

Prophet Ismail (as)

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Ismail is regarded as a prophet and messenger and the founder of Ishmaelites in Islam. He is the son of Abraham, born to Hajar (Hagar). Ismail is also associated with Mecca and the construction of the Kaaba. Ismail is the figure known as Ishmael in Judaism and Christianity.

Birth of Ismail

Ismail was born in 1800 BC in present day Palestine. Sarah, the first wife of Ibrahim knew that her husband was longing for a child. As Allah has mentioned Ibrahim's Dua in Qur'an: "O my Lord! Grant me a righteous son!" (Qur'an 37: 100) And she knew that she was getting old and may not be able to provide Ibrahim with a child. She suggested to Ibrahim that he should marry her servant Hajar and maybe Allah would bless them with a child through her. Ibrahim accepted the advice of his beloved wife Sarah and married Hajar. It wasn't long before Ibrahim and Hajar were blessed with a baby boy whom they named Ismail / Ishmael.

There are many versions of the story, some of which include a prophecy about Ishmael's birth. One such example is from Ibn Kathir (d.1373) whose account states that an angel tells the pregnant Hagar to name her child Ishmael and prophesies, "His hand would be over everyone, and the hand of everyone would be against him. His brethren would rule over all the lands." Ibn Kathir comments that this foretells of Muhammad's leadership.

Ismail and Hagar taken to Mecca

Ishmael and Hagar being taken to Mecca by Abraham in Islamic texts is an important part in the story of Ishmael, as it brings the focus to Mecca and is the beginning of Mecca's sanctification as a holy area. Islamic tradition says Abraham was ordered by God to take Hagar and Ishmael to Mecca, and later Abraham returned to Mecca to build the Kaaba. In many of these accounts, the Sakina (a wind or spirit sent by God), or angel Gabriel (Jibril) guides them to the location of the Kaaba. Generally, it is said that Hagar asks Abraham who he is entrusting herself and Ishmael to as he leaves them. He answers that he is entrusting them unto God, to which Hagar then makes a reply that shows her faith, stating that she believes God will guide them. Hagar and Ishmael then run out of water and Ishmael becomes extremely thirsty. Hagar is distressed and searches for water, running back and forth seven times between the hills of Al-Safa and Al-Marwah. Hagar is later remembered by Muslims for this act during the Hajj, or pilgrimage, in which Muslims run between these same hills as part of the Sa'yee. When she returns to Ishmael, she finds him scratching or hitting the ground with his heel, whereupon water begins flowing and Hagar collects some and then creates a basin around the water flow. This spring is known as Zamzam. At some point, a passing tribe known as the Jurhum sees birds circling the water, so they get close to investigate. They ask Hagar if they can settle there, which she allows. Ishmael grew up among the tribe and learnt various things from them. There are numerous versions of this story, each differing in various ways. The versions used in this summary, as well as others, can be found in al-Tabari's history and are recounted in Reuven Firestone's *Journeys in Holy Lands*.

Ismail's Wives:

After Hagar died, Ibrahim came one day to see Ismail, but he was not at home. When Abraham asked Ismail'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.

she replied: "We are living in misery; we are living in hardship and destitution."

Ibrahim said: "When your husband returns, convey my salutations and tell him to change the threshold of the gate of his house."

When Ismail came, he seemed to have felt something unusual, so he asked his wife: "Has anyone visited you?"

She replied: "Yes, an old man of such and such 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 Ismail said: "Did he give any advice?"

She said: "Yes he told me to convey his salutation to you and to tell you to change the threshold of your gate."

Ismail said: "That was my father and he has ordered me to divorce you, so go back to your family."

Ismail divorced her and married another woman from amongst the Jurhum tribe.

Abraham did not return to see his son for a period as long as Allah wished him. One day Abraham again came to see his son, but did not find Ismail home, so he spoke to Ismail's new wife:.

She said: "Ismail has gone in search of our livelihood."

Ibrahim asked her: "How are you getting on?" asking her about their sustenance and living condition.

She replied: "We are prosperous and well off (we have everything in abundance)." Then she thanked Allah.

Ibrahim said: "What kind of food do you eat?"

She said: "meat."

Ibrahim said: "what do you drink?"

She said: "water."

He said: "O Allah! bless their meat and water. When your husband comes back, give my regards to him and tell him that he should keep firm the threshold of his gate."

When Ismail came back, he asked his wife: "Did anyone come by?"

She replied: "yes, a good looking old man came to me," she praised him and added: "He asked about you and I informed him that we were in a good condition."

Ismail asked her: "Did he give you any advice?"

She said: "Yes, he told me to give his regards to you and ordered you to hold on firmly to the threshold of your gate."

On that Ismail said: “He was my father, and you are the threshold of the gate. He has ordered me to keep you with me.”

Construction of the Kaaba

The Kaaba was a sanctuary in pre-Islamic times. Tradition holds that it was originally a simple unroofed rectangular structure. The Quraysh tribe, who ruled Mecca, rebuilt the pre-Islamic Kaaba. This is Bait Ullah, the House of Allah. Its sanctity and antiquity is older than history itself. Tradition goes that the Kaaba was ordained by Allah to be built in the shape of the House in Heaven called Baitul Ma’amoor. Allah in his infinite Mercy ordained a similar place on earth and Prophet Adam was the first to build this place.

The Bible, in Chapter of Genesis describes the Kaaba when God ordained Abraham to erect a Shrine for worship when Abraham was ordered to go to the Southern desert with his wife Hagar and infant son Ismael.

The Old Testament describes this building as the Shrine of God at several places, but the one built at Ma’amoor is very much similar to the one at Makkah. There is no doubt that it was referring to the stone built house at Makkah.

The Qur’an brought this story into full light of history. It’s states: “Allah has spoken the Truth, therefore, follow the creed of Ibrahim, a man of faith and not an idolater.”(Qur’an 3:95)

The first house established for the people was at Makkah, a Holy place and guidance to all human beings. The Qur'an firmly establishes the fact that Ibrahim was the real founder of the Holy Shrine. When Prophet Ibrahim built the Holy Shrine in Makkah, his prayers were that this place should remain a center of worship for all good and pious people; that Allah should keep his family the custodians of the Holy place.

Ever since Ismael, the son of Ibrahim, who helped build this place, his descendants remained the custodians of the Holy Shrine. History tells us that centuries passed and the guardianship of the Kaaba remained in the family of Ismael until the name of Abde Manaf came into the limelight. He inherited this service and made it much more prominent.

His son Hashim took this leadership and extended it to many other towns of Hejaz so much so that many pilgrims flocked annually to this place and enjoyed Hashim's hospitality. A feast was given in honour of the pilgrims, food and water were served to all guests by the family of Hashim. This prominence created jealousy and his brother Abdu sham's adopted son Umayya tried to create trouble. There was a dispute in which Umayya failed and left Makkah to settle down in the Northern provinces of Syria. After Hashim his brother Muttalib and after him Hashim's son Shyba, who became known as Abdul Muttalib assumed the leadership of the family. He organized feasts and supplies of water to the pilgrims during the annual festival of Pilgrimage to the Holy Shrine.

Prophet Ibrahim built this House for devout worship to one God. But within his lifetime people disobeyed his orders and began to put idols inside the

Kaaba. Ibrahim had to cleanse the House of these idols and of idol worshippers. He told the people that this was a symbolic house of God. God does not live there, for He resides everywhere. People did not understand this logic and no sooner had Ibrahim died the people, out of reverence, filled the place with idols again.

They thronged to this place annually and worshipped their personal gods, It was over four thousand years later that the last of the line of prophet's Muhammad Ibn Abdullah entered Makkah triumphantly, went inside the Ka'abah and, with the help of his cousin and son in law 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib, destroyed all the idols. At one stage of this destruction of idols, the tallest of the idol Hubbol was brought down after 'Ali had to stand on the shoulders of the Prophet to carry out God's orders. The Prophet of Islam was reciting the Verse from the Qur'an: "Truth hath come and falsehood hath vanished."
(Qur'an 17: 81)

This was done in the 8th year of Hijra, January 630 AD after the bloodless victory at Makkah by the Prophet.

Side note

Historically, when Ibrahim was ordered by Allah to build the Shrine for worship, he uncovered the original foundations of the Kaaba, built by Adam (as). Ibrahim with the help of his son Ismael erected the new shrine on the same foundations. Originally it contained only four walls without a roof. Centuries later during the time of Kusayi who was the leader of the Tribe of Quraish in Makkah, a taller building was completed with a roof and a quadrangle wall around it to give it the shape of a sanctuary and doors all around the sanctuary walls. People entered through these doors to the Ka'abah

for worship. It is now about 60 feet high, 60 feet wide from east to west and 60 feet from north to south. A door is fixed about 7 feet above ground level facing North East. A Black stone (**Hajar al Aswad**) was fixed into its eastern corner. In front of the building was Maqam e Ibrahim, the arch shape gate known as that of Banu Shayba and the Zamzam Well. Just outside are the Hills called Safa and Marwa and the distance between the hills is about 500 yards. These days both hills are enclosed into the sanctuary walls with a roof over it. The whole building is built of the layers of grey blue stone from the hills surrounding Makkah. The four corners roughly face the four points of the compass. At the East is the Black stone (**Rukn al Aswad**), at the North is al Rukn al Iraqi, at the west al Rukne al Shami and at the south al Rukne al Yamani. The four walls are covered with a curtain (**Kiswa**).

In the Eastern corner about 5 feet above ground the Hajar al Aswad (**the black stone**) is fixed into the wall. Its real nature is difficult to determine, its visible shape is worn smooth by hand touching and kissing. Its diameter is around 12 inches. Opposite the North west wall but not connected with it, is a semi-circular wall of white marble. It is 3 feet high and about 5 feet thick. This semi-circular space enjoys an especial consideration and pilgrims wait in queue to find a place to pray there. Between the archway and the facade (**N.E.**) is a little building with a small dome, the Maqam e Ibrahim. Inside it is kept a stone bearing the prints of two human feet. Prophet Ibrahim is said to have stood on this stone when building the Ka'abah and marks of his feet are miraculously preserved.

On the outskirts of the building to the North East is the 'Zamzam Well' (**this is now put under ground**).

Prophethood of Ismail

Allah gave Ismail the duty of prophethood. He gave him the duty of guiding the people of Amalika in Yemen. Ismail lived with this nation for fifty years and conveyed the divine message. Some of them believed in him but others insisted on unbelief and polytheism.

Allah says in the Qur'an: "Mention Ismail, for he was true to what he promised, and he was a Messenger and Prophet of God. He enjoined upon his family and people As-Salat (the prayers) and Zakat (charity), and his Lord was pleased with him." (Qur'an 19: 54 / 55)

Genealogy and association with the Arabs

Ishmael's place as the founder of the Arabs was first stated by Josephus. As Islam became established, the figure Ishmael and those descended from him, the Ishmaelites, became connected, and often equated, with the term Arab in early Jewish and Christian literature. Before Islam developed as a religion, Ishmael was depicted in many ways, but after its establishment, Ishmael was almost always seen in a negative light in Jewish and Christian texts, as he becomes the symbol for the "other" in these religions. As the Islamic community became more powerful, some Jewish midrash about Ishmael was modified so that he was portrayed more negatively in order to challenge the Islamic view that Ishmael, and thus the Muslims, were the favoured descendants of Abraham. This became the genealogy according to Jewish sources and the Bible, in contrast with the genealogy of Arabs according to

Muslims. The development of Islam created pressure for Islam, to be somehow different from Judaism and Christianity, and accordingly, Ishmael's lineage to Arabs was stressed.

Today, some Christians believe that God fulfilled His promise to Ishmael today by blessing the Arab nations with oil and political strength. In pre-Islamic times, there were three distinct groups of Arabs - the Ba'ida, Ariba, and Musta'riba. The Ba'ida were the "legendary Arabs of the past," while the Ariba were the "Southern Arabs." Ishmael's descendants became the Northern Arabs known as the Musta'riba or "Arabized Arabs." The Musta'riba were described as Arabized since it is believed Ishmael learned Arabic when he moved to Mecca and married into the Arabic tribe of Jurhum. Ishmael's line is then traced from his son Kedar, then down through to Adnan, then to the Musta'riba, to the Quraysh. In this manner, Prophet Muhammad's ancestry leads back to Ishmael, joining "original biblical ancestry of Abraham with a distinctively Arab affinal stock, and connecting Muhammad with Mecca and the Kaaba.

Death of Ismail

Ismail was 130 or 137 when he died. He is reported to have had twelve sons. According to some sources, Ismail lived in Makkah till his death. Ismail according to different sources, is buried alongside his mother Hajar near the Kaaba in Masjid Al-Haram. Allah knows best.

The graves of Ismael and his mother Hajar are within this semi-circular wall.