibn Ashur, he said: ‘Sarah laughed out of surprise of being given the good news by the angels that she would have a child at such an old age.’⁴²⁵

Al-Khalidi said: ‘Ibrahim’s wife, Sarah, was standing serving her husband’s guests and welcoming them. She became reassured when she found out that they were angels. Then when she heard about the destruction of Lut’s people, she laughed and was happy to hear that. She was aware of Lot’s people and their disbelief and deviation. She had heard about their

⁴²⁴ Tafsir al-Tabari (15/390-394).

⁴²⁵ Al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir (12/119).

immorality and lewdness with other men. She was of course disgusted by them, so was delighted to hear that the angels were on their way to destroy them. Her laughter was therefore one of happiness.

We will not even bother entertaining ridiculous views which claim that the word ‘*dhahik*’ in the verse means that her menstrual cycle suddenly appeared. There is no need to debate this opinion and prove how incorrect this view is.⁴²⁶

‘We gave her good news of Isaac and, after him, of Jacob.’

After hearing this good news, she was informed of further good news; the birth of her son Isaac, a name chosen for them by Allah. The name Isaac in the Hebrew language means, ‘the one who laughs.’ This was then followed up with further great news; the birth of her grandson Jacob, the son of Isaac.

This was mentioned by Hafidh Ibn Kathir. Then Ibn Kathir mentioned that we can also use this verse to prove that it was Ismael who Ibrahim was commanded to slaughter, and that it could not have been Isaac, because when they were given the news of Isaac, they were told about Isaac immediately, and Allah’s promise cannot be deflected, nor delayed. It is therefore not possible that he be commanded to slaughter a child that he has already been told will live to have another child. It could therefore have only been Ismael. And this is one of the strongest arguments for this position, and alhamdulillah.⁴²⁷

Isaac is one of the prophets who had their names chosen for them directly by Allah. He was born to elderly parents who could never have had a child had it not been for the intervention of Allah, the Powerful, the Merciful, who does what He wills. Additionally, Allah informed them that this child of theirs would be knowledgeable and a righteous prophet.

The miraculous birth of Isaac, led to the Jewish nation and Bani Israel. Despite the virtue these two great prophets have over this nation, some of them have disrespected them and spoken of them in unbecoming ways, as we see recorded in parts of the Torah. In fact, this disrespect has unfortunately extended to most, if not all, the prophets of Bani Israel. Those prophets who were not on the receiving end of slander, were tortured, or

⁴²⁶ Al-Khalidi (1/421).

⁴²⁷ Tafsir Ibn Kathir (4/265).

even killed. The Qur'an has alluded to these crimes committed by Bani Israel towards their prophets. Though Allah has highly praised the prophets of Bani Israel, such as Isaac and Jacob, for their efforts in guiding their nation to the straight path.⁴²⁸

She wondered, 'Oh, my! How can I have a child at this old age, and my husband here is an old man? This is truly an astonishing thing!'

She was shocked, because having a child meant that she would become pregnant, then give birth. But this was not possible normally, so naturally she was amazed. The age that a woman is no longer able to give birth can differ from person to person, but in any case, it was a miracle in the case of Sarah, because she was an elderly women well beyond this age. Some said that she was 90 years of age, while Ibrahim was 120 years old, but Allah knows best.

Here are some lessons that we can take from these verses:

- It is incredible that the Qur'an, despite its limited words, pays attention to presenting the specific emotions and inner feelings of people, as it relates their stories.
- The laws of nature have been created by Allah so that that people can organise their lives based on consistent rules. They should not rely on the supernatural or miracles to happen, because nature and life has consistent rules. However, this does not apply to Allah, for the creator of nature can break its laws whenever He wills. This is so that people know that Allah is the Powerful and they rely upon Him alone, along with taking the necessary means and laws of nature made by Him.
- In the case of Ibrahim and his wife, there is every reason for them to lose hope in another child. Yet, nothing gets in the way of Allah's will.
- Every so often, Allah shows people a sign, breaking normal routines and laws of nature, so that the shock of this change impacts people.
- Al-Razi said: 'She became shocked due to what she is used to, not because she doubted Allah's ability. If someone trustworthy told a Muslim man that Allah will turn this mountain into pure gold, he

⁴²⁸ Al-Mahlawi, H. (2013), *Eighty Famous Personalities*, p. 65.

will not doubt be stunned, not because he doubts Allah's ability, but because this is an abnormal occurrence.⁴²⁹

- Al-Alusi said: 'She was amazed at the incredible blessing that Allah gave her despite the laws of nature, not that she questioned Allah's ability.'⁴³⁰

***They said, 'Are you astonished by Allah's decree? May Allah's mercy and blessings be upon you, O people of this house. Indeed, He is Praiseworthy, Glorious.'* (Hud: 73)**

As we said before, we do not know the exact number of angels that were present. As per the approach of the Qur'an, it does not go into details over matters that are of little benefit. The angels replied by rebutting her astonishment. She is in the home of a prophet who receives revelation, so why should she be amazed at Allah's decree? His command comes into existence with a mere word, 'be!'

'May Allah's mercy and blessings be upon you, O people of this house.'

The concept of blessing (*barakah*) is a major one, not easily understood by the materialistic person, the atheist, or the numeric. I mean by the numeric, one who counts everything using numbers, only working within the framework of physics. How will such people understand that Allah can protect one from harm, illness, or harm, and bless a person's wealth. Many people who have thousands still feel insufficient, while many are content with little and never feeling like they are in need. Many poor lands find sufficient provision in the rain, such as Jordan, Palestine, and Sham in general. Its fruits are the best there are, because they come from blessed lands.

In any case, this is a concept based on faith in what Allah has informed us. The one who does not believe, will not comprehend this, so can go on with his life restricted to materialism and numbers. The believer on the other hand, knows the reality of blessing that Allah places in things, and benefits greatly from this belief.⁴³¹

'O people of this house (Ahl al-Bayt).'

⁴²⁹ Al-Tafsir al-Kabir (18/29).

⁴³⁰ Ruh al-Ma'ani (12/100).

⁴³¹ Nawfal, A. Tafsir Surat Hud, p. 270.

This is of course a reference to the family of Ibrahim. This prophetic household from which the prophets and messengers after branched, ending with the seal of prophets and messengers, Muhammad (peace be upon him). This verse shows that his wife is included in ‘Ahl al-Bayt’, and this is further supported by what was revealed elsewhere in the Qur’an addressed to the mothers of the believers, ‘God only wishes to keep impurity away from you, people of the [Prophet’s] House (Ahl al-Bayt), and to purify you thoroughly.’ (al-Ahzab: 33)

Ibn Attiyah al-Andalusi said: ‘This verse shows that a man’s wife is from his household, because she was addressed in this way. This therefore supports the view that the wives of the Prophet are from Ahl al-Bayt who Allah has kept impurity away from.’⁴³²

Al-Qurtubi said: ‘This verse shows that a man’s wife is from his household. It also shows that the complete greeting of *salam* ends with ‘*wa barakatuh*.’⁴³³ *Barakah* means growth and increase. One manifestation of that *barakah* is that all the prophets and messengers were from the lineage of Ibrahim.’⁴³⁴

‘Indeed, He is Praiseworthy (Hamid), Glorious (Majid).’

Ibn Ashur said that this verse is an explanation for Allah’s mercy and blessing upon the family of Ibrahim, because Allah praises and is thankful to those who obey Him. And He is Majid (Glorious), so nothing is too great for Him; He rewards people with what He likes. Using these two names is a proof that Allah is well pleased with Ibrahim and his family.

Al-Tabari said: ‘Hamid means the One who is praised for His blessings and bounties upon you and all of creation.’⁴³⁵

Al-Sa’di said: ‘Al-Majid is the great and glorious, above all things. All creation is humbled before His greatness and submits before His might... Majd (which the name Al-Majid comes from) means greatness in all His attributes. So He is complete in His knowledge, His mercy has encompassed all things, and the Powerful who is able to do all things. He has

⁴³² Al-Muharrar al-Wajiz (3/191)

⁴³³ i.e. The most complete greeting is, *assalamu alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh*. This is authentically narrated from Abdullah ibn Abbas (See Muwatta Malik, No: 2757) and other scholars. (Translator)

⁴³⁴ Tafsir al-Qurtubi (9/71).

⁴³⁵ Tafsir al-Tabari (15/4000).

complete and perfect wisdom and kindness, and all His attributes are complete and perfect.⁴³⁶

The Prophetic Hadith mentioned that Allah says:

‘I have split the prayer (i.e. Surat al-Fatiha) in half between Myself and My servant. If My servant says: ‘Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the World’, Allah says: ‘My servant has praised Me.’ If he says: ‘*Al-Rahman* (The Lord of Mercy), *Al-Rahim* (the Giver of Mercy)’, Allah says: ‘My servant has extolled Me.’ If he says: ‘Master of the Day of Judgement’, Allah says: ‘My servant has glorified Me.’⁴³⁷

This hadith gives us an idea of glorifying Allah, for one way of glorifying Allah is to attest and affirm His power, authority, and kingship. Nothing gets in the way of His rule or His decree. Allah, Most High, has also described His Book as being *al-majid*, in His saying, ‘Qaf. And the Glorious Qur’an.’ (Qaf: 1). He also said, ‘Rather, it is a Glorious Qur’an, in a preserved tablet.’ (al-Buruj: 21-22). So the Qur’an too is glorious (*majid*) and great, due to the vast knowledge, higher objectives, and noble manners, that it contains. There is no surprise in this, of course, because it is the speech of Allah, Most High.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ‘Allah raises some people with this Qur’an, and lowers others with it.’⁴³⁸ He raises those who act upon it and live by it, and He debases those who turn their backs against it and do not act upon it.

‘Then, when the fear left Ibrahim and the good news reached him, he pleaded with Us for Lot’s people.’

When the angels reassured Ibrahim that they were messengers from Allah, then gave him the news of a son and grandson, he settled and no longer worried. So Ibrahim began to argue with the angels about destroying Lot’s people. This was not in opposition to Allah’s decree, but only because he was tender-hearted, forbearing, and merciful. He was keen and hopeful that Lot’s people may accept Islam, before they are punished.

Imam al-Shanqiti said:

⁴³⁶ Al-Haqq al-Wadiah al-Mubin, p.33.

⁴³⁷ Sahih Muslim (No: 395).

⁴³⁸ Sahih Muslim (No: 817).

‘It is not clarified here what exactly he said during this dispute and plea, but this is mentioned in Surat al-Ankabut. ‘We are about to destroy the people of that town. They are wrongdoers.’ Ibrahim said, ‘But Lut lives there.’ They answered, ‘We know well who lives there. We shall save him and his household, except for his wife; she will be with those who stay behind.’ (al-Ankabut: 31-32). In other words, he told them that destroying their town would mean destroying some of the believers without a sin. So they replied, ‘We know well who lives there.’ This is also mentioned in Allah’s statement, ‘Then [before the torment] We evacuated the believers from the city. But We only found one household of Muslims.’ (al-Dhariyat: 35-36)⁴³⁹

Some Lesson From This Verse:

- The prophets are the best of creation, and the most merciful.
- The prophets can become shocked and fearful, like other people.
- Arguing is permitted as long as the aim is to sincerely seek out the truth.
- Ibrahim’s plea is an indication of his forbearing nature.
- Ibrahim would not have argued or plead if he was certain that the matter had been decided and made final by Allah.

‘Ibrahim is forbearing, devout, and repentant.’

This is the shortest verse in Surat Hud. The Arabic word *halim* means to be forbearing in all one’s affairs and maintaining good character in all circumstances. It implies being patient with the harm that people cause, while always responding with good. This is why some people would say, ‘*hilm* (forbearance) is the king of good manners.’ A beautiful trait that is beloved to Allah, as the Prophet said to al-Ahnaf ibn Qays: ‘You have two traits that Allah loves; *hilm* (forbearance) and *anah* (composure).’⁴⁴⁰

The trait of devotion (*awwah*), that Ibrahim is described with here, implies doing something with consistency. Ibrahim is in a constant state of worship, obedience, and remembrance of Allah; always returning to Him. This trait was also mentioned in the story of Ibrahim in Surat al-Tawbah in the verses on him seeking forgiveness for his father, ‘Indeed, Ibrahim

⁴³⁹ Adwa al-Bayan (3/31).

⁴⁴⁰ Sahih Muslim (No: 17).

is devout and forbearing.’ Being devout also means sincere and humble when making du’a.

Ibrahim was *munib*, which means that he was always turning back to his Lord in repentance for all matters that he thinks he may have been negligent in. He was thus forbearing with people, devout in himself, and always turning to Allah.

We notice in the story of Ibrahim that he always maintains his calmness and composure. He is forbearing throughout all the events that he faces. This is quite noticeable in all the chapters of the Qur’an that mention him. He does not become excessively angry, nor does he curse or insult. He is patient with his people, and he forgives and overlooks.

He was like this in his dialogue about the sun and the moon in which establish that they are unworthy of being worshipped. He also maintained his calm when speaking to the tyrant king. He was even composed when destroying the idols, not doing so aggressively, but to make a clear point in the hope that his people would wake up from their misguidance. He kept calm when he was thrown into the fire and prayed to Allah. He kept his cool when he took his wife and beloved son to Makkah, turning to Allah and imploring Him to protect them. A truly incredible role model Ibrahim was in leadership and keeping disciplined.

These beautiful traits were ones that all the great prophets had, but Allah describes some prophets with them in particular, because they excelled and were known for them. Ibrahim certainly stood out when it come to being forbearing, never hastily wishing his people to be punished or destroyed, despite their wrongdoings towards him.

‘O Ibrahim! Plead no more! Your Lord’s decree has already come, and they will certainly be afflicted with a punishment that cannot be averted!’

This is the third verse in which Ibrahim is mentioned by name in this passage. The previous verse praises Ibrahim, the one before it speaks about his plea regarding Lot’s people, and this verse commands him to put aside his plea. It could be the angels calling out to him and telling him to stop pleading, or it could be from Allah, delivered to Ibrahim through the angels. It is too late for a plea now, for when Allah’s decree comes, none can avert it.

Imam Muhammad al-Amin al-Shanqiti said: ‘This punishment that this verse mentions and confirms that it cannot be averted, has been clarified in several places of the Qur’an, such as in this chapter and in other chapters:

‘When Our command came, We turned the cities upside down and rained down on them clustered stones of baked clay, marked by your Lord. And these stones are not far from the wrongdoers!’ (Hud: 82-83)

‘And We turned the cities [of Sodom and Gomorrah] upside down and rained upon them stones of baked clay. Surely in this are signs for those who contemplate.’ (al-Hijr: 74-75)

‘They must have passed by the city [of Sodom], which had been showered with a dreadful rain [of stones]. Have they not seen its ruins? Yet they do not expect to be resurrected.’ (al-Furqan: 40)

‘Then We utterly destroyed the rest, and poured a rain of destruction down upon them. How dreadful that rain was for those who had been forewarned! There truly is a sign in this, though most of them will not believe.’ (al-Shu’ara: 172-173)

They said, ‘We are sent to a people lost in sin, to send upon them stones of clay, marked by your Lord for the transgressors.’ (al-Dhariyat: 32-34)

Some Lessons From This Verse:

- It shows Allah’s gentleness with His noble messengers.
- If Allah’s decree has been decided, it cannot be averted.
- Nothing can protect the corrupt from Allah’s punishment.
- Allah is forbearing with people and gives them chance after chance. But if they exceed all boundaries, they are taken with a severe punishment.
- Allah teaches His messengers, and none is above Allah’s command. Like Allah said to Nuh, ‘O Nuh, he is not from your family. He has done wrong. So do not ask me about that which you have no knowledge of.’

2. The Story of Ibrahim’s Guests in Surat al-Hijr

Allah, Most High, said:

Tell them too about Ibrahim’s guests: who entered upon him and greeted [him with], ‘Peace!’ He [later] said, ‘We are afraid of you.’ ‘Do not be

afraid,' they said, 'We bring you good news of a knowledgeable son.' He said, 'How can you give me such news at my old age? What sort of news is this?' They responded, 'We give you the good news of truth, so do not be of those who despair.' He said, 'Who would despair of the mercy of their Lord except the misguided?' He then said, 'So, what is your mission, O messengers?' They said, 'We have been sent to a people of criminals.' But We shall save the household of Lot, all except his wife; We have decreed that she will be one of those who stay behind.' (al-Hijr: 51-60)

When we look at the verses of Surat al-Hijr, we notice that they do not speak about Ibrahim's challenges with his people, but instead the verses focus on his dialogue with the angels. Some of the details of the dialogue are mentioned elsewhere, as we discussed previously. However, in these verses, the angel-messengers are described as his 'guests', Ibrahim makes it clear that they are scared of them, and the son they are promised is described as being knowledgeable. We also find other points discussed here, not mentioned in other chapters. This shows us that the stories of the Qur'an that seem like they are being repeated, actually contain new meanings and new perspectives in each different chapter. Therefore, to think that the Qur'an is being repetitive by mentioning these stories several times, shows a lack of contemplation or a lack of understanding, or both.

Tell them too about Ibrahim's guests: who entered upon him and greeted [him with], 'Peace!' He [later] said, 'We are afraid of you.'

Shaykh al-Sa'di said: 'Tell them about the incredible story of Ibrahim, because there are lesson to learn in the stories of the messengers, especially the story of Ibrahim who we have specifically been commanded to follow and take as a role model.'⁴⁴¹

I would like to point two things out here. The first is that, although we can contemplate the Qur'an without understanding Arabic well, to truly comprehend it and ponder its meanings and secrets, we must work to learn the Arabic language. Secondly, the stories of the Qur'an are entire truths. We cannot mix historical tales and biblical narrations with them, especially not those narrations that speak disrespectfully about the prophets of Bani Israel.

⁴⁴¹ Tafsir al-Sa'di, p. 864.

‘Who entered upon him and greeted, ‘Peace!’ He said, ‘We are afraid of you.’

The verses seem to imply that they entered without previously informing him that they were going to visit, nor was he expecting them. However, they greeted him with the greeting of peace. Now, this passage seems to suggest that this was the first thing that Ibrahim said to them when they greeted him with peace. But of course we know from our previous discussion that this fear developed later on, when he served them with food and they did not eat from it. However, each chapter and passage in the Qur’an focuses on specific parts of any story, not mentioning it entirely. It is therefore essential that we make sense of the stories of the prophets by reading everything the Qur’an has to say, and adding the further clarifications of the Prophet in his Sunnah.

No doubt, Ibrahim would not respond to their greeting, by saying, ‘we are afraid of you.’ It is also unlikely that these were words that Ibrahim actually said to them aloud. Rather, it seems like this is something that Ibrahim said and thought to himself. However, what was within him was still noticeable on his emotions and facial expression. This is a method used in Arabic rhetoric; they say someone ‘said’, but they can mean within themselves. Like Allah said regarding Yusuf (peace be upon him):

Joseph’s brothers argued, ‘If he has stolen, so did his brother before.’ But Joseph suppressed his outrage, revealing nothing to them, and said, ‘You are in such an evil position, and Allah knows best [the truth of] what you claim.’ (Yusuf: 77)

So we can see here that the Qur’an, at times, misses out some information, since it has been mentioned elsewhere, because the objectives of each passage could differ.

‘Do not be afraid,’ they said, ‘We bring you good news of a knowledgeable son.’

We already saw in Surat Hud that this son that they were given good news of is Isaac. They also informed them of the coming of Isaac’s son after that. Ibrahim was previously also given the good news of his elder son, Ismael. Thus Ibrahim thanked his Lord for this blessing, saying, ‘All praise is for Allah who has blessed me with Ismael and Isaac in my old age. My Lord is indeed the Hearer of [all] prayers.’ (Ibrahim: 39)

He said, ‘How can you give me such news at my old age? What sort of news is this?’ They responded, ‘We give you the good news of truth, so do not be of those who despair.’ He said, ‘Who would despair of the mercy of their Lord except the misguided?’

Ibrahim and his wife Sarah are both well aware that whatever Allah decrees will occur. However, this a natural response to something that is normally deemed impossible; a miracle. So the angels reminded Ibrahim that this news is the truth, because it comes from Allah, and none is more truthful in speech than Allah. When they then said, ‘do not be of those who despair’, he came back to his realisation that they are messengers from Allah who only speak the truth and told them that he knows well that none ‘despair of the mercy of their Lord except the misguided.’

Once again, we see that although it is natural for us to expect the laws of nature to be consistent, these laws can easily be broken by Allah’s will. The unexpected can happen, while the expected sometimes does not. Ibrahim, no doubt is the leader of the monotheists, and his hope in Allah is great. Those who do not truly understand Allah’s nature and His vast mercy. Only they would lose hope in His mercy. As for the sound believers, they know that Allah gives as He wills. But any human can become momentarily shocked when a miracle occurs or when something so unexpected happens.

This verse shows that faith and losing hope in Allah cannot be combined in the same heart. Allah’s mercy is near, so it is never too far from anyone. The believing heart must always be aware of this.

He then said, ‘So, what is your mission, O messengers?’ They said, ‘We have been sent to a people of criminals.’ But We shall save the household of Lot, all except his wife; We have decreed that she will be one of those who stay behind.’

They were described as being *mujrimin* (criminals) because they indulged in sin, corruption, and lewdness. Their corruption spread across the whole society, until there was no hope back for them. At this stage, there was no option left but for them to be annihilated. Unfortunately, Western society is similarly going through moral decline and utter degradation. Even worse, it forcefully imposes its views on the rest of the world. The

Muslim society should therefore be aware of this, protecting itself from such corruption and misguidance.

We should be careful and realise that these historical realities mentioned by the Qur'an give us lesson for our daily lives. We should never thus think that Allah will not punish us if we allow our societies to drown in sin and immorality without speaking out, clarifying the truth, and protecting ourselves from corruption. When people become engrossed in worldly pleasures, they put themselves at risk of destruction. Allah, Most High, said:

‘When We decide to destroy a town, We command those corrupted by wealth [to reform], but they persist in their disobedience; so Our sentence is passed, and We destroy them utterly.’ (al-Isra: 16)

The Qur'an does not give us much detail about Lot's family. We do not know whether he had any children, or how many children he had. But we know that his wife disobeyed and was thus left behind. We can also not accept reports that claim that he had two daughters, and other similar tales, for these have not been reported authentically, so we stay silent about them.

‘We have decreed that she will be one of those who stay behind.’

This statement cannot be from the angels, because the One who decides and decrees is Allah alone. It could be that they said this based on the command of Allah, and we, the angels, have been sent to implement His decree. Similar to what the righteous man said:

‘The young boy had parents who were people of faith, and we feared that he would trouble them through defiance and disbelief. We hoped that their Lord should give them another child, purer and more compassionate, in his place.’ (al-Kahf: 80-81)

It was Allah who willed this, and Al-Khadir who implemented the command of Allah.

This verse teaches us that being a relative of someone righteous, even a prophet, does not benefit the one whose heart is blocked. We have an example in the wife of Lot, and before him, the wife of Nuh. Both were in the household of some of the greatest prophets of Allah, yet this did not benefit them.

3. Ibrahim's Dialogue with the Angels in Surat al-Ankabut

Allah, Most High, said:

When Our messengers brought the good news [of the birth of a son] to Ibrahim, they told him, 'We are about to destroy the people of that town. They are wrongdoers.' Ibrahim said, 'But Lut lives there.' They answered, 'We know well who lives there. We shall save him and his household, except for his wife; she will be with those who stay behind.' (al-Ankabut: 31-32)

Lot migrated with his uncle Ibrahim, settling at the valley of Jordan. Lot then lived alone among one of the tribes on the banks of the Dead Sea, within the city of Sodom. Lot married into them and became part of the community there.

These people were then afflicted with an unbelievable deviation, the first of its kind in human history, as the Qur'an described it. Men would incline towards sexual relations with men, instead of women who Allah has created for men. The natural relationship in all animals between male and female which leads to procreation, as Allah created all things in pairs. Hence, this lewd deviation never existed before the people of Lot. From the story of Lot in the Qur'an, we can see that this deviation spread widely amongst his people.

Sexual deviation can occur between men and women if it crosses its natural boundaries, but it generally still remains within the bounds of the *fitrah*. As for sexual deviation involving people of the same gender, then not only is it a sexual transgression, but it has crossed the bounds of pure nature and the *fitrah* of living beings. Allah has made sexual pleasure between spouses one which fits within the broader greater objectives of human existence. So the fact that some people find pleasure in sexual deviation, is not enough to make it acceptable, and is only a sign that they have left the bounds of the *fitrah* upon which Allah created humans.

They also cut off the way, steal money, and harm travellers passing by, sexually abusing their men. This is even worse than the original crime. On top of this, they publicly commit sexual deviations, in groups, with no shame whatsoever. They truly have reached the pinnacle of perversion and lack of shame.

It is clear that Lot initially called them to Allah and to abandoning their impurity, with kindness and concern. Then he threatened that Allah's punishment could befall them, making it clear that they have exceeded all bounds of deviation. But their reply was, 'bring us Allah's punishment if you are truthful.' (al-Ankabut: 29). Lot then said, 'My Lord, help me against these transgressing people.' (al-Ankabut: 30). This meant the end for the people of Lot, with Allah accepting his prayer and sending the angels to complete the task.

When Our messengers brought the good news [of the birth of a son] to Ibrahim, they told him, 'We are about to destroy the people of that town. They are wrongdoers.'

The context here is the story of Lot, which is why this incident involving Ibrahim and the angels is not discussed in much detail here. From the wording of the Qur'an, it seems like the main aim of the angels was to destroy Lot's people, but on their way they visited Ibrahim and brought him the good news of a son. Lot's people combined two major crimes, along with many others: disbelief in Allah and sexual lewdness.

Ibrahim said, 'But Lot lives there.' They said, 'We know well who lives there. We shall save him and his household, except for his wife; she will be with those who stay behind.'

Ibrahim is clearly concerned for his brother Lot, who was his nephew, but his brother in terms of prophethood. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'The prophets are brothers.' And this should be the attitude of every Muslim; concern for the wellbeing of his Muslim brother. But the angels made it clear that Lot, and the believers with him, are not included in this punishment.

However, Lot's wife was not with the believers who Allah saved, because she did not oppose the evil of her people, but rather astonishingly sided with them and approved their corruption. She will therefore remain behind and be destroyed with the rest of them. This also shows that she did not believe in Allah's punishment, otherwise she would at least have escaped with Lot to save herself.

4. The Story of Ibrahim's Guests and the Destruction of Lot's People in Surat al-Dhariyat

Allah, Most High, said:

Has the story of Ibrahim's honoured guest reached you [O Prophet]? They went in to see him and said, 'Peace.' 'Peace,' he said, [then added] 'These people are strangers.' Then he quickly turned to his family and brought a fat [roasted] calf, and placed it before them. 'Will you not eat?' he said, beginning to be afraid of them, but they said, 'Do not be afraid.' They then gave him good news of a knowledgeable son.' Then his wife came forward with a cry, clasping her forehead [in astonishment], exclaiming, [A baby from] a barren, old woman!' They replied, 'This is what your Lord has decreed. He is the Wise, the All Knowing.'

Then Ibrahim said, 'What is your mission, O messengers?' They said, 'We are sent to a people lost in sin, to send upon them stones of clay, marked by your Lord for the transgressors.' Then [before the torment] We evacuated the believers from the city. But We only found one household of Muslims in it. And left the town to be a sign for those who fear the painful punishment. (al-Dhariyat: 24-37)

This is an approach used regularly in the Qur'an. A rhetorical question is asked, before a story is told. 'Has the story of Musa reach you?' 'Has the story of the armies reach you?' There are many examples of stories being introduced in this manner, with the aim of grabbing people's attention and make them keen on knowing the answer.

Ibrahim's honoured 'guest' is mentioned in the singular form (*dayf*), although we know that it was a group of angels that visited. That is because this word is used in Arabic to refer to one and to a group, because they are still viewed as a unit of guest, even if there is a number of them. The host should treat his guests like they are one person in terms of taking care of each one equally and paying attention to each one equally. Our messenger Muhammad taught us to treat all those in a gathering equally, such that every person thinks that he is the one getting all the attention.⁴⁴² We find several places in the Qur'an in which the singular form is used to describe

⁴⁴² Fawa'id Hadith Abi Umari, Ibn al-Qas (No: 60).

a group if they are together, with a collective aim, like we see in the story of Musa and Harun when they were sent to Pharaoh (al-Shu'ara: 16).

‘Honoured guests.’

Why are they described as being honoured? They were honoured in two ways. They were honoured by Allah, as mentioned in the Qur'an:

And they say, ‘The Most Compassionate has offspring!’ Glory be to Him! In fact, they [the angels] are only honoured servants. They do not speak before He speaks, and they act by His command.’ (al-Anbiya: 26-27)

It could also refer to them being honoured by Ibrahim who hosted them in his house, presented them with food specifically prepared for them, and served them.

‘These people are strangers.’

We alluded before that Ibrahim did not say this directly to them, as that would contradict the good treatment of guests. Rather he said this to himself or he could have said it to his wife privately. This is supported by the earlier verse, ‘But when he saw that their hands are not reaching for the food, he became suspicious and fearful of them.’ (Hud: 70). That is because everything about the situation, their greeting, their appearance, and abstaining from eating made Ibrahim sense that the situation is a strange one. Despite that, he did not rush into making any rash decision or confronting them, which is a lesson for us in being sharp and aware, while at the same time not rushing into rash decisions.

Another lesson that can be learnt from this incident is that a host should not pressure or force his guests to eat, because people may have different reasons for not wanting to eat. Hence, Ibrahim said, ‘Will you not eat?’ which is a respectful invitation to eat, as opposed to something like, ‘eat.’ So the principles of hosting a guest are all found in this incident of Ibrahim. They were immediately invited in, food well prepared, and they were treated kindly.

This incident also teaches us that a woman should support their husbands in serving the guests. While at the same time we notice that Sarah did not sit with the guests and casually chat with them. Instead she stood aside, serving her guests with food and drink.

‘They gave him good news of a knowledgeable son.’

When Sarah realised that she would not give birth, she took an incredibly respectable and patient stance by gifting Hajar to Ibrahim in the hope that she would give birth to a son for him. So Allah decreed that Ismael would be born to Hajar and Isaac would be born to Sarah. Isaac was described as knowledgeable. Not tall or beautiful, but knowledgeable. This shows that valuable traits are what one should be keen on and praised for, not natural features that are beyond a person's control. In other verses, he was also described as being 'forbearing'.

Then his wife came forward with a cry, clasping her forehead [in astonishment], exclaiming, [A baby from] a barren, old woman!' They replied, 'This is what your Lord has decreed. He is the Wise, the All Knowing.'

This is a natural reaction of women. It is not appropriate to say that this is proof of the weakness of a woman's intellect. It is enough that Sarah sacrificed herself for Ibrahim and was patient with him throughout. But this a normal reaction which is the result of strong emotions and surprise.

Allah's name Al-Hakim (the Wise) and Al-Alim (the All Knowing) are mentioned together in the Qur'an in around thirty seven places, usually first mentioning knowledge, then wisdom. Not only is His knowledge vast and encompassing, but His wisdom dictates that this knowledge is placed appropriately in everything that He decides and decrees. We thus have no choice but to submit to Allah's decree, for our knowledge is deficient, and so is our wisdom. When a servant has knowledge of Allah, this helps him to remain firm and patient, because his trust in Allah is based on certain unwavering knowledge. The Qur'an relates that Jacob (peace be upon him) said:

No! Your souls have tempted you to do something [evil]. So [I am left with nothing but] beautiful patience! I trust Allah will return them all to me. Surely He is the All-Knowing, All-Wise.' (Yusuf: 83)

Similarly, in legislation, the matter first returns to complete knowledge, because knowledge is the basis of laws. Then comes wisdom to ensure that these laws are applied appropriately with proper measure. This allows for the laws of the Shari'ah to fit with the nature of humans, which is one of the special features of Islamic Shari'ah. Additionally, the laws of nature are usually consistent, so it is rare for them to be broken. So when Allah

decrees that a miracle occurs and they are broken, He does so for a perfect wisdom. Perhaps it was for these reasons that Allah's name Al-Hakim is usually mentioned after Al-Alim.

Imam Ibn al-Qayyim said:

Knowledge and wisdom are within all the attributes of perfection. For Allah's knowledge (*'ilm*) implies life, sight, hearing, and other related attributes. While wisdom (*hikmah*) implies perfect will, justice, mercy, excellence, kindness, and placing everything in their most appropriate place. This is what required the sending of messengers and granting reward or punishment. So wisdom is more specific than knowledge, for wisdom entails the correct application of knowledge.⁴⁴³

So Allah's creation is never in vain or without purpose. His decree is always based on encompassing knowledge and complete wisdom, and so is His legislation and guidance. He alone judges between them, and it is His judgment alone that we are all bound by.

Then the angels explained to Ibrahim what their mission was, as we explained earlier. They were sent to destroy the corrupt people of Lot. However, al-Sha'rawi notes here that there seems to be a contradiction between describing the stones that were thrown at them as being both stones and clay, for there is a difference between the two. The answer to this is that this clay was heated up until it turned into stone; and this is something that some other verses alluded to.

They said, 'We are sent to a people lost in sin, to send upon them stones of clay, marked by your Lord for the transgressors.'

What is meant by these stones being 'marked by your Lord', is that every stone carries the name of the person that it was intended for. It also shows that they came prepared directly from the sky, not stones taken from the earth. Allah has shown us His limits and His boundaries, which are commanded to never cross, nor even come close to. By falling into sin, one crosses these limits and transgresses them. However, Lot's people were transgressors, because they completely went beyond these limits and remained outside them with no concern whatsoever. They misplaced the

⁴⁴³ Asma Allah al-Husna, p. 127.

blessing of desire that Allah gave them in a way that contradicts His creation and opposes a major objective of marital relations.

‘Then [before the torment] We evacuated the believers from the city. But We only found one household of Muslims in it. And We left the town to be a sign for those who fear the painful punishment.’

They were not necessarily commanded to evacuate, but the path of escape was made easy for them and facilitated. Except for Lot’s wife who was apparently a Muslim, but in reality only would pretend to be with Lot. Otherwise, she was in agreement with her people and upon their religion. This betrayal that is referred to in Surat al-Tahrim (v. 10). It is not a reference to betrayal of the intimate marital relationship, but a betrayal of faith.

The town was left to be a sign for those who come after. Shaykh Mutawalli al-Sha’rawi said:

This sign is that the stones through which Allah destroyed them are still there to be seen. Whoever sees them can tell that these are not normal earth stones, but rather a very different type of stones. Thus this sign remains until this day as a reminder and warning to anyone who considers following in their footsteps. Some said that the sign left behind was a fountain that no person can come close to due its awful smell.⁴⁴⁴

However, the ones who will take heed are only those ‘who fear the painful punishment’ of Allah. Those who do not, are completely heedless of any sign, regardless of its clarity.

5. The Description of Isaac in the Qur’an

The description of Isaac in the Qur’an is not as detailed as some other prophets, such as Musa, Sulaiman, Yusuf, and Isa. However, it has alluded to some things.

1. **A gift from Allah.** We gave him Isaac and Jacob as an additional gift, and made each of them righteous.’ (al-Anbiya: 72)
2. **One who received revelation.** ‘We have sent revelation to you [O Prophet] as We did to Noah and the prophets after him; to Ibrahim, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, to Isa, Job, Jonah, Harun, and Solomon; and We gave David the Zabur (Psalms).’ (al-Nisa: 163)

⁴⁴⁴ Tafsir al-Sha’rawi (23/14595).

3. **He was knowledgeable.** ‘They said, ‘do not fear. We came to give you the good news of a knowledgeable son.’ (al-Hijr: 53)
4. **Righteousness.** ‘We gave him the good news of Ishaq, a righteous prophet.’ (al-Saffat: 112)
5. **A man of strength and insight.** ‘Remember Our servants Ibrahim, Isaac, and Jacob, all men of strength and vision. (Saad: 45)
6. **Allah completed His favour upon him.** ‘And so will your Lord choose you [O Joseph], and teach you the interpretation of dreams, and perfect His favour upon you and the descendants of Jacob— [just] as He once perfected it upon your forefathers, Ibrahim and Isaac. Surely your Lord is All-Knowing, All-Wise.’ (Yusuf: 6)
7. **He was one of the leaders of the monotheists.** ‘I follow the faith of my fathers: Ibrahim, Isaac, and Jacob. It is not [right] for us to associate anything with Allah [in worship]. This is part of Allah’s grace upon us and humanity, but most people are not grateful.’ (Yusuf: 38)
8. **His parents were brought the good news of his birth.** ‘His wife was standing by and laughed. We gave her good news of Isaac and, after him, of Jacob.’ (Hud: 71)

6. The Messengerhood of Isaac

The books of history mention that God sent Isaac (peace be upon him) to the Canaanites who used to live in the Levant and Palestine. Treading the path of all prophets and messengers, he called them to monotheism and the worship of God alone, with no partner. Allah relates to us that Yusuf said: ‘I follow the faith of my fathers: Ibrahim, Isaac, and Jacob. It is not [right] for us to associate anything with Allah [in worship]. This is part of Allah’s grace upon us and humanity, but most people are not grateful.’ (Yusuf: 38)

They say that Isaac married Rebecca, his cousin’s daughter, and she gave birth to two sons, Esau and Jacob, who is also known as Israel. When Isaac died, he was buried in Hebron, where his father Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was buried. This what is mentioned in the Biblical tradition and some history books.

7. Sham is One of the Beacons of Monotheism

Allah willed that Ibrahim migrated to settle in one of the lands of monotheism, in Sham. This prophethood was then inherited by Isaac, then by Jacob. This continued until Sulaiman (peace be upon them all). As for Makkah, Ibrahim took Hajar, the mother of the Arabs, there. And Ismael was sent as a messenger to the Arabs of Hijaz and Yemen. He called them to pure tawhid and they accepted his call. Some remains of this message continued to exist there until the sending of the seal of prophets and messengers, Muhammad.

There was thus a sort of unity between the lands of Sham and the Arabian peninsula. Ibrahim was the father of this unity, because he had two homes, one in Jerusalem and one in Makkah. Allah also willed that the miraculous event of al-Isra wa-l Mi'raj would be from Makkah to Masjid al-Aqsa, then up to the seventh heaven. Allah said:

‘Glory be to the One Who took His servant [Muhammad] by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque (al-Aqsa) whose surroundings We have blessed, so that We may show him some of Our signs. Indeed, He alone is the All-Hearing, All-Seeing.’ (al-Isra: 1)

Had Allah willed, this journey could have been from Makkah, and this shows that there is a strong relationship between Masjid al-Haram and Masjid al-Aqsa. The companions of the Prophet recognised this, so were quick to conquer Sham and free al-Aqsa from the idolatry of the Romans. Since then, the enemies of the mosque have continually attempted to conquer al-Quds, but these efforts were of no impact in front of the powerful force of the Muslims.

The author of *Khitat al-Sham* (A Description of Sham), Muhammad Kurd Ali, said:

Very early on, the whole world realized the importance of the location of the land of al-Sham, as it was a target for conquering invaders. The Pharaohs came to it via land and sea, the Babylonians and Persians from the east and north, Ghazan, Hulagu and Timur Lenk from the east, Napoleon from the south and west by sea, and Ibrahim Pasha of Egypt by land and sea, i.e. from the west and south west. The allied armies of the English, the French and the Arabs (the author means the soldiers of

Faisal ibn al-Husain) came from the south and the west. The Levant saw the campaign of Umar ibn al-Khattab, Abu Ubaidah ibn al-Jarrah, Khalid ibn al-Walid, Musa ibn Naseer, Nur al-Din Zangi, Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, and Sultan Selim. These were from the conquerors. Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz and Ibn Taymiyyah were from the reformers, while Bakhtinsar, Hulagu, Genghis, Ghazan, and Timur were from the corruptors.⁴⁴⁵

The land of Sham has been blessed by Allah from above seven heavens. It is the land of the prophets and divine revelation, and was a land of settlement for Ibrahim, Isaac, and the prophets that came after them.

⁴⁴⁵ Muhammad Kurd Ali (1/12-16).

Chapter 4

Ibrahim's Leadership, Building of the Ka'bah, Advice to His Children, Sincere Du'a, and Calling People to Hajj



Section 1: Ibrahim's Leadership, Building of the Ka'bah, Advice to His Children, Sincere Du'a, and Calling People to Hajj in Surat al-Baqarah

Section 2: Ibrahim's Supplication in Surat Ibrahim

Section 1:

Ibrahim's Leadership, Building of the Ka'bah, Advice to His Children, Sincere Du'a, and Calling People to Hajj in Surat al-Baqarah

Allah, Most High, said:

When Ibrahim's Lord tested him with certain commandments, which he fulfilled, He said, 'I will make you a leader of people.' Ibrahim asked, 'And will You make leaders from my descendants too?' God answered, 'My pledge does not hold for the transgressors.' We made the House a resort and a sanctuary for people, saying, 'Take the Maqam (standing-place) of Ibrahim as your place of prayer.' We commanded Ibrahim and Ishmael: 'Purify My House for those who walk round it (make *tawaf*), those who stay there (for *i'tikaf*), and those who bow and prostrate themselves in worship.' Ibrahim said, 'My Lord, make this land secure and provide with produce those of its people who believe in God and the Last Day.' God said, 'As for those who disbelieve, I will grant them enjoyment for a short while and then subject them to the torment of the Fire; an evil destination.' As Ibrahim and Ishmael built up the foundations of the House [they prayed], 'Our Lord, accept [this] from us. You are the All Hearing, the All Knowing. Our Lord, make us both Muslim (submit) to You and from our descendants a nation that will submit to you. Show us our rituals (*manasik*) and accept our repentance. You are truly the Acceptor of Repentance, Most Merciful. Our Lord, raise from among them a messenger who will recite to them Your verses, teach them the Book and wisdom, and purify them. You are the Mighty, the Wise.'

Who but a fool would forsake the religion of Ibrahim? We have chosen him in this world and he will rank among the righteous in the Hereafter. His Lord said to him, 'Submit!' He said, 'I submit myself to the Lord of all the worlds.' This was the advice of Ibrahim, as well as Jacob, to his children, [saying], 'Allah has chosen for you this faith; so do not die except as Muslims.' Were you present when death came upon Jacob? When he said to his sons, 'What will you worship after I am gone?' They replied, 'We

shall worship your God and the God of your fathers, Ibrahim, Ishmael, and Isaac, one single God; to Him we submit ourselves.’ That community passed away. What they earned belongs to them, and what you earn belongs to you. You will not be answerable for their deeds.

They say, ‘Become Jews or Christians, and you will be rightly guided.’ Say, ‘No, [instead follow] the religion of Ibrahim, the upright, who did not worship any god besides God.’ Say, ‘We believe in God and in what was sent down to us and what was sent down to Ibrahim, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and what was given to Musa, Isa, and all the prophets by their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we submit ourselves to Him.’ If they believe like you do, they will be rightly guided. But if they turn their backs, then they will be entrenched in opposition. God will protect you from them; He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing. [It is] Allah’s hue. And who gives a better hue than Allah? It is Him we worship. Say, ‘How can you argue with us about God when He is our Lord and your Lord? Our deeds belong to us, and yours to you. We devote ourselves entirely to Him.’ Or are you saying that Ibrahim, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes were Jews or Christians? Ask them, ‘Who knows better: you or God?’ Who could be more wicked than those who hide a testimony [they received] from God? God is not unmindful of what you do. That community passed away. What they earned belongs to them, and what you earn belongs to you. You will not be answerable for their deeds. (al-Baqarah: 124-141)

The verses mentioned in Surat al-Baqarah prior to this passage are a dialogue and debate with the People of the Book regarding Bani Israel and their attitudes and stances towards the prophets and their religion, from the era of Musa until Muhammad; mostly concerning the Jews, and partly concerning the Christians. Some verses also allude to the common traits in the People of the Book and the idolators.

However, this passage now goes back to a period before Musa, speaking about Ibrahim. The story of Ibrahim plays a major role in clarifying the dispute that existed between the Jews and the Muslims of Madina. The lineage of the People of the Book returns to Ibrahim, through Isaac. They are proud of this lineage and proud of Allah’s promise to bless Ibrahim’s offspring. Quraish is also from the lineage of Ibrahim, through Ismael. They

too are proud of this lineage and, based on this and their authority over the Arabs, they maintain supervision over the Sacred Mosque and the Ka'bah.

So now the discussion in these verses turns to responding to the claims of the Jews and Christians of being the only guided ones and their claim that they will be the only dwellers of Paradise. This passage clarifies the true religion of Ibrahim and the vast difference between his religion and the religion of those who claim to be followers of his, whether Jews, Christians, or idolators. It explains that guidance is never restricted to a race or location. But God's religion is universal; whoever follows it properly, in any place and any era, is guided and shall be admitted into Paradise. For this is God's religion, and no human can claim lineage or familial relations with God.

1. Al-Baqarah: 124

Allah, Most High, said:

***When Ibrahim's Lord tested him with certain commandments, which he fulfilled, He said, 'I will make you a leader of people.' Ibrahim asked, 'And will You make leaders from my descendants too?' God answered, 'My pledge does not hold for the transgressors.'* (verse 124)**

Allah commands His messenger to recall the commandments that Ibrahim was tested with, which he fulfilled to the best level. Allah described Ibrahim in another verse, saying, 'And Ibrahim, who fulfilled.' Ibrahim kept maintained real discipline and was patient, to ensure that he fulfils all his Lord's commands in a manner that pleases Him.

An example of something that Allah commanded Ibrahim is what Ibn Abbas narrated:

'Allah commanded him with *taharah* (purification); five things in the head and five in the body. Cutting the moustache, rinsing the mouth, rinsing the nose, using the *siwak* (tooth stick), and parting the hair. In the body: cutting the nails, shaving the pubic hairs, circumcision, removing the armpit hair, and washing the privates with water after relieving oneself (*istinja*).'⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁶ Tafsir Abd al-Razzaq (No: 116) and Tafsir Ibn Jarir (No: 1910).

He was also commanded with Islam, Hajj, Ihram, Tawaf, Sa'y, and Throwing the stones (*jamarat*). Ibrahim was successful in passing all the tests and trials that Allah caused him to face. He succeeded in calling to his father and his people to Allah and facing their enmity; he succeeded in his migration to Allah and being separated from his wife and son; he succeeded in the test of sacrificing his son, which Allah saved him from; he succeeded in the command to build the Ka'bah; and succeeded in upholding many other noble traits and deeds. Also included in the commands of Allah referred to in this verse are the beliefs, laws, worship, and manners that are part of his Shari'ah.

Perhaps the success of Ibrahim in fulfilling these commands is his strong relationship with Allah, his strong faith, and the purity of his heart. 'Ibrahim was of the same faith: he came to his Lord with a sound heart.' (al-Saffat: 83-84)

He said, 'I will make you a leader (imam) of people.'

An imam is someone who is followed by people. Al-Raghib said: 'An imam is something that is followed, in action or speech, whether that is a person or a book or otherwise, whether upon truth or falsehood.'

A righteous person is an imam in goodness. Allah said: 'We raised from among them leaders, guiding by Our command, when they patiently endured and firmly believed in Our signs.' (al-Sajdah: 24). So Allah made Ibrahim a leader for all people, at all times and places. He was an imam for the believers of Bani Israel, the believing Christians, and remains so for the Muslims, the followers of Muhammad (peace be upon him). He continues to be a teacher of sound faith and leader of goodness until the Day of Judgment.

Allah made his life one full of various human experiences that can be taken as an example to be followed by all those who follow Allah's path. This is what makes Ibrahim's message a universal one. However, this status that Ibrahim attained only came after successfully facing the test and trials that were put in his way. The path of being an imam (leader) is not an easy one. It is only given to those who fulfil their obligations and remain steadfast. One who is lazy, selfish, and concerned only about this life, can never be an imam.

Ibrahim asked, ‘And will You make leaders from my descendants too?’ God answered, ‘My pledge does not hold for the transgressors.’

When Ibrahim was informed that he has been made an imam for others, he requested the same for his children and offspring. This was out of concern and hope that there will be many righteous leaders to come in every age. This shows the purity of his heart and concern for the guidance of people. He did not care about restricting such a status to himself, but wanted others to be made leaders who guide humanity, thus continuing the message of truth generation after generation. However, Allah responded to his request by laying down a major principle, which is that leadership in faith is only granted to those who deserve it due to their firm faith, righteousness, sound knowledge, and patience.

‘My pledge does not hold for the transgressors.’

Dhulm (transgression) comes in various forms, such as transgression against oneself by committing *shirk* and transgression against people. The transgressors should be prevented from all forms of being an imam, whether being a messenger, a caliph, or an imam in prayer. Being just is what qualifies one for leadership in faith, while transgression makes one unfit for such a role.

This verse shows that the oppressors and transgressors have no right in the leadership of nations, because the overlying principle of political leadership is to bring about good and to prevent harm in all areas; faith, society, economy, and psychology. This was a form of leadership that some prophets, such as Dawud, Sulaiman, and Muhammad, fulfilled according to Allah’s legislation.

Those who try to convince people that politics is a dirty game that does not fit with the purity of faith, are only detaching the authority of religion in the political sphere, based on the old, but ignorant, maxim that says, ‘Leave what is for Caesar to Caesar, and what is for God to God.’ The movement that wants to separate politics from religion (as they understand it) is an evil one. It places authority in the hands of the most corrupt people who have no concern for justice, nor for implementing the Book of Allah. But this verse, demolishes this claim, because it prevents political leadership for those who transgress. It is prohibited to give such an important role to those not fit for it. It is even worse when it is in the hands of

those who separate between the reciter and the Book, the judiciary and the Shari'ah, and religion and politics.

The scholars used this verse as a proof to say that it is obligatory upon the scholars and seniors of society to remove oppressive rulers from their role, as related by Imam al-Mawardi. Ibn Taymiyah said: 'This shows that the oppressor should not be taken as a leader.'⁴⁴⁷ Al-Qurtubi said: 'A group of scholars used this verse to prove that the Imam (caliph) should be upright and noble, and capable of upholding this. It is such leaders that the Prophet commanded us to obey and not remove. As for the people of oppression and corruption, then they are not deserving it.'⁴⁴⁸

2. Al-Baqarah: 125

Allah, Most High, said:

We made the House a resort and a sanctuary for people, saying, 'Take the Maqam (standing-place) of Ibrahim as your place of prayer.' (verse 125)

In the Sacred Mosque and the rites of Hajj, Allah has kept a sign and remembrance of Ibrahim's leadership in Islam until the Day of Judgment. The House, here is of course the Ka'bah. The Qur'an refers to the Ka'bah as *Al-Bayt al-Atiq* (al-Hajj: 29). This can be from the Arabic word *atiq* to mean ancient or to *atiq* mean 'set free', because nobody has ownership of the Ka'bah, but it is the House of Allah.

Makkah has also been called Bakkah in the Qur'an, and there are various opinions about why it was called this. Makkah has also been called Um al-Qura in the Qur'an due to its high status above other cities and towns. Allah, Most High, said:

'So We have revealed to you a Quran in Arabic, so you may warn the Mother of Cities (Um al-Qura) and everyone around it, and warn of the Day of Gathering—about which there is no doubt—[when] a group will be in Paradise and another group in the Blaze.' (al-Shura: 7)

Allah, Most High, also said:

⁴⁴⁷ Minhaj al-Sunnah (8/255).

⁴⁴⁸ Tafsir al-Qurtubi (2/74).

‘This is a blessed Book which We have revealed, confirming what came before it, so you may warn the Mother of Cities and everyone around it. Those who believe in the Hereafter [truly] believe in this Book and they guard their prayers.’ (al-An’am: 92)

It has also been called, ‘the safe town.’ As Allah said, ‘By this safe town.’ (al-Tin: 3)

‘We made the House a resort and a sanctuary for people.’

We made the Ka’bah a place that people constantly return to. Whenever they leave it, they long to return to it. So they return for Hajj, Umrah, and worship. The souls never tire of being there. They also turn to it with their hearts and bodies in their daily prayers, remembering it every day.

Shaykh al-Sha’rawi said: ‘Ponder the word ‘House’ and the word ‘resort’. A house is a place which people return to, find comfort, and rest, with their wives and children. The Ka’bah was called a House because it is a place that all people find rest. And it is a ‘resort’ because it is a place which people go back to again and again. This is why anyone who visits it once, wishes that he could return many times more, because he has tasted the beauty of the Ka’bah.’⁴⁴⁹

Just looking at the Ka’bah removes the stress and sadness of your heart, putting behind all the worries of life. The hearts are attached to this place. Hence Ibrahim said:

‘Our Lord! I have settled some of my offspring in a barren valley, near Your Sacred House, our Lord, so that they may establish prayer. So make the hearts of people incline towards them and provide them with fruits, so perhaps they will be thankful.’ (Ibrahim: 37)

And a ‘sanctuary’, a safe place for people in which none feel fear for themselves or their wealth. Even animals are safe from being hunted and plants safe from being cut down. In the pre-Islamic era of *jahiliyyah*, a man would see the murderer of his own father in the Haram (sanctuary), yet would not harm him due to the sanctity of the Haram in their hearts. To ensure safety for the people remains in the Haram, the Prophet prohibited carrying weapons in it and fighting.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁹ Tafsir al-Sha’rawi (1/575).

⁴⁵⁰ Sahih Muslim (No: 1374).

‘Take the Maqam (standing-place) of Ibrahim as your place of prayer.’

A *maqam* in Arabic is the place or spot on which a person stands. The Maqam of Ibrahim is the stone which he stood on to continue building the Ka’bah. When the Ka’bah became bigger, he would stand on this rock, and Ismael would hand him the rocks to continue building. He also stood on it announce the Hajj to people and call them to it. The footprints of Ibrahim still remain visible on this stone until this day as a sign from Allah. It is the stone that people know today as the Maqam of Ibrahim by the Ka’bah, behind which two *rak’as* (units) are prayed after performing *tawaf*. This description of the Maqam, is the preferred view of the majority of scholars.

There are other opinions about what is meant by the Maqam of Ibrahim, but not very strong ones. We’ll allude to them nonetheless for the sake of being encompassing. Some said it refers to Arafah, Muzdalifah, and al-Jamarat. Others said it refers to the whole sacred sanctuary. But what supports the first opinion is that Allah commanded us in this verse to take the Maqam as a place of prayer.

It is narrated that Umar ibn al-Khattab said: ‘My view coincided with Allah three times. I said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, we should make the Maqam of Ibrahim a place of prayer.’ So Allah revealed, ‘Take the Maqam of Ibrahim as your place of prayer.’⁴⁵¹

It is also authentically narrated that the Messenger of Allah prayed behind the Maqam, as narrated by Jabir in his description of the Prophet’s Hajj, in which he said: ‘Then he walked fast for three rounds (around the Ka’bah) then walked four more rounds (at normal pace), then went to the Maqam of Ibrahim and recited, ‘Take the Maqam of Ibrahim as your place of prayer.’ He then made the Maqam between him and the Ka’bah.

This spot that Ibrahim stood on to build the Ka’bah is the same place that he stood on to call people to Hajj. In Fath al-Bari, Hafidh Ibn Hajar said, in the Hadith of Uthman, he added:

‘When Ibrahim completed the building of the Ka’bah, Jibril came to him and showed him the rites of Hajj, Ibrahim then stood on the Maqam

⁴⁵¹ Sahih al-Bukhari (No: 402) and Muslim (No: 24).

and called out, ‘O people, accept the call of your Lord.’ So Ibrahim and Ismael performed the rites of Hajj.

Al-Fakihi narrated with a sound chain of transmission to Mujahid that Abu Hurayra said: ‘Ibrahim stood by the Hijr and called out, ‘O people, Hajj has been legislated for you.’ He even made those in the wombs hear. So all those who believed and those who Allah knew would perform Hajj, until the Day of Judgment, replied, ‘Labbayk Allahumma Labbayk.’⁴⁵²

The fact that Ibrahim’s footprints are still visible on this stone is a miracle from Allah, because it is a solid stone. However, the part under his feet was made to soften slightly like mud, then its solidity returned when Ibrahim stepped off, so that his footprints would remain on them for all to see after him until this day, almost five thousand years later. The precise marks of Ibrahim’s feet were very clear to see on the stone until the time of the Companions (may Allah be pleased with them). Ibn Wahb narrates in the Muwatta from Yunus ibn Yazid from Ibn Shihab that Anas ibn Malik said: ‘I saw the Maqam with the toes of Ibrahim and the soles of his feet. However, people wiping their hands on it, made it less visible.’⁴⁵³

Imam al-Tabari narrates in his tafsir from Sa’id ibn Abi Arubah, from Qatadah, that he said regarding this verse: ‘They were commanded to pray by the Maqam, not to wipe it. But this ummah exaggerated in a fashion similar to that of the previous nations. Some people told me that they themselves saw the precise marks of Ibrahim’s heels and toes, but people continued to wipe it until those marks faded.’⁴⁵⁴

Despite what is mentioned in these reports, the prints of his feet have not completely worn off. A careful look at it makes it possible to see some of the prints, as mentioned by the fourteenth century Makkan historian, Shaykh Muhammad Tahir al-Kurdi, when he opened the Maqam and looked inside. This was something that Ibn Hajar also alluded to, referring to some lines of poetry recited by Abu Talib, the Prophet’s uncle in which he mentioned that Ibrahim’s footprints remained on the stone as he stood on them barefooted.

⁴⁵² Akhbar Makkah (No: 973).

⁴⁵³ Fath al-Bari (8/169).

⁴⁵⁴ Tafsir Ibn Jarir (No: 2000). With an authentic isnad.

Shaykh Muhammad Tahir al-Kurdi said: ‘We can conclude from looking at Ibrahim’s honourable footprints that he was the height of an average man of our time (the 14th century AH). He was not too tall, nor too short.’⁴⁵⁵

This is similar to the description of our messenger (peace be upon him). Therefore, we find, the Prophet said when speaking of the event of the Night Journey: ‘I saw Ibrahim, and I was the one who resembles him most from his offspring.’⁴⁵⁶

It is narrated in by Ibn Sa’d in the story of Abd al-Muttalib’s custody of the Prophet, that someone from the tribe of Bani Mudlaj said to Abd al-Muttalib: ‘Take good care of him, because we have never seen anyone with feet that resemble the feet of Ibrahim that are in the Maqam as much as him.’⁴⁵⁷

The Maqam is a virtuous and honourable site, which maintains the remembrance of Ibrahim (peace be upon him). Allah refers to it in two verses of the Qur’an. This verse in Surat al Baqarah and another verse in Surat al-Imran in which Allah says:

‘Surely the first House [of worship] established for humanity is the one at Bakkah (another name for Makkah)—a blessed sanctuary and a guide for all people. In it are clear signs: the standing-place of Ibrahim.’ (al-Imran: 96-97)

The standing-place of Ibrahim truly is a sign from Allah. For it to be preserved for thousands of years from the hands of enemies, and people to be praying behind it every single day. This is truly a miracle and a sign of his prophethood.

Some Legal Rulings Related to the Maqam

One of the most important teachings that relate to the Maqam is that it is recommended to perform two units (*rak’as*) of prayer upon completing the Tawaf around the Ka’bah. Abdullah ibn Umar narrates that the Prophet came to the Ka’bah, made Tawaf seven times, prayed two units behind the Maqam, then went to the Safa. And Allah, Most High, said: ‘There was an excellent example for you in the Messenger of Allah.’⁴⁵⁸ Jabir also reports

⁴⁵⁵ Bakdash, S. *Fadl al-Hajar al-Aswad*, p. 115.

⁴⁵⁶ Bukhari (No: 3437).

⁴⁵⁷ Tabaqat Ibn Sa’d (1/96).

⁴⁵⁸ Bukhari (No: 395).

that the prophet did the same, adding that he recited Surat al-Kafirun and Surat al-Ikhlās in his prayer.

Many jurists have also mentioned that it is recommended to make du'a after performing two units of prayer behind the Maqam of Ibrahim. At such a blessed place and after such a virtuous act of worship, we should be optimistic about Allah accepting our supplication. One should therefore make du'a for any matter of this life or the next, but it is better to make du'a with the supplications reported from the Prophet. And since this Maqam is one through which we remember our father Ibrahim, his sacrifices in the path of Allah, and his excellent traits, we should ask Allah to grant us some of these great virtues that Ibrahim was granted.

We commanded Ibrahim and Ismael: 'Purify My House for those who walk round it (make tawaf), those who stay there (for i'tikaf), and those who bow and prostrate themselves in worship.'

Shaykh al-Sa'di said, commenting on this verse, 'They were commanded to purify the Ka'bah from all forms of impurities; the impurity of disbelief, idolatry, and sin, as well as physical impurities, so that it remains a sacred and purified place for the worshippers. He first mentioned those who make tawaf, because this act of worship is specific to al-Masjid al-Haram, then *i'tikaf* (devotional retreat), because this is an act of worship that can only be done in a mosque, then prayer.

Allah attributed the House to Himself for a number of reasons:

- This makes Ibrahim and Ismael take extra care of purifying Masjid al-Haram, because it is the House of Allah.
- Attributing it to Allah gives it a higher status and honour, which commands respect from all the believers and makes it beloved to them.⁴⁵⁹

Dr. Fuad Mahmud ibn Sindi said: 'The Qur'an twice mentions that Ibrahim was commanded by Allah to purify the House. The command is once directed at Ibrahim alone in Surat al-Hajj. 'And [remember] when We assigned to Ibrahim the site of the House, [saying], 'Do not associate anything with Me [in worship] and purify My House for those who circle

⁴⁵⁹ Tafsir al-Sa'di, p.92.

[the Ka'bah], stand [in prayer], and bow and prostrate themselves.' (al-Hajj: 26)

The second time, it was a command for Ibrahim and Ismael after they had built the House, the Maqam was known, and Makkah became highly populated. This is in Surat al-Baqarah, in Allah's statement:

'We made the House a resort and a sanctuary for people, saying, 'Take the Maqam (standing-place) of Ibrahim as your place of prayer.' We commanded Ibrahim and Ishmael: 'Purify My House for those who circumambulate it (*tawaf*), those who stay there (for *i'tikaf*), and those who bow and prostrate themselves in worship.' (v. 125)

In the first verse, Ibrahim is commanded to purify the House for those who make *tawaf* around it and those who pray there. Imam al-Qurtubi said: 'Allah mentioned the most important pillars of prayer in this verse: standing, bowing, and prostrating.'

In the second verse, both Ibrahim and Ismael were commanded to purify the House, also for those who make *tawaf* around it and those who pray there, but it added a third act of worship which is to purify it for those who are staying there for *i'tikaf*.⁴⁶⁰

Tahir ibn Ashur says:

What is meant by purifying the House is to purify it from any physical impurities, so that the worshipper can worship Allah comfortably without being harmed or distracted by what is unpleasant. It also means to purify it from anything which is not befitting its purpose, such as idols, sin, corruption, and transgression, such as men and women circumambulating the Ka'bah naked. This verse implies that the idolators are not fit for taking care of the haram, because they did not purify it from idolatry, nor sin. Hence, Allah said:

'And why should Allah not punish them while they hinder pilgrims from the Sacred Mosque, claiming to be its rightful guardians? None has the right to guardianship except those mindful [of Allah], but most pagans do not know.' (al-Anfal: 34)

⁴⁶⁰ Sindi, p.256.

Allah, Most High, also said: ‘O believers, the polytheists are impure.’ (al-Tawbah: 28)⁴⁶¹

Ibrahim and Ismael were given the honour to purify the House. Then Muhammad was given the honour of purifying the House from the impurity of idolatry. Ibrahim built it upon the religion of tawhid, purely for the worship of Allah alone. But over the years, the pagans surrounded it with idols that are worshipped along with Allah. So the greatest task of purifying the House from such filth, fell on the shoulders of Muhammad (peace be upon him), which he fulfilled to the greatest extent.

3. Al-Baqarah: 126

Allah, Most High, said:

Ibrahim said, ‘My Lord, make this land secure and provide with produce those of its people who believe in God and the Last Day.’ God said, ‘As for those who disbelieve, I will grant them enjoyment for a short while and then subject them to the torment of the Fire; an evil destination.’ (al-Baqarah: 126)

Allah informs us of some of the distinct features of the Haram; a consequence of the supplications of Ibrahim. It seems like he made these supplications when he took his son Ismael and her mother to stay in Makkah. Allah accepted Ibrahim’s prayer and made Makkah a safe and secure land. This has mostly always been the case until this day, though some exceptional events did occur which led to some fear and harm, but these were rare incidents; and general principles remain true, even if exceptions exist. In addition to Allah decreeing that it remains safe over the centuries, Allah commanded us to maintain the safety in Makkah and put added effort into protecting it.

This prayer by Ibrahim is one of the most encompassing prophetic supplications, because safety and security of lands and roads is a leading cause of happiness, it brings justice and honour, and allows people to focus on what benefits them.

Ibrahim also asked Allah to provide the people of Makkah with produce, fruits, and trees, so that they always have what suffices them in terms

⁴⁶¹ Al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir (1/114).

of food, never feeling the need to leave it for the sake of finding provision. This is in the hope that there will always be people who maintain Allah's House and call to the worship of Allah alone.

This du'a was accepted by Allah, for fruits come to Makkah from all over the world, as Allah said: 'Have We not established for them a safe haven (Makkah) where every kind of produce is brought, as a provision from Us? But most of them do not comprehend.' (al-Qasas: 57)

Ibrahim particularly prayed for the believers, hoping that this land is filled with believers in Allah. However, Allah decreed that provision would be granted to all people, believers and disbelievers, even animals; so He said in response to Ibrahim:

'As for those who disbelieve, I will grant them enjoyment for a short while and then subject them to the torment of the Fire; an evil destination.'

No matter how long a person lives and whatever pleasures they are given, it remains a short and temporary enjoyment which will quickly come to an end.

This verse teaches us that we are all in need of asking Allah, no matter how high our status, and that *du'a* is a cause for attaining what we want. It also shows Ibrahim's concern for the believers that will come and settle in Makkah. We can also see in this verse that Allah will give worldly provision to all people, righteous or evil. Allah gives it to those that he loves and those that He does not love. But leadership in faith is only granted to those who are righteous and close to Allah.

4. Al-Baqarah: 127

Allah, Most High, said:

Ibrahim and Ismael built up the foundations of the House [praying], Our Lord, accept from us. You are the All Hearing, the All Knowing.'
(al-Baqarah:127)

Some scholars were of the view that the Ka'bah had already been built before Ibrahim, and that what Ibrahim and Ismael did was to renovate the House, not to build it from scratch. Its foundations were already present, but they were commanded to raise its foundations and complete its building again.

However, other scholars disagree, claiming that Ibrahim was the first to build the Ka’bah and that there was no such thing as a Ka’bah before that. Had there been, the Arabs would have been aware of it and transmitted it throughout the generations in Hijaz, Yemen, and Najd.

We do not have authentic prophetic traditions that speak about the building of the Ka’bah before Ibrahim. However, the first group of scholars, as well as some weak reports, argued that the apparent wording of the Qur’an seems to support their view. As well as the verse at hand, they quoted Allah’s statement, ‘And [remember] when We assigned to Ibrahim the site of the House.’ (al-Hajj: 26). They claimed that the place of the Ka’bah was existed before, but it was unknown because it had been completely destroyed. Allah therefore showed Ibrahim its place and commanded him to build the Ka’bah once again at its correct and specified place.

However, since we do not have any clear Hadith that speaks of the Ka’bah being built before Ibrahim, we should keep to what the Qur’an has mentioned and that is that Ibrahim and Ismael were the first to build the Ka’bah, and Allah knows best.

Ibn Kathir says regarding this matter:

Allah commanded Ibrahim to build a House that can be a place of worship like the places of worship of the angels in the heavens. He guided him to the place that had been prepared and decreed for the Ka’bah since the creation of the heavens and earth. As reported in Sahih al-Bukhari and Muslim: ‘This land has been made sacred (haram) the day Allah created the heavens and earth. And He has made it sacred until the Day of Judgment.’⁴⁶²

A lot has been reported about the Ka’bah being built before Ibrahim. Some reported that the angels built it, others said Adam initiated its building, and others claimed it was Seth son of Adam. Similarly, it was narrated that the Ark of Noah made *tawaf* around the Ka’bah. All these narrations are fabricated, very weak, or Biblical narrations, so none can be accepted as proof on this matter. However, we do know that the Ka’bah had been built four times before the Prophet Muhammad was sent:

1. It was first built by Ibrahim.

⁴⁶² Qasas al-Anbiya, p. 152.

2. It was then built by the Amaleks.
3. It was then built by the tribe of Bani Jurhum.
4. It was then built by Quraish five years before the prophet became a messenger. They made it a condition to only use pure money to build it, but this did not suffice them, so they missed out just over three meters from the side of the Hijr, which remains open.

They put a short wall over it, for people to circumambulate behind it. They also made some other changes to it, increasing its height to 18 cubits, and roofing it, as it had not been roofed before. They added a drainpipe from wood, closed the western door, and raised the eastern door to ground level. This way they could allow entry or prevent whoever they wanted from entering. The Messenger of Allah participated in building the Ka'bah with them and carried stones with them.

However, when the building was complete and they wanted to place the Black Stone in its place, a dispute occurred between them, each tribe wanting the honour of placing the stone in its place. They then decided that the first to enter the House would be allowed to decide. It was Muhammad (peace be upon him) that entered, so he placed the black stone on a piece of cloth and told each tribe to hold a corner. They lifted together towards its place, before the Messenger himself placed it into its place in the Ka'bah with his hands, thus resolving a dispute that was potentially going to lead to fighting and even killing.

After Islam, the Ka'bah was re-built three further times:

- By Abdullah ibn al-Zubair.
- Then by al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf.
- Then again by Sultan Murad Khan.

Whoever wants further details on this matter should refer to *al-Ka'bah al-Musharrafah* (in Arabic) by Dr. Mahmud Ahmad al-Dosari.⁴⁶³

‘Ibrahim and Ismael built up the foundations of the House.’

This verse is not explicit about who exactly laid the foundations down, Ibrahim or Ismael, or whether they existed before them. However, in a Hadith, the Prophet seems to allude that it was Ibrahim. In the Hadith

⁴⁶³ An English translation of selected chapters of this book are available through the link below: <https://en.alukah.net/Authors/View/Library/2244/>

narrated by Aisha, he said: ‘Have you not seen how your people reduced the area of the Ka’bah, making it smaller than when Ibrahim laid down its foundations? She said: ‘Will you not return it to how it was laid down by Ibrahim?’ He replied: ‘Had your people not only recently left their idolatrous religion I would have.’⁴⁶⁴

‘Our Lord, accept from us. You are the All Hearing, the All Knowing.’

This verse shows us that Ibrahim and Ismael were conscious of Allah while building the Ka’bah, mindful that they are fulfilling Allah’s command, and hoping that Allah accepts their deeds from them. They teach us to never be too proud of ourselves or to think too highly of our actions. Instead to remain humble and fearful that Allah will not accept our deeds from us. For a person becomes more complete as their servitude to Allah becomes greater.

Abu Hayyan mentioned that these Names of Allah, the All Hearing, the All Knowing, are appropriate here; Allah hears their prayer for their deeds to be accepted and He knows what is in people’s hearts and how sincere they are.⁴⁶⁵ He hears all things in all languages, loud and quiet, and He knows all things, open and secret.

5. Al-Baqarah: 128

Allah, Most High, said:

‘Our Lord, make us both Muslim (submit) to You and from our descendants a nation that will submit to you. Show us our rituals and accept our repentance. You are truly the Acceptor of Repentance, Most Merciful.’ (al-Baqarah: 128)

Along with being one of the greatest means to attaining what one want, du’a is one of the greatest acts of worship. In fact, it is worship, as the Prophet (peace be upon him) described. He said: ‘Du’a is worship (ibadah).’ Then he recited, Allah’s statement, ‘Your Lord says, ‘Call on Me and I will answer you; those who are too proud to worship Me will enter Hell humiliated.’ (Ghafir: 60)⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶⁴ Bukhari (No: 1583) and Muslim (No: 1333).

⁴⁶⁵ Al-Bahr al-Muhit (1/388).

⁴⁶⁶ Tirmidhi (No: 2969). Imam al-Tirmidhi said: ‘This is an authentic Hadith.’

Despite how much these two great prophets have been blessed and their firmness upon Islam, they still ask Allah to make them Muslims, fully submitting to Him in all their affairs. They are always looking to increase in faith, piety, and closeness to Allah. Ibrahim then did not suffice by making *du'a* for himself and children, but also prayed for firmness upon Islam for their offspring. What he really wanted and hoped for is that Islam and *tawhid*, the religion of all the prophets and messengers, remains in his offspring, so that people continue to submit to Allah and obey His commands until the Day of Judgment.

This *du'a* comes from hearts that know well that all our hearts are between the two fingers of Allah, Most High; He turns them as He wills.

‘Show us our rituals (*manasik*).’

This is a *du'a* in which Ibrahim asks Allah to teach them the proper way of completing the rites of Hajj and worshipping Him. We take from this that acts of worship have to be based on revelation and proof. It is not valid for anyone to worship Allah except in a way that Allah has revealed.

Shaykh al-Sa'di said: ‘It could be that this refers to the rituals that are specific to Hajj, as implied by the context. It could also refer to ritual worship more broadly, which includes the whole religion, which is implied by the generality of the wording. However, the word *manasik* has become attached to the rituals of Hajj. But in general, this *du'a* of theirs is one in which they pray for success towards beneficial knowledge and righteous deeds.’⁴⁶⁷

It is narrated that Ali ibn Abi Talib said: ‘When Ibrahim completed building the House, he made this prayer, so Allah sent Jibril to show him how to perform Hajj. He went with him to Safa and Marwa, Mina, al-Mash'ar al-Haram, and Arafat. Then he said: ‘Have you understood what I have shown you?’ He replied: ‘Yes’.⁴⁶⁸

‘Accept our repentance. You are truly the Acceptor of Repentance, Most Merciful.’

No matter how much effort a person puts into their worship, there will always be some deficiencies and shortcomings, either unintentionally or

⁴⁶⁷ Tafsir al-Sa'di, p.93.

⁴⁶⁸ Musannaf Abd al-Razzaq (No: 9099).

be not performing our worship in the most complete way. So the prayer of Ibrahim and Ismael seeking forgiveness, is for these types of shortcomings. Some scholars said they sought forgiveness for their offspring and asked Allah to turn those who stray from their offspring back to the straight path. They also did this to teach others that Hajj and pilgrimage is a place of seeking forgiveness from the Most Merciful and wiping away sins.

Some scholars have mentioned that *tawbah* (repentance) is three levels. The *tawbah* of most Muslims is to feel guilt for their past sins, intending never to return to that sin, and returning things to their rightful owners. A higher level than that is those who make *tawbah* from those things that are discouraged, ill thoughts, and worship that is not completed to the highest level. Whereas the highest level is the repentance of those who repent so that Allah raises their rank. So of these two great prophets sought forgiveness for themselves, then it would have been of this third level.⁴⁶⁹

Imam al-Nawawi mentioned that *tawbah* is obligatory from all sins. If this sin is between a person and Allah alone, then there are three conditions for it to be accepted:

1. To stop sinning
2. To feel remorse for committing that sin.
3. To firmly intend to never return to it.

If the sin involves harming another person or taking a right of theirs, then there is a fourth condition, which is to make it up to them or return their property to them. It could also be by asking for their forgiveness if this does not lead to more harm.

Allah's name Al-Tawwab is mentioned eleven times in the Qur'an; nine of them alongside Allah's name Al-Rahim, such as in Surat al-Baqarah (v. 37). While Allah's name Al-Rahim is mentioned 123 times in the Qur'an, mostly alongside His name Al-Ghafur.

Ibn al-Qayyim and Shaykh al-Sa'di both explained that Allah is Al-Tawwab (The Acceptor of Repentance), because He first forgives a person by allowing to repent in the first place, then accepts their repentance from them.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁹ There is no reason why prophets cannot repent for the first or second level either. Adam was taught to repent from a sin and other prophets also sought forgiveness for the second type. (Translator)

⁴⁷⁰ Madarij al-Salikin (1/339).

6. Al-Baqarah: 129

Allah, Most High, said:

‘Our Lord, raise from among them a messenger who will recite to them Your verses, teach them the Book and wisdom, and purify them. Indeed, You are the Mighty, Wise.’ (al-Baqarah: 129)

These supplications by are not mere passing words, but prayers that stem from hearts that are truly concerned about the guidance of the generations to come after them. This specific prayer also shows their deep insight, since they asked for Allah to send a messenger, not any righteous man, and someone who comes from among them, not a foreigner. This gives them something to be honoured with and someone they can easily relate to.

Allah accepted their du’a by sending the final messenger Muhammad (peace be upon him). Abu Umamah said: ‘O messenger of Allah, how did things start for you?’ He replied: ‘[I am] the prayer of my father Ibrahim and the glad tidings of Isa. My mother saw in a dream that a light was coming out of her that lit up the palaces of Sham.’⁴⁷¹

Ibrahim’s prayer coincided with what Allah had already decreed in sending Muhammad as a messenger to the illiterates of Arabia, as well as the rest of the world, both humans and jinn. This is clarified in Allah’s statement, ‘He is the One Who raised for the illiterate [people] a messenger from among themselves—reciting to them His revelations, purifying them, and teaching them the Book and wisdom, for indeed they had previously been clearly astray.’ (al-Jumu’ah: 2)

The Arabs were known as illiterates, because they mostly did not read or write. As the Prophet said: ‘We are an illiterate nation. We do not write or count.’⁴⁷² This has nothing to do with education or eloquence, since the Arabs were known for their literary expertise; but they heavily relied on memorisation, as opposed to writing.⁴⁷³

‘Our Lord, raise from among them a messenger who will recite to them Your verses, teach them the Book and wisdom, and purify them.’

⁴⁷¹ Musnad Ahmad (No: 22261).

⁴⁷² Bukhari (No: 1913).

⁴⁷³ This last sentence is an addition from the translator for the purpose of clarifying.

These are four things that Ibrahim prayed for in the messenger that he hoped Allah would send. ‘A messenger who will recite to them Your verses.’ Allah commanded His messenger to recite His words that were revealed to him through the angel Jibril. He was told to recite the Qur’an to all the people. ‘I was commanded to be from the Muslims and to recite the Qur’an.’ (al-Naml: 91-92)

‘Teaches them the Book and wisdom.’ It is the role of the messenger to teach people the Qur’an, clarifying its rulings, its lawful and unlawful, what is obligatory and what is recommended, its admonishments, and knowledge of the afterlife. There is a difference between reciting the Book and teaching them the Book. Recitation was mentioned first, because it is people’s first exposure to the Qur’an. This implies teaching people the proper way of reciting (*tajwid*). After this comes teaching them its meanings (*tafsir*), which further expands on the meanings that are initially understood by simply hearing the verses. ‘Wisdom’ is the Prophetic Sunnah. The Prophet teaches us the Sunnah, which is an expansion and clarification of the Qur’an. This is a reference to the study of Hadith.

‘And purifies them’, internally from the impurities of *shirk* and doubt, and externally from the impurities of sins and disobedience. Sometimes the act of ‘purifying’ is attributed to the person himself, as Allah said, ‘The one who purifies it has succeeded.’ (al-Shams: 9). This is in the sense that a person must himself work to become pure. At times it is attributed to Allah, Most High, since He is the One who truly purifies. ‘But Allah purifies whoever He wants.’ (al-Nisa: 49). At other times, it is attributed to the Prophet, such as in this verse, because he is the one sent by Allah to teach us the message that purifies us.

Someone may ask why Ibrahim’s supplications were always accepted. The acceptance of prayers has conditions. One condition is to only eat that which is halal (lawful). Ibn Abbas narrates that Sa’d ibn Abi Waqqas said: ‘O messenger of Allah, ask Allah to make me someone whose prayers (du’a) are accepted. So the Prophet replied: ‘O Sa’d, make what you eat pure, and you will become one whose prayers are answered.’⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷⁴ Al-Mu’jam al-Awsat (No: 6495). This hadith is considered weak by many scholars of Hadith, but its meaning is supported by authentic narrations.

The most essential condition for acceptance of du'a is to fulfil servitude (*ubudiyah*) to Allah with sincerity, words, and actions, not simply claiming servitude with words. Ubudiyah means to uphold the obligations, strive in voluntary worship, and live sincerely for Allah. This is summarised in the statement of the Prophet, in which he said, Allah, Most High, says:

'I have announced war against whoever is an enemy to my friends (*awl-iyah*). And my servant cannot come closer to Me with anything more beloved to Me than what I have obligated upon him. My servant then continues to come closer to Me with voluntary worship, until I love him. Then when I love him, I become his hearing that he hears with, his sight that he sees with, his hand that he holds with, and his foot that he walks with. If he asks Me, I would give him, and if he seeks My forgiveness, I would forgive him.'⁴⁷⁵

The First House of Worship on Earth

Allah, Most High, said:

'Surely the first House [of worship] established for humanity is the one at Bakkah (another name for Makkah)—a blessed sanctuary and a guide for all people. In it are clear signs: the standing-place (Maqam) of Ibrahim. Whoever enters it is safe. Pilgrimage (Hajj) to the House is a duty owed to God by people who are able to undertake it. And those who disbelieve [should know that] God has no need of anyone.' (al-Imran: 96-97)

Allah informs us that the first House built for worship and to remember Allah's name is al-Masjid al-Haram and the Ka'bah. He describes it as a blessed sanctuary since it contains both worldly and religious blessings for those who come to it. Allah then spoke about the obligation of Hajj for those who are able to reach Makkah and financially provide for themselves and their families for the duration of their journey. Then whoever rejects this and refrains from performing Hajj without a valid excuse, has left the religion.

The natural love and respect for the Ka'bah has always remained in the hearts of the believers, since it was built by Ibrahim (peace be upon him). This was then further emphasised as a religious duty and act of obedience to Allah, since Muslims are obliged to hold sacred that which Allah made sacred. In the story of the conquest of Makkah, the Prophet said: 'This is a day in which the Ka'bah is glorified and in which it is clothed.'⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁵ Sahih al-Bukhari (No: 6502).

⁴⁷⁶ Sahih al-Bukhari (No: 4030).

Many events show the sanctity of the Ka'bah, from the time of Ibrahim when he was commanded by Allah to purify it and call people to perform Hajj, to when Allah protected it from the attack of Abraha and his army that included elephants. In the Shari'ah of the final messenger, many acts of worship are also connected to the Ka'bah. We direct ourselves to it during every prayer and we are taught to not face the Ka'bah when relieving ourselves. As for the status of Hajj and the great reward of performing it, then it is well known.

Regarding the black stone, the Prophet said that it is a stone from Jannah, whiter than milk, but the sins of mankind turned it black.⁴⁷⁷

When Was al-Masjid al-Aqsa Built?

Forty years after building the Ka'bah, Ibrahim built al-Masjid al-Aqsa in Jerusalem.

The Messenger (peace be upon him) was asked by Abu Dharr: 'O Messenger of Allah, what is the first mosque built on earth?' He said: 'Al-Masjid al-Haram.' He said: 'Then which mosque?' He replied: 'Al-Masjid al-Aqsa.' He asked: 'How long was it between them?' He replied: 'Forty years.'⁴⁷⁸

This authentic hadith suggests that Ibrahim is the one who built al-Aqsa, as well as the Ka'bah. This means that al-Aqsa was built in Jerusalem, before Bani Israel entered Palestine; after Musa and before Dawud and Sulaiman. This was before Sulaiman built the temple as the Jews claim. So Jerusalem has always been a Muslim land and al-Aqsa has always been one of the mosques of Allah. This is before the Jews existed and before they claimed the land of Palestine. The right of the Muslims to Palestine comes well before any claims to it made by the Jews or Christians.

The place of al-Aqsa has remained, and the prophet Muhammad led the prophets in prayer at Masjid al-Aqsa during the journey of al-Isra wa-l-Mi'raj. However, the mosque has gone through damage, which was later renovated in the era of the Umayyads. However, Shaykh Uthman al-Khamis argues that it was Jacob who built al-Aqsa Mosque.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁷ Musnad Ahmad (No: 3537). Tirmidhi said: 'This is an authentic Hadith.'

⁴⁷⁸ Bukhari (No: 3366) and Muslim (No: 520).

⁴⁷⁹ Al-Khamis, p.180.

A Prayer for Makkah and Madina

After Ibrahim completed building the Ka'bah, he prayed for it and the people of Makkah, made it a sanctuary in which fighting, hunting, and cutting down trees is permissible. Our messenger informed us of this and then made a similar prayer for Madina.

Imam Muslim narrated that someone felt distressed by the living conditions of Medina, so he came to Abu Sa'id al-Khudri and said: 'I have a large family (to support) and we are enduring hardships. I have therefore made up my mind to take my family to some fertile land. Abu Sa'id said: 'Don't. Stay in Medina. We once come out with the Messenger of Allah until we reached Usfan. We stayed there for some nights, so some people said: 'By Allah, we are just laying here, while worried for the safety of our children who we left behind.'

This reached the Messenger of Allah, so he said: 'What is this that has reached me? By Allah, I if wanted to, I could have commanded my camel to proceed without stopping, until it reaches Madina.' He then said: 'Ibrahim declared Makkah as sacred territory (*haram*) and it became sacred, and I declare Madina sacred territory; the area between the two mountains. No blood is to be shed within its bounds and no weapon is to be carried for fighting, and the leaves of the trees there should not be cut off except for fodder. O Allah, bless our Madina for us.' Then he said: 'By Him in Whose Hand my life is, there is no valley or mountain path of Madina which is not protected by two angels until you reach there.'⁴⁸⁰

Abu Hurayra said, that when people saw the first fruits of the season, they would bring them to the Messenger of Allah. The Messenger would take them and say, 'O Allah, bless our fruits for us, bless our city, bless our *sa'* and bless our *mudd* (two measures of volume they used). O Allah, Ibrahim is your slave, your friend, and your Prophet. I too am your slave and your Prophet. He prayed to you for Makkah and I pray to you for Madina just like he prayed for Makkah.' Then he would call the smallest child he saw and give him the fruits.'⁴⁸¹

Allah has done the pagan Arabs a great favour by blessing them with the prayer of Ibrahim for the Haram and its people. they should therefore

⁴⁸⁰ Sahih Muslim (No: 1374).

⁴⁸¹ Sahih Muslim (No: 1373).

be thankful to Allah, worship Him alone, and follow the religion of Ibrahim. Allah, Most High, said:

They say, ‘If we follow the guidance with you (O Muhammad), we will be driven out of our land.’ Have We not established for them a safe haven (Makkah) where every kind of produce is brought, as a provision from Us? But most of them do not comprehend’ (al-Qasas: 57)

Allah, Most High, said:

‘Have they not seen how We have made [Mecca] a safe haven, whereas people all around them are being snatched away? How can they then believe in falsehood and deny Allah’s favours?’ (al-Ankabut: 76)

The Centrality of the Ka’bah in the World

Many Muslim scholars have explained that the Ka’bah is in a central part of the world. This was mentioned by Abu Hayyan, Yaqut al-Hamawi, and others. Ibn al-Qayyim said: ‘Just as Allah made them a moderate middle nation; He chose a middle location on earth for them as their direction for prayer.’⁴⁸²

This is not merely a geographical discussion, but has important spiritual implications. Many classical scholars drew a connection between the central location of the Ka’bah and the central and moderate position of Muslims. This can be linked to the Muslim ummah being favoured above the other nations. Its central location also makes it perfect for delivering the message of Islam to all people all around the world. This centrality is another reason for it being named Um al-Qura (The Mother of Towns).

7. Al-Baqarah: 130

Allah, Most High, said:

‘Who but a fool would forsake the religion of Ibrahim? We have chosen him in this world and he will rank among the righteous in the Hereafter.’ (al-Baqarah: 130)

Certainly! None should forsake or turn away from the religion of Ibrahim, for it is the religion of all the prophets and messengers, revealed to them by Allah, the Creator of all creation. Only a foolish person would forsake such a religion for a manmade religion or ideology. Everything

⁴⁸² Miftah Dar al-Sa’adah (2/31).

around us points to the truth of only one God and the truth of the message that the prophets brought.

8. Al-Baqarah: 131

Allah, Most High, said:

His Lord said to him, ‘Submit!’ He said, ‘I submit myself to the Lord of all the worlds.’ (al-Baqarah: 131)

Ibrahim is the father and leader of the monotheists, because as soon as Allah commanded him to submit, he submitted himself completely to Allah, perfecting his faith, worshipping Allah with sincerity, and leaving all his affairs with Allah. Who better than the one who submits themselves to Allah. Such a person has left their affairs to One who is powerful, wise, and provides for all His creation. This is the meaning of Islam and what it means to be a Muslim; the perfect manifestation of a true Muslim is shown to us by Ibrahim.

Ibrahim then advised his children and the following generations to stick to this pure way of Islam. Whoever disbeliefs has thus rejected Allah and rejected the advice of Ibrahim.

9. Al-Baqarah: 132

Allah, Most High, said:

This was the advice of Ibrahim, as well as Jacob, to his children, [saying], ‘Allah has chosen for you this faith; so do not die except as Muslims.’ (al-Baqarah: 132)

Ibrahim begins his advice with a reminder of Allah’s great favour upon them in choosing this complete and perfect religion for them. He then commands to hold tight to this religion throughout their lives up until their death. None knows when they will die, so his statement, ‘do not die except as Muslims’, is in reality a command to live as Muslims until their very end. Ibn Kathir clarified this, saying:

‘In other words he commanded them to do good in their lives and remain firm upon that, so that Allah will grant you death upon it. That is because a person usually dies in the state that they lived and they are then

sent in the state upon which they died. And Allah, the Generous, has made such that those who seek good will be guided to it and kept firm upon it.⁴⁸³

We can learn from this advice of Ibrahim that advice regarding tawhid and what comes with that, such as noble manners and righteous deeds, is the one of the most important things that a father can advise his children at all stages of their life, so that they meet Allah upon this. This is the best thing that any father can do for his children. Encouraging them to follow the faith of Allah, to live by it, and to only die upon Islam; thus making them live successful lives and attaining salvation and Allah's contentment in the afterlife.

The faith that Ibrahim is referring to is of course Islam; the only religion that Allah will accept in the afterlife. Allah, Most High, said: 'Whoever seeks a religion other than islam will not have it accepted from them. In the afterlife, they will be with the losers.' (al-Imran: 85)

Fakhr al-Razi has mentioned several things that can be taken from this advice. He said: 'Know that this story contains a number of things that inspire accepting the faith.'

1. The first is that Allah did not say, 'Ibrahim commanded', but used the word advice (*wasiyyah*), since a will and advice is more powerful. Wills usually come when there is a fear of death, so one tends to be most concerned about their faith at that time. His advice in this case is therefore more impactful on the hearts.
2. Secondly, he specifically advised his children because the concern of a father for his children are more than his concern for others.
3. Thirdly, he advised all his children with the same thing, not just some of them.
4. Fourthly, this advice of Ibrahim was given for all times and places. He then warned them severely against dying upon disbelief.
5. Fifthly, Ibrahim did not mix anything else with this advice, but just focused on this matter, which shows its great importance.

Given that Ibrahim was the most complete person with perfect character, we know that when he made this his main advice towards the end of

⁴⁸³ Tafsir Ibn Kathir (1/280).

his life that this must be the most important of all things.⁴⁸⁴ And knowing that he is a great prophet, this advice was not random, but was inspired by Allah.

Ibrahim's children took on his advice and passed the same advice to their children.

10. Al-Baqarah: 133

Allah, Most High, said:

***Were you present when death came upon Jacob? When he said to his sons, 'What will you worship after I am gone?' They replied, 'We shall worship your God and the God of your fathers, Ibrahim, Ishmael, and Isaac, one single God; to Him we submit ourselves.'* (al-Baqarah: 133)**

This is an incredibly powerful scene involving Jacob's advice to his children on his deathbed. Consider what his biggest concern was at the moment of his death. What was going through his mind? What is it that he wants to leave behind for his children? It is sound faith. This is the most important thing that he can leave behind and thus he makes this his last word of advice before he left this world.

Thankfully, his children knew their religion. Pure faith and sound belief is something that they had inherited from their forefathers, so they assured their father that they will remain steadfast.

11. Al-Baqarah: 134

Allah, Most High, said:

***That community passed away. What they earned belongs to them, and what you earn belongs to you. You will not be answerable for their deeds.* (al-Baqarah: 134)**

Each time the Jews heard words of praise for Ibrahim, they attributed that to themselves, considering themselves the children of Ibrahim and thus his followers. Allah then rejected the claim of anyone who boasts association to Ibrahim while not following his guidance and teachings. 'That community' that was referred to beforehand, Ibrahim, Ismael, Isaac, and Jacob, who the Arabs are being told to follow if they are truly followers

⁴⁸⁴ Tafsir al-Razi (4/72-73).

of them. This way they would have the honour of lineage and the honour of being true adherents to their faith. Otherwise, lineage alone means very little.

‘What they earned belongs to them, and what you earn belongs to you.’ You cannot claim their good actions, nor their reward. Each is held to account for their own actions; if good, then good; and if evil, then evil. None will be questioned or held to account for what anyone else does.

12. Al-Baqarah: 135

Allah, Most High, said:

They say, ‘Become Jews or Christians, and you will be rightly guided.’ Say, ‘No, [instead follow] the religion of Ibrahim, the upright; never was he a polytheist.’ (al-Baqarah: 135)

Ibn Jarir al-Tabari mentioned that in this verse Allah presented his messenger with a concise and powerful argument that he should respond to Ahl al-Kitab with. He was told that they should instead all follow the religion of Ibrahim who we all testify is the true religion that Allah is pleased with and commanded humanity to follow. We should leave aside any other religion that only some of us follow, and instead follow the truth that we all agree to. The religion of Ibrahim is the only one that all of us can unite upon.⁴⁸⁵

Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi notes that when Allah affirmed the Islam of Ibrahim, He negated everything that opposes it, ‘never was he a polytheist.’ This implies the invalidity of the claim of Ahl al-Kitab in being followers of Ibrahim, while they said that Uzair was the son of God and Isa was the son of God. In fact, it shows that the Jews and Christians are both considered misguided, for the only religion accepted by Allah is the pure monotheism of Islam. When the idolators opposed this, Allah sent Muhammad to call humanity to true and pure *tawhid*.⁴⁸⁶

This is the case with all false religions and innovated groups; they claim to be upon the truth and that their ways lead to salvation, while they explicitly oppose the prophets of Allah.

⁴⁸⁵ Tafsir al-Tabari (3/102).

⁴⁸⁶ Mahasin al-Ta’wil (1/407)

13. Al-Baqarah: 136

Allah, Most High, said:

Say, ‘We believe in God and in what was sent down to us and what was sent down to Ibrahim, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and what was given to Musa, Isa, and all the prophets by their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we submit ourselves to Him.’ (al-Baqarah: 136)

True belief (Iman) includes firm faith in what is mentioned in this verse and righteous deeds. Good deeds are therefore part of Iman, and one of the fruits of Iman. When Iman is mentioned generally, it includes Islam and good deeds. Similarly, when Islam is referred to, it includes Iman. But when they are mentioned together, Iman refers to the internal beliefs and firm faith, while Islam refers to the external actions.

‘Say’ with your tongues, believing with your hearts. This is the truest and strongest form of belief. Just as words alone without conviction is major hypocrisy, words without application are of little benefit, though one could be rewarded for it if it is good and he has faith. But there is a clear difference between mere words and words that come with the actions of the heart. So the believers here are commanded to ‘say’ and announce their faith publicly and call to it.

Allah’s saying, ‘in what was sent down to us’, includes the obligation to believe in the Qur’an and the Prophetic Sunnah, since both are revealed and sent down by Allah. as Allah said, ‘Allah has sent down the Book and Hikmah upon you.’ Thus a believer is required to believe in everything that is in the Qur’an and Sunnah, the unseen mentioned in them, as well as their laws and legislations.

Additionally, this verse obliges believers to believe firmly in all the Prophets of Allah, and all the revelations sent to them. Those prophets and books that we are informed of, we must believe in specifically. While we also generally believe in the books and prophets that have not specifically been mentioned to us or named in our scriptures.

We believe in them all without any distinction, for they were all sent by Allah, so their message is one. This is a distinct feature of the Muslims. They believe in all the prophets and messengers without any distinction

whatsoever, unlike the other faiths who accept some prophets and reject others. This itself is a contradiction, because the prophets they claim to believe and follow have accepted all the prophets of Allah, particularly Muhammad (peace be upon him). If they reject Muhammad, they have therefore rejected their own prophet.

The Religion of Ibrahim

The religion of the prophets is one, for the prophets are brothers. Their teachings revolve around three main pillars:

1. Sound belief in Allah, His names, attributes, and the pure worship of Allah alone.
2. Belief in the prophets and messengers, and their detailed teachings, such as prayer, zakat, jihad, and other teachings.
3. Knowledge of and belief in life after death: everything that has been revealed to us regarding this from the life in the grave until Paradise and Hell.

Guidance and happiness therefore revolve around these things, for they are the teachings that Allah sent his messengers with throughout history. This is what is meant by the statement of the Prophet: ‘The prophets are brothers; their mothers are many, but their religion is one.’ This is also what is meant by Allah’s statement:

He has ordained for you [believers] the Way which He decreed for Noah, and what We have revealed to you [O Prophet] and what We decreed for Ibrahim, Musa, and Isa, [commanding]: ‘Uphold the faith, and make no divisions in it.’ What you call the polytheists to is unbearable for them. Allah chooses for Himself whoever He wills, and guides to Himself whoever turns [to Him]. (al-Shura: 13)

These major pillars are what the vast majority of Meccan chapters of the Qur’an speak about. By reading the stories of the prophets in the Qur’an, we appreciate the importance of these pillars and the wisdom and benefit behind repeating these stories in the Qur’an. It keeps our hearts firm and teaches us the effects and consequences of sound belief.

The religion of Islam is often attributed to Ibrahim, despite being the religion of all the prophets, for a number of reasons. These include his efforts in tackling idolatry and falsehood; the fact that all the prophets after

him are from his lineage; and to show the falsehood of the attribution of the Jews, Christians, and idolators in attributing themselves to Ibrahim. Allah, Most High, said:

O People of the Book, why do you argue about Ibrahim when the Torah and the Gospels were not revealed until after his time? Do you not understand? You argue about some things of which you have some knowledge, but why do you argue about things of which you know nothing? God knows and you do not. Ibrahim was neither a Jew nor a Christian. He was upright and a Muslim (devoted to God), never an idolater. (al-Imran: 65-67)

Allah then clarified that those who have most right to claiming association to Ibrahim are those who follow him. 'Indeed, those who have the best claim to Ibrahim are his followers, this Prophet, and the believers.' (al-Imran: 68). The rest of the Qur'an also consistently reaffirms the fact that this Qur'an was only revealed to revive the religion of Ibrahim.

In conclusion, we can see that the name 'Islam' has two meanings; one general and one specific. The general meaning of Islam refers to the religion of all the prophets and messengers, because they all submitted to Allah and followed His guidance. Thus, whoever followed Isa when Allah sent him, was a Muslim, while those who rejected him were disbelievers. Then when Allah sent Muhammad, everyone was required to accept his message to be a Muslims. It is this final version that Muhammad was sent with that is the specific understanding of the name 'Islam'. None have a valid claim to it, except those who follow Allah's final messenger.

The False Claim of Uniting Islam and Other Faiths

Shaykh Bakr Abu Zaid (may Allah have mercy on him) has an excellent book on this topic, which he titled *al-Ibtal li Nadhariyat al-Khalt Bayn Din al-Islam was Ghairihi min al-Adyan* (Nullifying the Theory of Uniting Islam and Other Faiths). In it, he came to a number of conclusions:

- The Muslims must reject this theory of mixing between abrogated and corrupted religions and the true preserved religion of Islam. This is a fundamental and basic belief of Islam.
- All people must believe that the religion of all the prophets and messengers was one; that is monotheism, prophethood, and resurrection. But that these pillars have only fully been upheld by the

Muslims, unlike the contradiction of the Jews and Christians, especially in terms of belief in Allah, His books, and His messengers.

- All people must believe that the legislations differed for different prophets, but that the final Shari'ah is Islam, which abrogates all the laws that came before it. No person is therefore permitted to worship Allah through laws other than that of Islam.⁴⁸⁷
- The Islam that the prophets were sent with, which is the religion of Ibrahim, invalidates and disproves the theory of uniting the Ibrahmic faiths. No religion remains preserved as it was revealed by Allah, except Islam alone and the Qur'an alone. There is no prophet after Muhammad, and his religion abrogates all that preceded it. It is therefore not permissible to follow anything but his faith.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'By Allah, whoever hears of me from this nation, Jew or Christian, and still does not believe in me, will be from the people of the Fire.'⁴⁸⁸

- It is impermissible for a Muslim to print the Torah or Bible, or to distribute them. The idea of printing the Torah, Bible, and Qur'an together under one book cover is extremely misguided and an act of disbelief, as it mixes between truth and falsehood.
- It is unlawful to accept the building of a temple or place of worship for all three faiths, because this involves accepting the validity of a religion other than Islam through which Allah is worshipped. This also goes against the objective of making Allah's religion prevail over all other religions, almost making all these religions equal. All these things are clear forms of disbelief.
- The mosques are from the major symbols of Islam. Muslims are therefore obliged to maintain respect and honour them. Part of this is to refuse to allow churches and temples to be mixed with the messenger of Allah, the book of Allah, and the teachings of Allah.

Every Muslim should know that there exists no uniformity between the people of Islam and the disbelievers, whether Christians or of other faiths, except under the principle mentioned in the following verse:

⁴⁸⁷ Abu Zaid, p.91

⁴⁸⁸ Sahih Muslim (No: 153)

Say, [O Prophet] ‘O People of the Book! Let us come to common terms: that we will worship none but Allah, associate none with Him, nor take one another as lords instead of Allah.’ But if they turn away, then say, ‘Bear witness that we are Muslims (have submitted to Allah alone).’

This verse should be the slogan of every dialogue between the people of Islam and Ahl al-Kitab, or others. All efforts that do not go towards establishing this principle are meaningless. What is required is to follow the final messenger whose coming we are informed of in both the Torah and Gospel.⁴⁸⁹

14. Al-Baqarah: 137

Allah, Most High, said:

‘If they believe like you do, they will be rightly guided. But if they turn their backs, then they will be entrenched in opposition. God will protect you from them; He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing.’ (al-Baqarah: 137)

Ibn Jarir clarified that Allah meant by this verse that if the Jews and Christians believe in Allah and in what was sent down to you and what was sent down to Ibrahim, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and what was given to Musa, Isa, and all the prophets by their Lord. If they believe in these things the way you have believed in them, then they have been guided to the straight path. They are then your brothers who have entered your faith. This verse thus shows that Allah will not accept any deed from anyone without first believing in these things mentioned in the previous verse.⁴⁹⁰

If they refuse to believe, then they will be entrenched in opposition to Allah, His messenger, and the believers. But Allah is sufficient for you O messenger. He will protect you from them. He hears everything that they see and is fully aware of what they are plotting against you out of envy and hatred.

This is the way of the Qur’an in clearly distinguishing between truth and falsehood. There is no sugar coating or playing with words. The truth is truth and falsehood is falsehood. The truth must be taken altogether, without any compromise. For each time the truth is compromised by someone,

⁴⁸⁹ Abu Zaid, p.101.

⁴⁹⁰ Tafsir al-Tabari (3/113).

its light becomes extinguished in his heart. Allah therefore commanded His prophet to not pay any attention to the suggestions of the Jews and Christians, but instead to keep steadfast on what Allah revealed to him.⁴⁹¹

15. Al-Baqarah: 138

Allah, Most High, said:

‘Allah’s hue. Who gives a better hue than Allah? It is Him we worship.’ (al-Baqarah: 138)

Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) interpreted this to mean the religion of Allah. The reason the religion is described as being a hue (a dye or colouring) is that its impact and effect is visible on a person, like colour appears on a person’s things. One’s faith too appears in their behaviour and appearance. Additionally, colour remains, just as belief should remain apparent on a person. So belief in Allah and His messengers is the colouring of Allah that each person should be coloured with. In fact, this is a colouring that every person is born with, remaining with him, unless this colour is ruined. The prophet said, ‘Every newborn is born upon the fitrah, but his parents turn him to Judaism or Christianity or Magianism.’⁴⁹²

Although this verse describes the hue of Allah, it also implies a command for the believers to maintain the colour of Islam, following its guidance in all aspects of their lives. They should submit to Allah’s commands so much that Islam becomes like a natural colour that is part of them and their lives. This is the colouring of Allah that enlightens minds and hearts with sound knowledge, purifies souls, reforms character, and perfects conduct. No human ‘colouring’ can compare to the divinely revealed guidance.

16. Al-Baqarah: 139

Allah, Most High, said:

Say, ‘How can you argue with us about God when He is our Lord and your Lord? Our deeds belong to us, and yours to you. We devote ourselves entirely to Him.’ (al-Baqarah: 139)

⁴⁹¹ Al-Maghrabi (2/319).

⁴⁹² Sahih al-Bukhari (No: 1358).

Allah commanded His messenger to say this to the Jews and Christians who claimed to have a special status with Allah. As Allah relates in the Qur'an, 'The Jews and Christians said that we are the children of Allah and His beloved ones.' (al-Ma'idah: 18)

In other words, our God is one and the same, so the fact that your prophet was sent by Allah before our prophet does not make you closer to Allah. He is our creator and yours, our maintainer and yours, and He alone knows who is suitable for prophethood. Instead what matters is righteous deeds, hence he said, 'Our deeds belong to us, and yours to you.'

17. Al-Baqarah: 140

Allah, Most High, said:

'Or are you saying that Ibrahim, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes were Jews or Christians? Ask them, 'Who knows better: you or God?' Who could be more wicked than those who hide a testimony [they received] from God? God is not unmindful of what you do.' (al-Baqarah: 140)

The Tribes (*al-Asbat*) are the twelve children of Jacob who is also called Israel. In other words, how could all these prophets be Jews or Christians, when the Torah and Gospel were only sent after them? Do they know the religion of these prophets better than Allah? Well Allah, their Lord and Lord of the prophets, has confirmed that all these prophets were Muslims; monotheists who submitted to Allah completely. This is affirmed in the Qur'an and in the previous scriptures, but this was hidden or misinterpreted by them. Allah thus said, 'Who could be more wicked than those who hide a testimony [they received] from God?'

The Jews and Christians hid the fact that Islam is the religion of Allah and hid the fact that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. By doing this, they concealed not just a testimony of truth, but a testimony from Allah that was revealed to them in the Torah and Injil. But Allah is fully aware of what they do.

'God is not unmindful of what you do.' This concise and comprehensive summary of any warning, reminder, or threat. Whoever is mindful of the fact that Allah knows his hidden and open affairs, will be conscious of what he says and does.

18. Al-Baqarah: 140

Allah, Most High, said:

‘That community passed away. What they earned belongs to them, and what you earn belongs to you. You will not be answerable for their deeds.’ (al-Baqarah: 141)

This way, Allah, Most High, broke all claims and arguments of association to prophets, clarifying that nothing matters except following the truth and acting upon it. None can therefore claim to be followers of the prophets, except through the Qur’an, the final revelation to the final prophet. And this applies to all people; your lineage to a prophet or companion or scholar or any noble man will not benefit you. Each will only be answerable for their own deeds.⁴⁹³ Allah, Most High, said:

Say, ‘Should I seek a Lord other than God, when He is the Lord of all things?’ Each soul is responsible for its own actions; no soul will bear the burden of another. You will all return to your Lord in the end, and He will tell you the truth about your differences. (al-An’am: 164)

This is a well-established principle of the Qur’an and Prophetic guidance. Lineage alone does not benefit. Whoever is from the lineage of the Prophet, for instance, from Ahl al-Bayt, but opposes the teachings of the Messenger, will not gain anything and is considered astray. The Prophet (peace be upon him) explicitly cautioned his own family of this, saying, ‘O Fatima, ask me whatever you want from my money, but I will not benefit you in the sight of Allah.’ He said the same to his uncle Abbas and his auntie Safiyyah.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹³ Al-Maghrawi (2/332).

⁴⁹⁴ Bukhari (No: 2753) and Muslim (No: 206).

Section 2:

Ibrahim's Supplication in Surat Ibrahim

Allah, Most High, said:

Remember when Ibrahim said, 'Lord, make this town safe! Preserve me and my offspring from idolatry. Lord, they (idols) have led many people astray! Whoever follows me is from me, but as for anyone who disobeys me; You are surely forgiving and merciful. Our Lord, I have settled some of my offspring in an uncultivated valley, close to Your Sacred House, Lord, so that they may establish the prayer. Make people's hearts turn to them, and provide them with produce, so that they may be thankful. Our Lord, You know well what we conceal and what we reveal: nothing at all is hidden from God, on earth or in heaven. Praise be to God, who has granted me Ishmael and Isaac in my old age: my Lord hears all prayers. Lord, make me and those my descendants establish the prayer. Our Lord, accept my prayers (du'a). Our Lord, forgive me, my parents, and the believers on the Day of Reckoning. (Ibrahim: 35-41)

Surat Ibrahim is a Meccan chapter of the Qur'an, part of a series of reminders to the people of Mecca to abandon their idolatry, and instead worship Allah alone. In these verses, Ibrahim made clear that the only thing that connects people to him is faith. 'Whoever follows me is from me.' We can also see Ibrahim's concern for this town, which is Mecca, and his concern for the guidance and uprightness of his descendants.

1. Ibrahim: 35

Allah, Most High, said:

***Remember when Ibrahim said, 'Lord, make this town safe! Protect me and my children from idolatry.'* (Ibrahim: 35)**

This is the first of many supplications made by Ibrahim mentioned in this passage of the Qur'an. He prays to Allah to keep Makkah safe, firstly so that his wife Hajar and son Ismael can safely settle there when he first took them. Secondly, he prays for the safety of Makkah generally for all times, because if safety is missing from any land, nothing else can fall into

place or work out. This prayer, that Allah accepted from Ibrahim, was perfectly chosen, since safety and security is the essence of all good. So when Makkah became a safe and secure land, it was a perfect place for people to worship Allah in.

A scholar was once asked, is safety or health more important? He replied: 'If a sheep breaks its leg, it will recover after a short while and return to eating. However, if it was tied in a place near a wolf, it would be unable to eat (for fear) until it dies.' And this shows that the pain of fear is worse than physical pain.

The acceptance of Ibrahim's supplication is clear to see, so much so that people would see the murderer of their most beloved relatives in Makkah, yet still refuse to harm them due to the sanctity of the Haram. Security has even encompassed animals and plants, for no animal can be hunted, nor tree be cut.

Ibrahim recognised, with his deep insight, that Makkah will never be the centre of a great civilization unless it is built upon security. Those in authority should therefore take note of this fact and make security one of their main objectives when establishing a state or community. However, such safety and security can never truly be achieved unless its laws and guidance are taken from the teachings of Islam. This is not surprising from a religion which informs us that Jibril emphasised taking care of the neighbour so much that the messenger thought he would soon have a share to inheritance. Compare this to most modern states across the world, where so many people live in unimaginable fear.

'Protect me and my children from idolatry.'

This is a sincere prayer from Ibrahim to Allah to save him and his descendants from idol worship and associating partners with Allah in any way. At the same time, this reveals to us the great blessing of a heart escaping the darkness of *shirk* and idolatry to the light of *iman* and *tawhid*. Ibrahim prays that Allah maintains this huge blessing for him and his children, because he has witnessed how many people in his time and before him have been led astray by these idols.

Abu al-Su'ud said that this verse shows that the infallibility of prophets from falling into idolatry is through Allah's grace.⁴⁹⁵ Imam al-Shanqiti mentioned that this passage does not clarify whether Ibrahim's du'a was accepted or not, but that other verses make it clear that it was accepted for some of his offspring, but not all of them.⁴⁹⁶ Unless we consider that his prayer for himself and his direct children, who at the time were Ismael and Isaac, then his prayer was accepted for all of them.

2. Ibrahim: 36

Allah, Most High, said:

***'Lord, they (idols) have led many people astray! Whoever follows me is from me, but as for anyone who disobeys me; You are surely forgiving and merciful.'* (Ibrahim: 36)**

This prayer of Ibrahim shows that he hated idols more than anyone and that he recognised the misguidance of those who worship them. This is why he attributed misguidance to the idols, although it was Satan who originally misguided people with his ideas and whispers about idolatry. But these false ideas continued to grow and get worse until they reached the state that they were in.

Ibrahim also made clear that idolatry has led many people astray, so much that this become dominant and widespread. Yet, this still does not make them right. 'If you obey most of those on earth, they will guide you astray from the path of Allah. They follow nothing but assumptions and do nothing but lie.' (al-An'am: 116). And the fact that Ibrahim is speaking about idols in this way, shows that he has nothing to do with those idolators who attribute themselves to him. Rather, like he said, those who are from him are only those who follow him in worshipping Allah alone and submitting to Him.

Ibrahim then says, 'but as for anyone who disobeys me; You are surely forgiving and merciful.' This is another example of Ibrahim's forbearing and merciful nature. He does not want people to be punished even if they oppose him and disobey Allah. He does not even mention punishment in

⁴⁹⁵ Irshad al-Aql al-Salim (5/50).

⁴⁹⁶ Adwa al-Bayan (3/112).

this regard. He is instead much more inclined towards hoping that some good may come out of people eventually.

3. Ibrahim: 37

Allah, Most High, said:

‘Our Lord, I have settled some of my offspring in an uncultivated valley, close to Your Sacred House, Lord, so that they may establish the prayer. Make people’s hearts turn to them, and provide them with produce, so that they may be thankful.’ (Ibrahim: 37)

Ibrahim settled ‘some’ of his offspring in this uncultivated land, which is Makkah. Although it was only Ismael to begin with, but the children of Ismael settled there and continued to live there. Hence, he said ‘some’, as his offspring from the children of Isaac settled elsewhere. There is great wisdom in Allah commanding Ibrahim to bring his wife and son to an uncultivated and barren land to settle. It allows for it to slowly grow and develop into a town which people settle in and visit due to its sacredness, not a land which people compete to conquer due to its crops or other things.

‘So that they may establish the prayer.’ This is one of the major objectives of Ibrahim for keeping his wife and son in Makkah. This way it no longer remains abandoned, but becomes filled with prayers. However, the pure monotheistic state that Ismael left it eventually was ruined until the idolators of the Arabs circulated the Ka’bah with the idols that the messenger destroyed in the conquest of Makkah in the eighth year after Hijrah. Though this statement by Ibrahim seems like a merely factual one, but it is also a prayer asking Allah to keep him and his offspring firm upon establishing the prayer.

Qurtubi said: ‘This verse implies that prayer in Makkah is better than prayer elsewhere.’ And this is proven by the Hadith narrated by Abu Hurayra that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: ‘Prayer in my mosque (Madina) is better than a thousand prayers at another mosque, except al-Masjid al-Haram.’⁴⁹⁷

In the Hadith of Jabir, the Prophet said: ‘Prayer at al-Masjid al-Haram is a hundred thousand times better than prayer elsewhere.’⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁷ Bukhari (No: 1190) and Muslim (No: 1394).

⁴⁹⁸ Ahmad (No: 14694).

In the Hadith of Abu al-Darda it is narrated that prayer in Bayt al-Maqdis is equivalent to five hundred prayers elsewhere, except the two great mosques.⁴⁹⁹

Ibrahim's prayer for Allah to 'make people's hearts turn to them', means that he did not want people to simply visit, but to do so with love and a longing to be in the sacred land. Shaykh al-Sa'di alluded to this and said that this is a prayer to make people love Makkah and the people of Makkah. Allah accepted his prayer by bringing out from the lineage of Ismael the final messenger Muhammad (peace be upon them) who called his followers to the pure religion of Islam, the religion of their father, Ibrahim. They accepted his message, established the prayer, and accepted Ibrahim's call to Hajj.⁵⁰⁰

The other du'a that Allah accepted is that He made Makkah a place which receives many foods and fruits from all places. This is in the hope that his offspring remain thankful and grateful to Allah for these many blessings. But the difference between the believers and the idolators of Quraish is stark. For they did not establish the prayer as they were commanded, nor were they thankful to Allah alone for the provision and security they were given.

4. Ibrahim: 38

Allah, Most High, said:

***'Our Lord, You know well what we conceal and what we reveal: nothing at all is hidden from God, on earth or in heaven.'* (Ibrahim: 38)**

His repeatedly starting each prayer, saying, 'Our Lord', shows the humility and need of Ibrahim; one of the most important etiquettes of du'a. He testifies to Allah's vast and encompassing knowledge that is fully aware of all our hidden secrets and everything that we do, in private or public.

There is some discussion about the second part of the verse, 'nothing at all is hidden from God, on earth or in heaven.' Is this a continuation of the du'a of Ibrahim or is this what Allah says to affirm Ibrahim's statement? Some scholars argued that the former view is the correct one; that

⁴⁹⁹ Musnad al-Bazzar (No: 4142). Though a number of scholars have questioned the authenticity of this Hadith.

⁵⁰⁰ Tafsir al-Sa'di, p.853.

this is all part of Ibrahim's prayer. However, Imam al-Shawkani said that the majority of scholars believe this to be from the speech of Allah who confirmed the truth of Ibrahim's statement. Though he did not rule out the second opinion.⁵⁰¹

5. Ibrahim: 39

Allah, Most High, said:

***'Praise be to God, who has granted me Ishmael and Isaac in my old age: my Lord hears all prayers.'* (Ibrahim: 39)**

The blessing of children is already a great one for any person. But Ibrahim was given children after waiting for so long and reaching an age at which people cannot normally have children. His mentioning Ismael first is another proof, on top of what we previously mentioned, that Ismael was the eldest child.

6. Ibrahim: 40

Allah, Most High, said:

***'Lord, make me and those my descendants establish the prayer. Our Lord, accept my supplication (du'a).'* (Ibrahim: 40)**

After alluding to prayer in his supplication earlier, the passage returns to mentioning prayer, showing its great importance. Ibrahim prays that Allah keeps him and his offspring firm upon establishing prayer. For the One who feeds us and takes care of us in our daily life, is also the One who nourishes our souls and purifies them. He is the One that gives us the strength and discipline to maintain our prayers in the best way. If Ibrahim, the great prophet, prays for this, then the rest of us are in more need of Allah's help to maintain the prayers.

According to a number of scholars, including Imam al-Tabari, Ibrahim's prayer for Allah to accept his du'a is a prayer to accept his good deeds and worship. This is taken from the statement of the Prophet (peace be upon him): 'Du'a is worship.' Then the Prophet recited Allah's statement, 'Your

⁵⁰¹ Fath al-Qadir (3/160).

Lord says, ‘Call on Me and I will answer you; those who are too proud to worship Me will enter Hell humiliated.’ (Ghafir: 60)⁵⁰²

7. Ibrahim: 41

Allah, Most High, said:

‘Our Lord, forgive me, my parents, and the believers on the Day of Reckoning.’ (Ibrahim: 41)

Ibrahim is indeed a model personality with a sound *fitrah* in all aspects of his life. So just as he was concerned about his offspring and prayed for their guidance and uprightness, he does not forget to prayer for his parents. He seeks forgiveness for himself, then his parents, then the believers generally. On the Day of Judgment, when some will be rewarded and forgiven, while others are punished, Ibrahim prays to Allah for His mercy and forgiveness for the believers on that day.

Abu Hayyan says: ‘It appears that Ibrahim sought forgiveness here for his immediate parents. His mother was a believer, while Ibrahim had not yet lost hope in his father also becoming a believer. That is if we say that this passage mentions supplications that occurred at different times throughout Ibrahim’s life. Some claimed that he meant pray for his mother and Nuh (peace be upon him), while other said he was referring to his first parents Adam and Hawa. But the first view seems closer to the truth. Especially since Ibrahim’s prayer for his father was explicitly mentioned in the Qur’an elsewhere.’⁵⁰³

This feeling of always being in need of Allah’s forgiveness is also what led our Prophet (peace be upon him) to increasing his worship, particularly during the night. This is narrated in the Hadith of Mughirah ibn Shu’bah who said that the Prophet would sometimes stand in prayer at night until his feet swelled. Some people would ask him about that and he replies: ‘Should I not be a thankful servant?’⁵⁰⁴

Thus this incredible passage of great prayers and supplications comes to an end, filling our hearts with the oneness of Allah and appreciating the status of du’a.

⁵⁰² Tafsir al-Tabari (13/235).

⁵⁰³ Al-Bahr al-Muhit (5/423).

⁵⁰⁴ Bukhari (No: 1130).

8. Ibrahim Invites People to Perform Hajj

Allah, Most High, said:

Remember when We assigned to Ibrahim the site of the House, [saying], ‘Do not associate anything with Me [in worship] and purify My House for those who circle [the Ka’bah], stand in prayer, and bow and prostrate themselves. Call people to the pilgrimage. They will come to you on foot and on every lean camel from every distant path, so they may obtain the benefits [in store] for them, and pronounce the Name of Allah on appointed days over the sacrificial animals He has provided for them. So eat from their meat and feed the desperately poor. Then let them groom themselves, fulfil their vows, and circle the Ancient House. (al-Hajj: 26-29)

Allah Almighty informs us of the greatness of the Sacred House and the one who built it. Allah made some of his offspring reside there and he and his son Ismael built the House upon the foundations of monotheism, God-consciousness, and the abandonment of idolatry. Allah then attributed the House to Himself to show its great status and virtue, thus increasing its love in the hearts of the believers. They were commanded to purify the House from all forms of impurity, physical and spiritual, so that the believing worshippers can worship Allah in the purest and best state.

Ibrahim was then commanded to call people to Hajj, teaching them its obligation and its virtues. They will then come to you from all over the world, walking or on a mount, like a camel or other animal. Just as Ibrahim called people to this great ritual, so did his son Muhammad (peace be upon them). As well as the great reward of performing Hajj, in proclaiming Allah’s oneness and following in the footsteps of these great prophets, Allah informs us that Hajj will bring people worldly benefits too.

‘Then let them groom themselves’, by cleansing themselves and removing bodily hair. ‘Fulfil their vows’ of Hajj, Umrah, and sacrifice, which the obligated upon themselves. ‘And circle the Ancient House’, the greatest and most sacred mosque on earth.

Having looked at the general meanings of this passage in Surat al-Hajj, we want to summarise some of the main benefits of the Hajj season:

- Hajj is a spiritual congregation and gathering.



- Hajj is a season of worship in which believers come closer to Allah, re-affirm the oneness of Allah in their hearts, and cleanse themselves from past sins, returning to their homes with a clean slate if they performed Hajj properly.
- Hajj is a season of trade. Traders find a great opportunity in the Hajj season to earn money and people find all sorts of fruits and goods.
- Hajj is a season of getting to know one another and learn about each other.

The Ka'bah and Hajj season bring about the remembrance of some of the greatest historical events in the life of Ibrahim. He brought his wife and son to settle there. The events of Zamzam and walking between Safa and Marwa originated there. Then Ibrahim and Ismael built the Ka'bah as Allah commanded them, and were given a ram as sacrifice to symbolise their complete submission and obedience to Allah. These great historical events did not end with Ibrahim, but continued to exist until the life of the Messenger. Allah saved and protected His House from the transgression of Abraha and his army in the year of the elephant. Then the final messenger of Allah contributed to re-building the Ka'bah after it was damaged, thus resolving a dispute that was going to lead to fighting amongst the Arab tribes; he was thus given the privilege of placing the black stone in its place. These great events are all part of the history of the sacred rites of Hajj and Umrah.

Additionally, Hajj is a season in which people get to learn about the origins of their religion, learn from one another, and discuss important matters. Many scholars would take the opportunity of Hajj to meet other scholars from around the world and benefit from them. It is also a chance to work together and bring people who are distant close to each other under a common goal and one belief.

9. Religious Disputes About Ibrahim

Many religious groups and factions disputed over Ibrahim, each claim to be his true followers. This itself shows Ibrahim's great status throughout history amongst all the major religions. This comes as no surprise, as Allah made Ibrahim a leader worth a whole nation. The most famous religious groups that claimed association to Ibrahim are the Jews, Christians, and pagan Arabs. The Jews claimed this because they are the children of Isaac;

the Christians claimed to be the true followers of the religion of Ibrahim; while the pagan Arabs claimed this because they are the children of Ismael and sanctified the Ka'bah. However, the Qur'an discusses this issue in a number of verses, clarifying that Ibrahim was a pure monotheist; a Muslim who submitted to Allah, as we covered in detail previously.

10. The Scriptures of Ibrahim

Allah, Most High, said: 'This is mentioned in the early scriptures, the scriptures of Ibrahim and Musa.' This means that Ibrahim was a prophet who had scriptures revealed to him from Allah. The scholars differed about the number of scrolls he was given. Some said they were twenty and others said ten. Ibn Ashur supported the latter view and said that the scripture contained guidance referred to in the earlier verses discussed in Surat al-Baqarah, when Ibrahim was tested with a word.

The scriptures given to prophets mentioned in the Qur'an are therefore five, in chronological order: the scriptures of Ibrahim, the Torah, the Zabur, the Gospels (al-Injil), and the Qur'an. Some of what is mentioned in the scriptures of Ibrahim is mentioned in the Qur'an. Allah, Most High, said:

'Successful indeed are those who purify themselves, remember the Name of their Lord, and pray. But you [people] prefer the life of this world, even though the Hereafter is far better and more lasting. This is mentioned in the earlier scriptures, the Scriptures of Ibrahim and Musa.' (al-A'la: 14-19)

No doubt, none can reach Allah without a pure soul. The Arabic word used is '*tazakka*', which could also mean giving *zakat*, though its broad meaning refers to purification in general; purification from *shirk* and from sin. This purity (*tazkiyah*) was something that the Prophet often made *du'a* for.⁵⁰⁵ The greatest way towards purification is to worship Allah sincerely. Hence, the two greatest acts of worship were mentioned after this: *salah* and *dhikr*. Prayer and remembering Allah are the means to purity.

During the journey of the Isra and Mi'raj, the Prophet went through the seven heavens, eventually being taken up to Allah, Most High. He was then given the five daily prayers and told that whoever prays them as required will be rewarded as though they have prayed fifty prayers.

⁵⁰⁵ Sunan al-Nasa'i (No: 5458).

However, during that journey, the Prophet also met his father Ibrahim who gave him some advice. Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that Messenger of Allah said:

I met Ibrahim on the Night of Ascension (al-Asra), and he said to me: 'O Muhammad, convey my greetings to your Ummah, and tell them that Jannah has a vast plain of pure soil and sweet water. It is a plain levelled land. The plants grow there by uttering: *Subhan-Allah, Al-hamdu lillah, La ilaha illallah*, and *Allahu Akbar* (Allah is above any imperfection, praise be to Allah, there is no true god except Allah, and Allah is Greatest).'⁵⁰⁶

'But you [people] prefer the life of this world, even though the Hereafter is far better and more lasting.' This is one of the teachings mentioned in the scriptures of Ibrahim. Despite everything that is said about the purpose of our existence on earth, the importance of monotheism, the clear harm of idolatry and misguidance, and the deception of worldly pleasures; despite all this, humans almost always incline to this worldly life. This is not a life of settlement and reward, but rather a short-lived test. While the next life is far greater and eternal. It therefore makes no sense for us to compete for the world with such keenness. This is not only something that the Qur'an consistently emphasizes, but is taught by all the prophets, and found in the scriptures of Ibrahim.

Like the other scriptures, the Scripts of Ibrahim were revealed in Ramadan. It is narrated that the Prophet said: 'The Scripts of Ibrahim were sent down on the first night of Ramadan, the Torah was sent down on the sixth of Ramadan, the Gospel was sent down on the thirteenth of Ramadan, the Zabur was sent down on the eighteenth of Ramadan, and the Qur'an was revealed on the twenty fourth of Ramadan.'⁵⁰⁷

Teachings from the Scriptures of Ibrahim in Surat al-Najm

There are also other teachings in the Scripts of Ibrahim alluded to in the Qur'an, as Allah mentioned in Surat al-Najm:

Has he not been informed of what is in the Scripture of Musa, and that of Ibrahim, who fulfilled [his duty]? That no soul shall bear the burden of another; that man will only have what he has worked towards; that his endeavours will be seen; and that in the end he will be repaid in full for it.

⁵⁰⁶ Tirmidhi (No: 3462).

⁵⁰⁷ Ahmad (No: 16984). Scholars have differed over the authenticity of this Hadith. (Translator)

And that to your Lord is the ultimate return; that it is He who makes people laugh and weep; that it is He who gives death and life; and He created the pairs, male and female, from an ejected drop of sperm; that He will undertake the second Creation; that it is He who gives wealth and possessions; that He is the Lord of Sirius; that it was He who destroyed ancient ‘Ad and Thamud, sparing none of them; and before them the people of Nuh who were even more unjust and rebellious. It was He who brought down the ruined towns and enveloped them in the punishment He ordained for them! Which then of your Lord’s blessings do you deny? This [Prophet] is a warner like the previous warners.’ (al-Najm: 37-56)

Shaykh Atiyyah Salim said: ‘This is some of what was mentioned in the Scripts of Ibrahim, which shows that most of it was reminders and admonishments, thus showing the connection between all divine scriptures.’

Allah alone is the one who controls these things mentioned in this passage. He alone controls these emotions, and gives and takes. Each person is held to account for every minor act that they did in this life, then the return of all creation will be to Allah.

Sirius (*al-Shi’ra* in Arabic) is a star that was worshipped by some ancient pagans. Although Allah is the Lord of all things, but He specified the mention of this star to show people that He is Lord of all their gods and anything that they worship, whether stars, sun, moon, angels, devils, prophets, saints, stones, or trees. How then can one worship something that belongs to Allah when the Lord of all these things is the only one worthy of worship.

‘Ad are the people of Prophet Hud and Thamud are the people of prophet Salih. Both were utterly destroyed for opposing their prophets. The same happened to the people of Nuh before them. Destruction was also the fate of the two ‘ruined towns’, Sodom and Gomorrah, where Lot’s people lived. This is some of what was revealed to Ibrahim in the Scripts (*Suhuf*).

11. The Traits and Characteristics of Ibrahim

Ibrahim is one of the greatest personalities in human history. He was given comprehensively noble traits by Allah, making him worthy of being the perfect role model. We have already spoken in detail about some of Ibrahim’s traits, but will summarise some of the most important of them here.

- Ibrahim was the leader of the Muslims, those who submitted to Allah. He is the father of the prophets and the pure monotheistic religion, known as al-Hanifiyyah, i.e. the straight path that has turned away from polytheism and misguidance.

It is narrated by Ibn Abbas that someone asked the messenger about the best religion. He replied: ‘The pure and easy Hanifiyyah.’ Easy in its teachings and sound in its principles. This ease and forbearing nature is also one which fits the description of Ibrahim himself, as Allah said, ‘Indeed, Ibrahim is devout and forbearing.’ Part of that was that Ibrahim was in a constant state of repentance and returning to Allah.

- Ibrahim was also a Siddiq (upright upon being truthful).

Three prophets were described like this in the Qur’an: Yusuf, Idris, and Ibrahim. Others were also described as being Siddiq in the Qur’an, such as Maryam, the mother of Isa. The greatest companion, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, was also known for this. But this quality is not restricted to them. Rather, whoever upholds truthfulness in his belief, words, and actions, is worthy of attaining the status of Siddiq, may Allah make us from them.

- Ibrahim was from the few servants who were thankful and grateful with their hearts, words, and actions. As we saw from the passage of Surat Ibrahim, he was constantly in worship and supplication. He also was the one who led the way to turning the Sacred Mosque of Makkah into a place of pilgrimage and worship, visited for that purpose by Muslims all around the world.
- Ibrahim was clean hearted, never seeking to harm others, even if they had harmed him and opposed Allah’s message. He was always concerned about his people and his offspring, reminding them and praying for them.
- Of course, Ibrahim’s greatest virtue is that Allah took him as a beloved friend and ally. Ibrahim’s love for Allah, his submission and obedience, is what made him deserving of such a high virtue.

Imam Muslim narrated from Jundub who said that he heard the Messenger of Allah delivering a speech to the people, five days before he passed away. In it he said:

‘O people, amongst you are brothers and friends, but I free myself from taking anyone as a *khalil* (a closest ally and beloved friend). Had I taken

anyone as a *khalil*, it would have been Abu Bakr. But your Lord has taken me as a *khalil*, just as He took Ibrahim as a *khalil*. Know that those before you had turned the graves of their prophets and their righteous ones into places of worship (*masajid*). Do not take their graves as places of worship, for I forbid you from doing so.’

- Ibrahim was also described as being the best of creation. Anas ibn malik said that a man came to the Prophet and said: ‘O best of creation.’ The Prophet replied: ‘That is Ibrahim.’

The scholars said that the Prophet said this out of humility and respect for his father Ibrahim. Otherwise, Allah has made him the leader of the children of Adam. The Prophet said: ‘I am the leader of the children of Adam.’ This is not something the Prophet claimed from his own self to boast or praise himself; but he simply delivered Allah’s command to the people. Some scholars said that perhaps the Prophet said this about Ibrahim before he was made aware of the fact that he is the leader of the children of Adam. There could also be other possible explanations, but these are the most common ones.

- Ibrahim too was a rightly guided leader, equal to a nation, hence Allah described him saying, ‘Indeed, Ibrahim was an *ummah* (a leader).’ He also said: ‘I am making you a leader for the people.’

Ibn Jarir said: ‘This verse means that Allah will make him a leader that is followed by the believers that come after him. They will follow his guidance and take him as a role model.’⁵⁰⁸ Ibrahim was given deep insight from a young age. Leadership and prophethood was also given to many of his offspring, such as Ismael and Isaac, both who were given knowledge and wisdom.

- Mercy and Gentleness

There is an interesting Hadith in which the Prophet uses Ibrahim as an example for gentleness. Imam Ahmad narrates in his Musnad from Abdullah ibn Mas’ud who said that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said during Badr:

‘What do you say we do with these war captives?’ Abu Bakr said: ‘O messenger of Allah, they are your family and people. Keep them, perhaps Allah will forgive them.’ Umar said: ‘O messenger of Allah, they drove

⁵⁰⁸ Tafsir al-Tabari (3/18).

you out and belied you. Kill them.’ Abdullah ibn Rawahah said: ‘O messenger of Allah, throw them into a valley with plenty of wood, then light them on fire.’ Al-Abbas said: ‘You have cut your own family.’

But the messenger did not respond. Some people thought that he would take with the view of Abu Bakr, while others thought that he would take with the view of Umar. Others thought he may take with the view of Abdullah ibn Rawahah.

The Messenger then came out and said: ‘Allah softens some hearts until they become softer than milk. And Allah hardens some hearts until they become harder than stone. You, Abu Bakr, are like Ibrahim, who said: ‘Whoever follows me is from me, but whoever disobeys me, then You are forgiving and merciful.’ And you are like Isa, when he said: ‘If You punish them, then they are Your slaves, but if you forgive them, then You are the Mighty and Wise.’ While you, O Umar, are like Nuh when he said: ‘Lord, do not leave any of the disbelievers on the earth.’ And you are like Musa who said: ‘Our Lord, You have given Pharaoh and his chiefs splendour and wealth in this present life and here they are, Lord, leading others astray from Your path. Our Lord, obliterate their wealth and harden their hearts so that they do not believe until they see the agonizing torment.’⁵⁰⁹

From this Hadith we can see that gentleness without being weak was from the traits of Ibrahim that the Prophet praised and used him as an example.

- Ibrahim kept to his covenant and fulfilled his duties. He was sincere in everything that he did, and these are all qualities that we consistently see in his stories.
- Ibrahim had vast knowledge, wisdom, and awareness. All matters were clear to him, thus allowing him to make the most just and best decision at all times. We saw this with the incident of the tyrant of Egypt and other situations.

Ibrahim’s sound knowledge meant that he knew how to worship Allah in the best way. He chose the best things to pray for, whether himself or others. His complete knowledge also meant that his priorities in calling to Allah were correct and his methodology in doing so was effective. Ibrahim prayed, ‘My Lord, grant me wisdom and join me with the righteous.

⁵⁰⁹ Ahmad (No: 3632). There is a slight break in the chain of this Hadith. Tirmidhi said: ‘This Hadith is Hasan.’

Give me honourable mention among later generations. Make me of the inheritors of the Garden of Bliss.’ (al-Shu’ara). This supplication was not a coincidence. Ibrahim knew that knowledge and wisdom brings about a good mention and respect amongst people, thus a higher chance of impacting them. If this knowledge is also acted upon, it then also leads to Jannah.

Hence, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ‘Whoever treads a path seeking knowledge, Allah will make the path of Jannah easy for him.’

The status of knowledge and the scholars is well known. The prophets are given the greatest share of this, as they have the greatest responsibility in calling people to Allah. Ibrahim fulfilled this duty excellently with his complete knowledge and sound wisdom. His arguments were therefore always effective and convincing. His whole life was about inviting people to the truth and teaching them about Allah. Everything that he said or did revolved around this mission.

- The greatness of Ibrahim is not only in his firm faith, knowledge, and wisdom. But along with these things he had rock solid patience, bravery, and a willingness to sacrifice. True leadership is only attained when these traits are present.

Most of these traits have been detailed throughout the book, but here we have provided a summary of some of his main qualities (peace be upon him).

12. Similarities Between Ibrahim and Muhammad

The many similarities between Ibrahim and Muhammad are something quite incredible. Despite the centuries that separate them, it is almost like they are immediate father and son. Here are some of those similarities, whether in events, actions, or personality:

1. Upbringing

Ibrahim was given wisdom and insight from a young age as Allah informed us, and so was Muhammad who had never worshipped an idol or worshipped anyone other than Allah, even before prophethood.

2. Contemplation

The Qur’an informs us of Ibrahim’s dialogue that he has with his people about the universe and stars, contemplating Allah’s creation. Similarly,

Muhammad would go away for days, privately worshipping Allah in the cave of Hira.

3. Family Enemies

Ibrahim faced strong opposition and enmity from his father Azar. While Muhammad faced similar enmity and opposition from his uncle Abu Lahab, something that the Qur'an refers to in a separate chapter.

4. Seeking Forgiveness for Parents

Ibrahim sought forgiveness for his father, but then refrained after he knew that there is no hope. Similarly, the Prophet said that he will seek forgiveness for his uncle Abu Talib so long as Allah does not forbid him. Allah then revealed to him forbidding him from seeking forgiveness for the disbelievers.

5. Believing Relatives

Ibrahim's nephew Lut believed and migrated with him, just as the Prophet's cousin Ali believed and migrated with him. The Prophet once said to him: 'Are you not happy to be with my like Harun was with Musa? Except that there is no prophet after me.'

6. Building the Ka'bah

We now know that Ibrahim built the Ka'bah and raised its foundations, then called people to the pilgrimage. The Prophet Muhammad also contributed towards building the Ka'bah when he placed the Black Stone in its place after Quraish disputed over who would be given that privilege. He then also called people to Hajj, taught them how to perform it, and prohibited any idolator from performing Hajj or anyone to perform Tawaf naked. During the farewell Hajj he said: 'Perform your rites, for today you are following something that it is from the inheritance of Ibrahim.'⁵¹⁰ The Ka'bah thus is a strong connector between Ibrahim and Muhammad.

7. Leading Humanity

Allah made both Ibrahim and Muhammad imams and leaders for the world. He said regarding Ibrahim, 'I am making you a leader (and role

⁵¹⁰ Ahmad (No: 17233).

model) for the people.’ And the Qur’an says, ‘O people, I am a messenger of Allah to all of you.’

We also saw that both Ibrahim and Muhammad both migrated for the sake of Allah under the protection and support of Allah.

8. The Ibrahimic Prayer

The messenger taught us to supplicate in every prayer asking Allah to praise and bless Muhammad and his family, just as he praised and blessed Ibrahim and his family.

9. The Sacred Land

Makkah was made sacred and a sanctuary by Ibrahim. This continued until the time of Muhammad and until today. But the Prophet Muhammad also made Madina a sanctuary and sacred place, as narrated in a sound Hadith.⁵¹¹

10. A Connection to Egypt

Ibrahim was given Hajar, the Egyptian, as a slave girl and Ismael was born from that. Similarly, the Prophet was given Mariyah and Ibrahim was born out of that.

11. Physical Resemblance

The person who most looked like Ibrahim was Muhammad. In a Hadith, the Messenger described the appearance of Musa and Isa, when he saw them. Then he said: ‘And I saw Ibrahim, and I am the one who resembles him most.’

12. Hasbunallah wa Ni'ma al-Wakil

It is narrated in Sahih al-Bukhari that Ibn Abbas said: ‘*Hasbuna-Allah wa ni'ma-l wakil* (Allah is sufficient for us, and He is the best Protector). Ibrahim said it when he was thrown into the fire, and Muhammad said it when the people said: ‘Those to whom the people said, ‘The people have assembled against you, so fear them.’ But this only increased them in faith, and they said, ‘Allah is sufficient for us, and He is the best Protector.’ (al-Imran: 173)

There are so many other examples and instances which show the strong relationship between Muhammad and Ibrahim. The mother of the believers Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) would sometimes swear by the

⁵¹¹ Sahih Muslim (1374).

Lord of Muhammad and sometimes swear by the Lord of Ibrahim. So the Prophet said to her: ‘I know when you are happy and when you are angry.’ She said: ‘How do you know, O messenger of Allah?’ He replied: ‘When you are pleased you say, ‘By the Lord of Muhammad’, but when you are angry, you say, ‘By the Lord of Ibrahim.’ She said: ‘That’s true. But I only abandon mentioning your name.’⁵¹²

The great resemblance between the two greatest prophets of Allah are also in their religious teachings. No other religion today can claim to have followed in the way of Ibrahim, except Islam. The religion of Muhammad is the religion of Ibrahim. Therefore any attempt to water things down and unite all the religions or to turn the three major Ibrahimic faiths into one faith, is a false and misguided endeavour. Belief and disbelief cannot go together. There is plenty of scope for humans to work together to do good without playing with their religions and opposing the fundamental teachings of their faith.

Instead, all that is required is for the different faiths to live peacefully with one another and work together towards common good. As Allah said, ‘Cooperate in doing what is right and good; and do not cooperate in sin and transgression.’

As the Prophet (peace be upon him) said regarding the disbelievers of Quraish: ‘I will accept any agreement with them that involves upholding the sacred symbols of Allah and maintain good family ties.’⁵¹³

Ibrahim on the Day of Judgment

Ibrahim is the first person to be clothed on the Day of Judgment when everyone rises from their graves and is gathered naked. Abdullah ibn Abbas said that the Prophet stood delivering a sermon and he said:

‘O people, you will be gathered on the Day of Judgment naked, bare-footed, and uncircumcised, like you were originally created you will be returned. The first person to be clothed on that day will be Ibrahim.’⁵¹⁴

We do not know of an authentic report which specifies why exactly Ibrahim is given this virtue, but the high status of Ibrahim makes him deserving of such treatment, and Allah knows best.

⁵¹² Sahih al-Bukhari (No: 6078).

⁵¹³ Musannaf Ibn Abu Shaybah (No: 39624). There is a similar version in Sahih al-Bukhari (No: 2731).

⁵¹⁴ Bukhari (No: 3347) and Muslim (No: 2860).

The Incident of the Intercession

Abu Hurayra said that some meat was brought to the Prophet and a foreleg was presented to him, and he used to like it, so he took a bite from it. Then he said: ‘I will be the leader of the people on the Day of Resurrection. Do you know why that is? Allah will gather the people, the first and the last, on one level ground where they will all be able to hear a caller, and all of them will be visible, and the sun will be brought near such that the people will suffer distress and trouble that they cannot tolerate nor bear. Then some people will say: ‘Don’t you see the state you have reached? Why don’t you look for a person who can intercede for you with your Lord?’

Some of them will say to others: ‘You should go to Adam.’ So they will go to Adam and say, ‘You are the father of all mankind, Allah created you with His Own Hands, and breathed into you from His spirit, and ordered the angels to prostrate for you. Will you not intercede for us with your Lord? Don’t you see what has happened to us? Don’t you see the state we have reached?’ Adam will reply, ‘Today my Lord is angrier than He has ever been and angrier than He ever will be. He forbade me (to eat from) the tree, but I disobeyed. Myself! Myself! Myself! Go to somebody else; go to Nuh.’

They will go to Nuh and say: ‘O Nuh, you are the first messenger to the people of earth, and Allah named you a thankful slave. Will you not intercede for us with your Lord? Don’t you see what has happened to us? Don’t you see the state we have reached?’ Nuh will say: ‘Today my Lord is angrier than He has ever been and angrier than He ever will be. I had been given one supplication, and I supplicated against my own people. Myself! Myself! Myself! Go to someone else. Go to Ibrahim.’ They will go to Ibrahim and say: ‘O Ibrahim! You are Allah’s Prophet and His Khalil among the people of the earth, so intercede for us with your Lord. Don’t you see what has happened to us?’ He will say: ‘Today my Lord is angrier than He has ever been and angrier than He ever will be. And I uttered three lies. Myself! Myself! Myself! Go to someone else.’⁵¹⁵

The Hadith then speaks about the eventual intercession of Muhammad (peace be upon him).

⁵¹⁵ Bukhari (No: 4712) and Muslim (No: 194).

The State of Ibrahim's Father

The Prophet said: 'On the Day of Resurrection, Ibrahim will meet his father Azar whose face will be dark and covered with dust. Ibrahim will say: 'Didn't I tell you not to disobey me?' His father will reply: 'Today I will not disobey you.' Ibrahim will say: 'O Lord! You promised that you would not disgrace me on the Day of Resurrection; and what is more of a disgrace than dishonouring my father?' Allah will say: 'I have forbidden Paradise for the disbelievers.' Then he will be addressed, 'O Ibrahim! Look! What is underneath your feet?' He will look down and see a blood-stained animal, that will be taken by the legs and thrown in the Fire.'⁵¹⁶

The Children of the Disbelievers Gathered Around Ibrahim

Imam al-Bukhari narrated in a long Hadith that in his Sahih from Samurah ibn Jundub who said that the Prophet would often ask his companions whether anyone saw a dream. Some people would thus tell him of any dreams they may have seen. Once the Prophet said:

'Two people came to me last night and told me to set out, so I set out along with them.' He then mentioned a long story and added:

'We came to a luxuriant garden containing all kinds of spring blossom in the middle of which there was a man who was so tall that I could barely see his head; it was so high up into the sky. Around the man were more children than I had ever seen. I asked my companions who this was and who these were, but they told me to continue moving on.'

He then said: 'The tall man who was in the garden was Ibrahim and the children who were around him were those who were born and died upon the *fitrah*.' Some Muslims asked, 'O Messenger of Allah, what about the children of the polytheists?' He replied: 'The children of the polytheists were there too.'⁵¹⁷

The Death of Ibrahim and His Grave

Ibrahim died in Palestine at around 175 years of age in approximately 1821 BC. Some scholars gave slightly different dates and there are contradicting historical reports on this. It is said that his son Ismael and Isaac

⁵¹⁶ Bukhari (No: 3350).

⁵¹⁷ Bukhari (No: 7047).

buried him where his wife Sarah was buried in the village of Arba, in Hebron, which is the city of Khalil al-Rahman today.

It seems that the historical narratives were influenced by the Biblical narrations that reached the Muslims, and the folklore that people pass on from generation to generation.

Some sources mention that the Romans were the first to take the tomb of Ibrahim as a place of worship after they converted to Christianity. They roofed a large part of the wall, and opened a small narrow door from the wall, turning it into a place of worship and a fortress during war.

Then the Greeks, Persians, and others then continued this, until the Muslims conquered Palestine in the fifteenth year of the Hijrah, and respected his tomb. None of them had taken it as a place of worship until the fourth century after Hijrah. Ibn Taymiyyah says regarding this: ‘The tomb of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was closed, and none could enter it until around the fourth century. Some said that someone saw a dream about it, after which it was excavated, while other claimed this happened after the Christians entered. It was then left as a masjid.’

Unfortunately, each era saw people taking advantage of the presence of the grave and it is now under the control of the Israelis who made part of it a Jewish temple. Muslims and Jews worship and pray under one roof.

Ibn Taymiyah said:

‘Regarding the graves of the prophets, the grave that all scholars agreed to is the grave of the prophet (peace be upon him). His grave is well known through mass transmission. As for the grave of Ibrahim, then most people say that it is the current known place, but some people have dismissed this claim, as narrated from Imam Malik. He is reported to have said: ‘No grave of a prophet is known today, except the grave of our Prophet Muhammad.’

When Ibn Taymiyah was asked about the graves of prophets that people visit today, he replied: ‘The grave that is agreed upon is the grave of our Prophet Muhammad. The grave of Ibrahim is a point of contention, but the correct view chosen by the majority is that it is indeed his grave.’⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁸ Majmu’ al-Fatawa (27/444-445).

The Summary

To compile this book about the great Prophet Ibrahim, I have used a variety of Tafsir works and benefitted from what different scholars have said, both classical and contemporary. We end this journey by summarising the key events and points mentioned from the life of Ibrahim in this book.

1. Ibrahim, peace be upon him, is the third father of mankind and the father of the prophets. This is because humanity's first father is Adam, its second father is Noah, and all the people of the earth are from his offspring. He is the pillar of the world and the leader of the hunafa (those who turned away from falsehood). God, glory be to Him, took him as a friend and made prophethood and the book in his offspring.

2. Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was called the 'shaykh of the prophets' and the 'father of the prophets', because he was the pioneer of the prophetic call in the entire world and the prophets that succeeded him were from his progeny.

3. All the prophets of the Children of Israel are his descendants, because they are from the children of Ya'qub, son of Ishaq, and Ishaq is the son of Ibrahim.

4. So from Ibrahim (peace be upon him) the tree of prophethood continues until the seal of the Messengers, may God's prayers be upon them, because Muhammad he is the son of Ismael. Allah Almighty said: 'And We granted him Isaac and Jacob, and We placed in his offspring prophecy and the Book.' (al-Ankabut: 27)

5. Historians and scholars differed about the place of birth of Ibrahim - peace be upon him. Some said that he was born in Sus in the land of Ahwaz, others said that he was born in Babylon in Iraq, others said in Kush, and some said that he was born in Harran. Most scholars said that his birth was in the era of Nimrod, son of Cush. Some said that his birth was in Ghouta of Damascus in the village of Barzeh in Mount Qasioun. Ibn Asakir (d. 571 H) said: 'The correct opinion is that he was born in Babylon in the city of Ur. This is the well-known correct view among the scholars of biography, history, and narrations.'



6. The Holy Qur'an did not mention the place of the birth of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) nor his date of his birth, and there is no legal text that defines this for us with certainty. This is why historians differed about the place of his birth, and we find much contradiction on the narrations that determine his exact time and place of birth.

7. Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was the middle son of two of his brothers: Haran and Nahor. Haran was the father of Lot (peace be upon him) and died during his father's life in the land of Babylon. He was his father's eldest son.

8. Ibrahim's people came out of the heart of the Arabian Peninsula, in which a group of Semites grew up. He argues that Ibrahim was a pure Arab from the lineage of the original Arabs whose lineage leads back to Sam son of Noah and that he is the father of the Adnanite Arabs who are the children of his son Ismail. This way he is considered the father of the Arabs before being the father of the Israelites.

9. The eastern Mediterranean region extending to the Arabian Peninsula is known as the land of civilizations and the cradle of the divine religions. The nations that established the civilizations belong to the sons of Noah, peace be upon him.

10. Ibrahim, peace be upon him, was born in Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq). He grew up in a society in which the worship of planets and idols prevailed; a society in which people prostrated to kings and rulers along with God Almighty. He grew up in a polytheistic family that carved idols for people and traded them, according to some narrations.

11. Allah honoured Ibrahim by protecting him from idolatry from a young age, by granting him sound intellect and guiding him to the truth. 'And indeed, We had granted Ibrahim his sound judgment early on, for We knew him well [to be worthy of it].' (Al-Anbiya, 21:51)

12. God, the Mighty and Sublime, showed His *khalil* (close friend) Ibrahim (peace be upon him) the wonders of the heavens and the earth, and the sun, the moon, the stars, trees, animals and other things that He created in His great kingdom. He made clear to him those things that are apparent and hidden, so that he (peace be upon him) is one of those who worship God alone and know the truth of what He guided him to. He gave

him understanding of His oneness and made clear to him the misguidance of his people who worship idols and take them gods besides Allah.

13. The life of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) embodies his call to the oneness of God Almighty and to make worship purely for Him alone, initially in Mesopotamia, then the Levant, Egypt, and Hijaz.

14. The people of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) worshipped stars, planets and celestial bodies, as the Sabians believed in sanctifying and worshipping planets and stars. In their temples they placed idols who symbolised those heavenly planets, and they would perform religious rituals in front of them, such as prayers, sacrifices, vows, and other rituals.

15. Among the worship that was prevalent in the people of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was the worship and sanctification of kings. They believed that their kings had the ability to create, take life, and that benefit and harm, happiness and misery, was under their control. One of the reasons behind such beliefs is that they believed the early kings who ruled after the Great Flood may have descended from heaven to earth. Some of the kings also claimed divinity, such the tyrannical king whom Ibrahim, peace be upon him, debated.

16. Other common religious rituals in the era of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) were sacrificial offerings and vows to the idols. These were done for various reasons, such as atonement for sins and to gain the appeasement of the gods. The offerings that people made to the gods were either agricultural offerings, such as wheat, corn, barley, and sesame, or animal sacrifices, such as sheep and goats. They would place them on an altar in front of their idols.

17. Temples had an important place among the inhabitants of Mesopotamia, like other Canaanite and Egyptian peoples. The temple represents the centre of religious and civil life from a religious point of view. That is because the temple, in the eyes of the inhabitants of Mesopotamia and other ancient peoples, is the holiest place, since they believe that the temple is the house of their god, who lives there with his wife, children, entourage, and servants.

18. The society in the era of Ibrahim was dominated by ideological corruption. It was a society immersed in paganism, as people deified planets and worshiped idols and kings, in addition to establishing religious

rituals that include supplications, prayers, offerings, and vows to their false idols. The magnitude and variety of deviation in religion all brought together in a few places in the era of Ibrahim was so great. This shows the incredible effort and strength of Ibrahim in calling his people to monotheism and confronting pagan and Sabian beliefs, as well as the kings who claimed divinity.

19. Scholars differed greatly about the Sabians, their history, rituals, and creed. They discovered that they are made up of multiple sects and divergent denominations that differ from each other in core teachings as well as practices, and the faith appears to have undergone some changes over time. The Holy Qur'an referred to the Sabians in three places.

20. Historians have linked the Sabians mentioned in the Holy Qur'an with the Sabians of Harran and the Sabians of Iraq, and divided them into two sects: the early Sabians who were followers of Ibrahim and polytheist Sabians are idolators and believe in the worship of planets.

21. One of the social spectacles present in the era of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was the feasts and social and religious ritual celebrations. Among the most important of these celebrations were those celebrated for each of their gods. The new year feasts were also an incredible sight attended by everyone, men, women, and children. They believed that they were being invited by all the gods to attend the new year festival. Led by the king, they perform religious rituals that include supplications, prayers, offerings, and other rituals in front of their greatest god, Marduk.

22. Education in the days of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was widespread, as schools that were part of the temples were widespread. They taught people reading, writing, and other skills. They used to write with reed pens on tablets made of wet clay. People at his time were particularly interested in teaching astronomy and built high structures help them to observe the stars and planets, through which they attempted to predict the future.

23. Among the most prevalent areas of study at the era of Ibrahim was mathematics. People were very interested studying mathematics, because it was handy for keeping track of the income of the temples, offerings, and to facilitate their commercial activities, all which necessitate some

knowledge of numbers and mathematics. They kept books and their official documents in the temples and royal palaces.

24. His time was a period in which morals and values were not part of religion, nor part of people's daily lives. Immoralities were in public display without any shame. Some people even went as far as making immoralities, such as fornication, a religious act through which one draws nearer to God.

25. Egypt and Babylon were two prosperous countries, in which the finest ancient civilizations were established. Canaan was affected by the wars and clashes that existed between the two countries, and control over Canaan was mostly for whoever had the upper hand amongst these two countries. Babylonian monuments indicate that it was the civilization that controlled Canaan in the third millennium BC. The Canaanite civilization was therefore heavily influenced by the Babylonians.

26. The life of Ibrahim was entirely in the path of Allah. He called people call worship God alone and to adhere to His guidance, with pure sincerity, submission, and complete trust in Allah.

27. Ibrahim began his call in Iraq by preaching to his father first, then his people, then the unjust disbelieving king who tried to burning him in the fire before Allah saved him from it. After that, God ordered him to migrate from Iraq, so he left it to the blessed and holy land along with Lot.

28. Ibrahim resided in the blessed land of Palestine. He then travelled to Egypt with his faithful wife Sarah, may God be pleased with her. An incident took place there with the King of Egypt, in which they were given Hagar. The story will be mentioned in detail later on, God willing. Sarah gave Hagar, her slave girl, to Ibrahim. Hagar then gave birth to Ibrahim's first child, Ismail (peace be upon him). God commanded him to take Hagar and Ismail to the Hijaz, so Ibrahim obeyed Allah's command. Later, his wife Sarah gave birth to his second son, Ishaq, despite Ibrahim having reached old age and Sarah being barren at the time.

29. There is a difference between a *Nabi* and *Rasul*. The *Rasul* is one who has been sent with a new *Shari'ah* that he is commanded to convey. The *Nabi* is someone who is commanded to convey a *Shari'ah* that came before him. So every *Rasul* is a *Nabi*, but not vice versa.



30. We do not know the exact number of prophets and messengers. Allah says: ‘We have told you the stories of some of them, while others We have not.’ (Ghafir: 78)

31. Ibrahim, like all the prophets, only deliver the message revealed to them by Allah. They do not make things up or change the message, but only deliver exactly what they were commanded to deliver.

32. Allah’s justice and mercy is manifested in sending prophets and messengers throughout human history to bring them good news for those who obey and warn those who stray from the path they were commanded to follow.

33. As well as being a prophet and messenger, Ibrahim is one of the few messengers of *Ulu al-Azm* (Strong Resolve) who established Allah’s religion as commanded.

34. Prophethood is an intermediary between the Creator and His creation in conveying His *Shari’ah*. An embassy between the King and His servants. They are a call from the Most Merciful to His creation to take them out of darkness into light, and from the tightness of the *dunya* (this world) to the vastness of the *akhirah* (afterlife). The sending of the prophets is thus a great blessing from Allah upon mankind.

35. Prophethood is thus not obtained through the choice of a prophet, nor through requesting it. Hence, when the idolators said: ‘If only this Quran was revealed to a great man from [one of] the two cities!’ Allah responded to them saying: ‘Is it they who distribute your Lord’s mercy? We [alone] have distributed their [very] livelihood among them in this worldly life and raised some of them in rank above others.’ (al-Zukhruf: 32)

36. Belief in prophethood is the way to knowing and loving Allah. it is the only path that leads to Allah’s pleasure, His paradise, and forgiveness, and protects one from His punishment.

37. Affirming prophethood is a need for humans greater than that of the air that they breathe, the food they eat, and the liquids they drink. That is because whoever misses out on one of these things may lose this life, but the one who fails to affirm prophethood shall face the greatest loss, because he will lose this life and the next.

38. Creation needs the messengers to inform them of what Allah likes and dislikes. Many people have gone astray and have been overcome by many shades of misguidance, despite the existence of prophet (peace be upon him). What would we expect to see if Allah did not send any messengers in the first place?

39. From Allah's mercy with His creation, He sent to them messenger as bringers of good news and warners, reciting His verses to them, teaching them what benefits them, and guiding them to the path of success in this life and the next, for before that they had been upon clear misguidance.

40. The greatest objective for which Allah created us is to worship Him alone and to obey Him. Allah said: 'I did not create jinn and humans except to worship Me.' Man cannot know what true worship is, except through the messengers that Allah sent.

41. Allah sent messengers in order to cut off the roots of the disbelievers, leaving them with no excuse for their disbelief. They are also sent so that Allah sees and makes apparent in reality who the obedient and disobedient ones are, and to establish the ultimate proof against His servants, and so that those who were to perish and those who were to survive might do so after the truth had been made clear to both.

42. Allah has perfected the prophets with noble manners and protected from lowly doubts and desires. The prophets are lanterns of guidance. People follow their way and take their lives and biographies as an example to adhere to until they settle, by their Lord, in Dar al-Salam (The Home of Peace, i.e. jannah).

43. The messengers came to reform and purify our souls, and to warn us from all that which harms them. They were sent to guide mankind to the straight path, encouraging noble manners and warning against evil traits. Allah Almighty said: 'He is the One Who raised for the illiterate [people] a messenger from among themselves—reciting to them His revelations, purifying them, and teaching them the Book and wisdom, for indeed they had previously been clearly astray.'

44. Allah has given prophets distinct features that no other shares with them. However, this does not take them out of being human beings.



45. Allah has protected the prophets from making any errors in delivering the message. So any possible mistake that comes from them is necessarily corrected by Allah.

46. It is obligatory to respect the prophets and to know their rights over us.

47. Secondly, the stories of the Qur'an are entire truths. We cannot mix historical tales and biblical narrations with them, especially not those narrations that speak disrespectfully about the prophets of Bani Israel.

48. The bodies of the prophets remain preserved and in tact in their graves, no matter how long ago they died. This is something established by the prophet who said that Allah has forbidden the earth from eating up the bodies of the prophets.

49. Allah protected the prophets from leaving behind in inheritance anything of this *dunya* (worldly matters), so that this cannot be used against them claiming that they were after the *dunya* and were eager to leave it behind for their children. And the prophet is like a father for his nation, so what he leaves behind is a general *sadaqah*.

50. One's faith is not complete until he believes in all the prophets without specifying their number; those who Allah told us about and those He did not, because Allah has told us that there are prophets that he did not relate to us and inform us of.

51. Islam is the religion of all the prophets from the time of Adam until the final messenger, their religion is submission to Allah. It is thus the first religion known to human beings.

52. Complete *tawhid* is the purpose for sending the prophets. This entails *tawhid* in its comprehensive understanding.

53. Allah gave each messenger a shari'ah (laws) for him and his people. These can differ from prophet to prophet in some areas, until Allah the seal of the prophets Muhammad with a shari'ah that is perfect for the rest of time and all places.

54. The story of Ibrahim - peace be upon him - is the longest Quranic story after the story of Musa - peace be upon him - and it takes up more than a whole *juzz* (a 30th of the Qur'an). Its verses were revealed in the early Meccan phase and continued until the end of the Medinan phase.

55. The story of Ibrahim reveals the traits of the perfect personality that presents a model in living by the teachings of Islam.

56. The story deepened the relationship between Ibrahim and the Muslims, the followers of the final prophet, our master Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him. Ibrahim was mentioned in the Qur'an sixty-nine times in twenty-five different Meccan and Medinan chapters. The scenes of his story are distributed across the Qur'an over seventeen parts (*juzz*).

57. The story of Ibrahim - peace be upon him - reveals some of the attributes of the angels and their functions, something that is part of our Islamic belief.

58. The story of Ibrahim - peace be upon him - was able to provide us with his valuable experiences in the field of dialogue, calling to God, and abiding by his commands. He was the role model from a young age until much older. It also provided us with valuable experiences by those who were brought up by Ibrahim, such as his wife and children.

59. Ibrahim - peace be upon him - has a distinguished position among the People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitab*), whether Christians or Jews. *Ahl al-Kitab* had a presence in the Arabian Peninsula in various and forms, whether through their various financial and commercial capabilities, such as the Jews, or through the presence of major Christian entities and countries near Arabia, such as Abyssinia and the Byzantine Empire.

60. The Arabs attribute themselves to Ibrahim, through his son Ismail, who, along with his father, built the Ka'bah, the centre of the pilgrimage for the Arabs throughout history. The importance of lineage for the Arabs cannot be over emphasised, to the extent that they considered that one cannot be an Arab if they did not have a known lineage.

61. The story of Ibrahim - peace be upon him - in the Holy Qur'an is original. You will not find anything similar in the Torah or the Biblical scriptures, in terms of accuracy, authenticity, and presenting the complete truth that is far from distortion and forgery. This increased its purity, solidity, and depth, within the themes of the distinguished Qur'anic discourse. This is the book that 'falsehood cannot approach from any angle. A revelation from the One Who is All-Wise, Praiseworthy.'

62. Surat Al-Imran did not mention any scenes or parts from the story of Ibrahim himself, but it spoke about what it means to be a true follower of Ibrahim and the true religion that he was upon.

63. The verses of Surat al-An'am present part of the dialogue between Ibrahim and his father, in which Ibrahim denounces that his father worships other than God. The verses then speak of Ibrahim's dialogue and debate with his people, when he proved to them, using clear logical arguments, the falseness of worshipping planets. He announced his faith in God and that he has dissociated himself from them. The verses then referred to the prophets from his descendants.

64. Surat Hud speaks about the story of Ibrahim in verses 69 to 76. The verses refer to the incident in which the angels came to visit Ibrahim in the form of human beings, though he did not recognise them. They then refused to eat from his calf that he prepared for his guests, because angels do not eat. They then gave Ibrahim and his wife Sarah the good news of the birth of their son Isaac, and their response to Sarah's astonishment. They then told Ibrahim of their mission to destroy the deviated people of Lot.

65. Surat Ibrahim, named after him, speaks about a scene from his story in verses (35-41). The verses show how Ibrahim - peace be upon him - left his son and wife in an uncultivated valley in the Hijaz, supplicating to his Lord to make this location a place of gathering for people, to provide them with goods, and to protect him and his children from idolatry.

66. Verses 51 to 60 of Surat al-Hijr mention the incident in which the angels came to Ibrahim in human form, their giving Ibrahim and his wife Sarah the good news of the birth of their son Isaac, and then telling Ibrahim of their mission to destroy the people of Lot.

67. Verses 41 to 50 of Surat Maryam mention Ibrahim calling his father to abandon disbelief and to enter the religion of God, though his father rejects his call. Ibrahim then abandons his people and God gifts him his son Isaac, then Jacob. This chapter was revealed quite early on, so is the first chapter revealed to provide some detail about Ibrahim's story. This is proven by the fact that Ja'far ibn Abi Talib recited it to the Negus and his people.

68. Verses 41 to 50 of Surat al-Anbiya speak of Ibrahim denouncing his father and his people's worship of other than Allah, him calling them

to true faith in Allah. It mentions how Ibrahim destroyed their idols before being judged by them in public, but Ibrahim was able to overcome them and their claims with sound arguments. Allah then saved him from the fire that he was thrown into.

69. Verses 26 to 29 of Surat al-Hajj presented a snapshot of his story that was relevant to the theme of the chapter: Hajj, its rituals, sacrifice, and the Sacred House.

70. Verses 69 to 89 of Surat al-Shu'ara highlight how Ibrahim rejected the disbelief of his father and people, calling them to abandon idolatry, and inviting them to accept Allah's religion. He announces his complete disassociation from their gods, instead turning to Allah, praying to Allah to save him on the Day of Judgment.

71. Verses 16 to 27 of Surat al-Ankabut speak of Ibrahim denouncing his people's worship of other than Allah, him calling them to worship Allah alone. He also explains some of God's attributes to them. The chapter shows how they responded to his call by threatening to kill or burn him, but was saved by Allah from their plots. Ibrahim migrated to Palestine with Lot and was blessed with a son Isaac, who was then blessed with Jacob.

72. Verses 83 to 113 of Surat al-Saffat describe Ibrahim as having a pure heart. The chapter mentions how Ibrahim denounced the idol worship of his people, destroyed their idols himself, and was then saved from the fire into which he was thrown. His son Isma'il is born and later on Ibrahim sees a dream in which he is commanded to slaughter Isma'il. God then blesses him with another son Isaac, a prophet, and blesses Ibrahim's righteous offspring.

73. In verses 24 to 34 of Surat al-Dhariyat, there is mention of the incident in which the angels came to visit Ibrahim, giving Ibrahim and his wife Sarah the good news of the birth of their son Isaac, and responding to Sarah's astonishment about the news. They then told Ibrahim of their mission to destroy the people of Lot.

74. Verses 4 to 6 of Surat al-Mumtahinah speak about a stance of great faith by Ibrahim and his believing followers in which they announced their clear dissociation from their people who were idolators, declaring enmity and hatred towards them unless they believe in God alone. The chapter



commands all believers to follow Ibrahim in this stance of his and explains Ibrahim's attitude towards his father.

75. The personality of Ibrahim - peace be upon him - occupies a prominent position in the Qur'anic discourse; a central figure among all the messengers mentioned in the Holy Qur'an. Perhaps this position is the result of his status among various religious groups. The Jews, Christians, and even pagans, affirm his greatness and claim to be his followers.

76. Contemplation of the universe, and the incredible creation of the heavens and earth, is one of the means of recognising the creator and His oneness.

77. Ibrahim was the first person to migrate in the path of Allah, along with his nephew Lot, and his wife Sarah. This verse shows that fleeing to protect your faith is an obligation, from lands of disbelief to a land in which one can establish his faith and practice is. There is no scholarly disagreement that the obligation of this form of migration (*hijrah*) continues until the Day of Judgment.

78. Migration was an escape from the plots and harm of the oppressors, the first step to victory. Ibrahim's life, therefore, from the moment of his migration onwards became one of accomplishment and building success, despite his enemies trying to destroy and end it. The migration also became a point in which a foundation was built and great Ibrahimic projects were initiated.

79. One of the successes of Ibrahim during this migration was being given, along with his offspring after him, the inheritance of the holy lands which Allah had blessed for all people. He migrated to the direction of prayer (*qiblah*) which Allah was pleased with for the first Ibrahimic community, the children of Israel, Jacob, son of Isaac.

80. Only the true believers understand the importance of the foundation of the first qiblah (Jerusalem). It is not a light matter that this was appointed for Ibrahim, because it was there that a great human civilization sprang to life and continued to bless humanity.

81. One of the events of Ibrahim's trip to Egypt was that Hajar was gifted to Sarah, the wife of Ibrahim. She then became Ibrahim's second wife after that and the mother of Ismael, his eldest son.

82. The king that Ibrahim faced in Egypt was a tyrant who oppressed people passing by and tried to take advantage of women. Ibrahim thus warned Sarah to tell him that she is his sister. He was technically truthful, but wanted to deceive the king to protect himself and Sarah from his evil. Ibrahim was in a constant state of supplication and reliance upon Allah, so they came out safe from their trip to Egypt, as it was all under the guidance and protection of Allah, Most High.

83. The whole event with the king shows the incredibly strong faith of Sarah. She stood firm before him and thanked Allah for His favours and protection.

84. We should also be wary of what is claimed in the Torah of the Jews, that the reason for Ibrahim's migration to Egypt was to seek worldly provision. That is because Sham at that time was a fertile land with plenty of provision. Rather, his migration was for religious reasons, to call to worshipping Allah alone, and Egypt was more prepared at that time to receive the message of truth and spread it amongst people.

85. What was mentioned in the books of the Jews about the story of Ibrahim and Sarah with the king of Egypt contradicts what was mentioned in the Islamic account of that story. One must beware of what the Jews added to their scriptures regarding Ibrahim (peace be upon him). They claimed some unacceptable characteristics and vile deeds to Ibrahim. These are all false claims that cannot be attributed to any prophet, let alone Ibrahim, the father of the prophets.

86. The Qur'an in its context and order of verses is a sufficient proof for the fact that Ismael was the sacrifice. This is further supported by the prophetic reports and some of the biblical transmissions. These proofs put together are enough to say with certainty that Ismael was the son that Ibrahim was commanded to sacrifice. As Ibn Kathir said: 'This is without doubt the correct view.'

87. The name of Ismael is repeated twelve times in the Qur'an over eight different chapters: al-Baqarah, al-Imran, al-Nisa, al-An'am, Ibrahim, Maryam, al-Anbiya, and Saad. His name is usually mentioned alongside the names of other prophets.

88. Ismael was the first to speak clear eloquent Arabic, which Allah inspired him to speak with, beyond the foundations of the Arabic language

that he originally learnt from the tribe of Jurhum. It is said *al-Arab al-Ar-ibah* are the ones that spoke Arabic in the language of Ya'rib ibn Qahtan, which is the original ancient Arabic. While *al-Arab al-Musta'ribah* are the Arabs who spoke the language of Ismael the son of Ibrahim (peace be upon them). This is the language of the people of Hijaz and its surroundings.

89. Ibrahim was extremely successful in discussing with his people and debating them, making him a case worthy of study by all researchers, preachers, and reformers, especially since Allah commanded us to follow his guidance and his ways, saying: 'Who but a fool would forsake the religion of Ibrahim? We have chosen him in this world and he will rank among the righteous in the Hereafter.' (al-Baqarah: 130)

90. Ibrahim remained attached to Allah, certain that Allah is with him in all things, in secret and open, at times of strength and weakness, alive or dead. This is especially so when he is working towards delivering the divine message, when there is a need for effort, sacrifice, and martyrdom.

91. Allah gave Ibrahim knowledge and certainty not given to any messenger, except Muhammad (peace be upon them). This quality is visible in all his dialogues, but became more obvious here in his precise choice of arguments.

92. Allah chose Ibrahim to face this tyrant king who claim divinity, so he debated him and silence him, shocking him with the soundness of his arguments.

93. The king who is called Nimrod son of Canaan in the books of history, is an obvious example in the history of oppressive tyrants. His kingdom expanded across the east and west, and according to some historians, his rule lasted more than four hundred years.

94. This incident with Ibrahim and Nimrod was not mentioned in the Old Testament. Its mention in the Holy Qur'an is considered an aspect of the historical prophetic miracle that refutes the claim of those who said that the Qur'anic stories are derived from other ancient sources such as the Old Testament.

95. We notice in the story of Ibrahim that he always maintains his calmness and composure. He is forbearing throughout all the events that he faces. This is quite noticeable in all the chapters of the Qur'an that

mention him. He does not become excessively angry, nor does he curse or insult. He is patient with his people, and he forgives and overlooks.

He was like this in his dialogue about the sun and the moon in which establish that they are unworthy of being worshipped. He also maintained his calm when speaking to the tyrant king. He was even composed when destroying the idols, not doing so aggressively, but to make a clear point in the hope that his people would wake up from their misguidance. He kept calm when he was thrown into the fire and prayed to Allah. He kept his cool when he took his wife and beloved son to Makkah, turning to Allah and imploring Him to protect them. A truly incredible role model Ibrahim was in leadership and keeping disciplined.

96. Allah's name Al-Hakim (the Wise) and Al-Alim (the All Knowing) are mentioned together in the Qur'an in around thirty seven places, usually first mentioning knowledge, then wisdom. Not only is His knowledge vast and encompassing, but His wisdom dictates that this knowledge is placed appropriately in everything that He decides and decrees.

97. The natural love and respect for the Ka'bah has always remained in the hearts of the believers, since it was built by Ibrahim (peace be upon him). This was then further emphasised as a religious duty and act of obedience to Allah, since Muslims are obliged to hold sacred that which Allah made sacred.

98. Masjid al-Aqsa was built in Jerusalem, before Bani Israel entered Palestine; after Musa and before Dawud and Sulaiman. This was before Sulaiman built the temple as the Jews claims. So Jerusalem has always been a Muslim land and al-Aqsa has always been one of the mosques of Allah. This is before the Jews existed and before they claimed the land of Palestine. The right of the Muslims to Palestine comes well before any claims to it made by the Jews or Christians.

99. Allah Almighty informs us of the greatness of the Sacred House and the one who built it. Allah made some of his offspring reside there and he and his son Ismael built the House upon the foundations of monotheism, God-consciousness, and the abandonment of idolatry.

100. Ibrahim was then commanded to call people to Hajj, teaching them its obligation and its virtues. They will then come to you from all over the world, walking or on a mount, like a camel or other animal. Just

as Ibrahim called people to this great ritual, so did his son Muhammad (peace be upon them).

101. Hajj is a season in which people get to learn about the origins of their religion, learn from one another, and discuss important matters. Many scholars would take the opportunity of Hajj to meet other scholars from around the world and benefit from them. It is also a chance to work together and bring people who are distant close to each other under a common goal and one belief.

102. Many religious groups and factions disputed over Ibrahim, each claim to be his true followers. This itself shows Ibrahim's great status throughout history amongst all the major religions. This comes as no surprise, as Allah made Ibrahim a leader worth a whole nation. The most famous religious groups that claimed association to Ibrahim are the Jews, Christians, and pagan Arabs.

103. Ibrahim was a prophet who had scriptures revealed to him from Allah. The scriptures given to prophets mentioned in the Qur'an are therefore five, in chronological order: the scriptures of Ibrahim, the Torah, the Zabur, the Gospels (al-Injil), and the Qur'an.

104. Ibrahim is one of the greatest personalities in human history. He was given comprehensively noble traits by Allah, making him worthy of being the perfect role model.

105. Ibrahim was clean hearted, never seeking to harm others, even if they had harmed him and opposed Allah's message. He was always concerned about his people and his offspring, reminding them and praying for them.

106. The many similarities between Ibrahim and Muhammad are something quite incredible. Despite the centuries that separate them, it is almost like they are immediate father and son.

107. Ibrahim was the first to legislate circumcision. He himself practised this at an old age, which shows his firm resolve and submission to Allah's command.

108. Ibrahim is the first to be clothed on the Day of Judgment.

109. No other religion today can claim to have followed in the way of Ibrahim, except Islam. The religion of Muhammad is the religion of



Ibrahim. Muhammad is the one who purified the religion of Ibrahim from the deviations that ruined it, returning it to its pure state left by Ibrahim.

And our closing prayer is, ‘All praise is for Allah, Lord of all worlds!’

Glory and praise be to You Allah, I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship but You, I seek Your forgiveness and repent to You.

About the Author

Dr. Ali Muhammad al-Sallabi

Dr. Ali Muhammad al-Sallabi was born in Benghazi in Libya in 1963. He is a writer, historian, and Islamic thinker. He is the deputy secretary general of the International Union of Muslim Scholars. He first gained his degree from the Faculty of Da'wah and Usul al-Din at the Islamic University of Madina in 1993. His book, 'Moderation in the Holy Qur'an', earned him an MA from Omdurman Islamic University (Sudan) in 1996. He then completed his PhD in 1999 at the same university. His PhD thesis, now published, is titled, 'The Fiqh of Empowerment in the Holy Qur'an.'

In his scholarly journey, he benefitted from a group of scholars including Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Sheikh Akram Dhiya' al-Omeri, Dr. Yasin al Khateeb, Salman al-Awdah, and other scholars. From early on, Dr. Ali al-Sallabi was interested in Quranic *tafsir*, Islamic history, the *fiqh* of divine ways (*sunan*), and cultures. He is known for his books and efforts in Qur'anic sciences, jurisprudence, history, and Islamic thought. He is a member of the Historical Review Committee and Texts Auditing Committee for many drama series like the Omar ibn al-Khattab, Abu Ja'far al-Mansour, Imam al-Hasan series, and others. He has lead several national initiatives, both political and social, in Libya.

The writings of Dr. Sallabi exceed seventy works in history and Islamic thought. The following have been translated into English:

- Prophetic Biography
- Abu Bakr al-Siddiq
- Omar ibn al-Khattab
- Uthman ibn Affan
- Ali ibn Abi Talib
- Al-Hassan ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib
- Omar Ibn Abdel Aziz
- Salahuddin al-Ayubi
- Mohammad al-Fateh
- Isa Ibn Maryam (The Whole Truth)
- Nuh and the Great Flood
- Ibrahim: The Father of the Prophets

IBRAHIM THE FATHER OF THE PROPHETS






DR. ALI MOHAMMAD AL-SALLABI

'As for Ibrahim's prayer for his father's forgiveness, it was only in fulfilment of a promise he had made to him. But when it became clear to Ibrahim that his father was an enemy of Allah, he broke ties with him. Ibrahim was truly tender-hearted, forbearing!' (al-Tawbah: 114)



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