

The Prophets

Appointed by Allah

أنبياء الله

**Compiled by
Umm Muhammad**

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FOREWORD

Numerous prophets have been sent to mankind throughout history.* Twenty-five of these have been mentioned by name in the Qur’ān, the final scripture sent by Allāh, the Exalted, as guidance to mankind. The Qur’ān does not relate these stories to entertain, nor is it a history book. Rather, the stories are related to teach, to warn about the repetition of past mistakes, and to illustrate examples of pious behavior which lead to the pleasure of Allāh.

As related in the Qur’ān, the stories of the prophets represent the history of *da‘wah* (invitation to the way of Allāh), generation after generation. The essence of Allāh's message related through all of the prophets was: O people, worship Allāh. You have no other deity but Him. Except He who created you, there is nothing worthy of worship; not stone idols, fire, heavenly bodies such as the sun and moon, angels or other men – even prophets, for all of these are His creations.

The stories of the prophets also represent examples of the strong faith of those chosen by Allāh – examples to be followed by believers. When the Qur’ān omits certain details, it is only because they add nothing to the intended lesson and therefore are of no importance. As Muslims, we do not rely on tales from the Jewish traditions (*isrā’eeliyyāt*), as their authenticity is questionable. Therefore, all documentation in this book is based on the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth*.

The purposes for relating these stories are several: firstly, to clarify the Islāmic version (what is taken only from

*See *Sūrah Ghāfir*, 40:78 and *Sūrah Yūnus*, 10:47.

the Qur'ān and the *sunnah*); secondly, to understand the moral behind them - the results of faith and *jihād*, and the repercussions of disbelief and tyranny; and finally, to take examples of faith and righteous behavior to apply to our own lives.

The amount of detail given about each of the prophets varies considerably in the Qur'ān. The story of Prophet Yūsuf takes up an entire *sūrah*, and Prophet Nūḥ is mentioned in several *sūrahs*, 43 times throughout. In contrast, Prophets Idrees, Ilyasa' and Dhu'l-Kifl are mentioned by name, only in passing. For this reason, the stories of their lives are not given separate chapters in this book.

There is speculation that the names of some of the less widely known prophets coincide with some of those included in the Bible, however, we only give the English equivalent of those names in which the identities have been positively confirmed.

Umm Muhammad
Rajab, 1412 / January, 1992

PROPHET ĀDAM

The story of Ādam is the story of human existence. It illustrates the purpose of man's creation, his special role on earth, and his relationship with his Creator. The story of Ādam appears in several of the longer *sūrah*s of the Qur'ān, each time as a reminder to man in a different context.

The narration opens in *Sūrah al-Baqarah* when Allāh, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, announced to the angels His intention to bring forth a new creature to be His *khalīfah* (representative on the earth): **"And when your Lord said to the angels, 'Indeed, I will make a khalīfah upon the earth,' they said, 'Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and glorify You?' He said, 'Indeed, I know that which you do not know.'"**¹

After the announcement, Allāh showed the angels that which they had not understood about mankind. In the words of the Qur'ān: **"And He taught Ādam the names – all of them."**² Scholars have said that the "names" mentioned in the Qur'ān refer to the knowledge of things that man alone can acquire or the ability to use language as symbols representing all things. This was a knowledge that the angels did not have, so when Allāh asked them to repeat what Ādam had learned, they were unable to do so and replied: **"Exalted are You; we have no knowledge except what You have taught us."**³ They knew then that Ādam had been given special abilities which qualified him to be a representative of Allāh on earth.

¹*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:30.

²*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:31.

³*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:32.

The Qur'ān states that Ādam was created from the elements of the earth, while the angels were created from light, and the *jinn* from fire. Allāh ordered the angels to prostrate to Ādam, not as an act of worship, but out of respect because of the special qualities of knowledge and reason that Allāh had bestowed upon him. This indicates that Allāh favored mankind and gave him a special place of responsibility in creation, honoring him with the respect of the angels. All of the angels complied and prostrated to Ādam. But Iblees (Satan), who was of the *jinn* disobeyed: **"And when We said to the angels, 'Prostrate to Ādam,' and they prostrated, except for Iblees. He was of the jinn and disobeyed the command of his Lord."**⁴ When Allāh asked Iblees why he did not prostrate, Iblees replied: **"I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay [i.e., earth]."**⁵ The reason behind Satan's disobedience was not ignorance or forgetfulness, but rather, conceit and defiance. Because of this, Allāh told Iblees that he would be evicted from Paradise.

Through this narrative, the Qur'ān shows that obstinacy, conceit and rebellion against Allāh are the attributes of Iblees and of those who follow his path to the Hellfire. Even after Iblees was given respite until the Day of Judgement, he continued his rebellion by promising to lead astray those of mankind who would follow him away from the path of Allāh and the path of righteousness.

From Ādam, Allāh created a mate and companion (Ḥawwā' [Eve]) and placed them to live in the Garden of Paradise, allowing them all things therein except the

⁴*Sūrah al-Kahf*, 18:50.

⁵*Sūrah al-A'raf*, 7:12.

approach to a certain tree.⁶ Such an approach would transgress the limit that Allāh had set for them. But just as he had threatened to do, Iblees came to Ādam, enticing him and his mate to eat of the forbidden tree. He told them that Allāh had only forbidden it to keep them from becoming angels or from being granted eternal life, swearing to them that he was a trustworthy advisor. Iblees, knowing well how to make all forbidden things seem desirable, tempted Ādam, and in his human weakness, Ādam forgot his promise to Allāh and gave in to the enticements of Iblees.

In His wisdom, Allāh had willed that this experience should occur in order for mankind to take his place on earth. Upon eating of the tree, Ādam and his companion became aware of their animal natures and felt shame, trying to hide their nakedness behind leaves of the garden. Thereupon they heard the voice of their Lord reminding them: **"Did I not forbid you from that tree and tell you that Satan is your clear enemy?!"**⁷ Then Allāh sent them down to dwell on the earth. At this point they remembered and regretted, saying: **"Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will surely be among the losers."**⁸ Because they were truly sorry for their transgression, Allāh taught them words of repentance which He accepted, saying to them: **"Go down from it, all of you. And when you receive guidance from Me, whoever follows My guidance – there will be no fear concerning them nor will they grieve."**⁹

⁶There have been speculations as to the nature of this tree, but the Qur'ān does not specify except that it was forbidden by Allāh. It might be compared to what is *ḥarām* (forbidden) in our earthly life by which man's faith and patience are tested.

⁷*Sūrah al-A'raf*, 7:22.

⁸*Sūrah al-A'raf*, 7:23.

⁹*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:38.

As related in the Qur'ān, the story of Ādam provides certain lessons:

1. Ādam and all of his descendants have been given this chance on earth to follow the guidance of Allāh. He who does so benefits his own soul, and he who refuses follows the rebellious path of Iblees to the Hellfire.
2. There are two types of sinners: the one who repents, returns to the way of Allāh and is forgiven; and the one who turns away out of conceit and is doomed to punishment.
3. Mankind was originally created to dwell upon the earth,¹⁰ but Ādam's trial and expulsion from the garden of Paradise was necessary to prepare him for his duties on earth – to make him familiar with the experiences of seduction, punishment and regret, and to give him knowledge of the enemy he faces and the refuge he can find in returning to Allāh. This sum of experiences comprised the knowledge that Ādam needed to carry his trust as Allāh's representative on earth.
4. Allāh held mankind in high esteem when He created him, when He gave him knowledge, and when He ordered the angels to prostrate to him. Man is a responsible being, and Allāh's favor upon him depends upon his own choice of whether or not to follow divine guidance. By the will of Allāh, man is the master of earth. All earthly materials are created for him and subject to his use. Yet he should not be enslaved by materialism or forfeit his human qualities for worldly gain.

¹⁰As stated in *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:30: **"I will make a khalifah upon the earth."**

5. Islām emphasizes the best moral side of man which makes him worthy of the trust bestowed upon him by Allāh. The nature of the battle between Ādam and Iblees alerts one to the whisperings of Satan in his own soul and enables him to recognize them so as not to be deceived. In cases of weakness and sin, the door of *tawbah* (repentance) is always open to the believer who sincerely regrets his mistake and seeks forgiveness from Allāh, resolving and doing his best not to repeat the sin again. It is stated in the Qur'ān: **"Then, indeed your Lord, to those who have done wrong out of ignorance and then repent after that and correct themselves – indeed, your Lord, thereafter, is Forgiving and Merciful."**¹¹

¹¹*Sūrah an-Nahl*, 16:119.

PROPHET NŪḤ (NOAH)

Prophet Nūḥ is mentioned 43 times in different *sūrah*s of the Qur'ān, and one of the shorter *sūrah*s is named after him and includes his story in detail.¹² Nūḥ was the first messenger sent by Allāh to warn his people. Although Ādam and Idrees (who is only mentioned twice in the Qur'ān) were prophets¹³ before him, they were not ordered by Allāh to institute reform because their people were still worshipping their Creator and had not yet deviated to *shirk* (the worship of others besides Allāh).

The Qur'ān mentions that Nūḥ lived a thousand minus fifty (or 950) years,¹⁴ which is the longest of any prophet. His long life was filled with hardship at the hands of his enemies who refused his message and defied Allāh. The story of Nūḥ is the story of *jihād* and the story of prolonged *da'wah* and patience in the face of accusations, ridicule and physical harm. Allāh states in the Qur'ān: **"Indeed, We¹⁵ sent Nūḥ to his people, [saying], 'Warn your people before there comes to them a painful punishment.' He said, 'O my people, indeed I am to you a clear warner – to worship Allāh, fear Him and obey me.'"**¹⁶

¹²Also refer to *Sūrah Hūd*, 11:25-48 for a detailed account of his life story.

¹³A prophet (*nabī*) is one who received revelation from Allāh. A messenger (*rasūl*) is one who was charged by Allāh to reform society. Therefore, Nūḥ was the third prophet but the first messenger.

¹⁴See *Sūrah al-'Ankabūt*, 29:14.

¹⁵It is to be noted that the reference of Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta'ālā*) to Himself as "We" in many Qur'ānic verses is necessarily understood in the Arabic language to denote grandeur and power as opposed to the more personal singular form "I" used in specific instances.

¹⁶*Sūrah Nūḥ*, 71:1-3.

The people of Nūḥ were the first to worship idols. The names of their idols are mentioned in the Qur'ān: **"And they said, 'Never leave your gods and never leave Wadd or Suwā' or Yaghūth and Ya'ūq and Nasr.'"**¹⁷ According to the scholars, these were the names of very pious and righteous men. After they died, the people wished to keep their memories alive, so they made statues representing them.

Those who erected the statues passed away, and the following generations forgot that they represented human beings. Legends about them grew and became exaggerated until they were considered to be gods and worshipped. For this reason, Islām forbids the fashioning of human and animal forms and forbids the erecting of statues (whatever their purpose) as a protection against committing *shirk*. The people of Nūḥ provide the earliest example of how societies gradually deviated from the true religion of Allāh, requiring a messenger and reformer to be raised from among them.

When the people began to worship idols that had no power of benefit or harm over them, they forgot the presence of Allāh and turned to various other sins as well. They oppressed the poor and looked down on them. And because the few who believed in the message of Nūḥ and followed him were of the lower class, the majority declared they would not accept Nūḥ unless he got rid of the poor believers. Of course, he refused.

Nūḥ tried every means of *da'wah* during the several centuries he lived among his people, as the Qur'ānic verses relate: **"He said, 'My Lord, indeed I invited my people [to You] night and day. But my invitation did not**

¹⁷*Sūrah Nūḥ*, 71:23.

increase them except in flight [i.e., aversion]. And indeed, every time I invited them to Your forgiveness, they put their fingers in their ears, covered themselves with their garments, persisted, and were highly arrogant. Then I invited them publicly. Then I announced to them and [also] confided to them secretly.'"¹⁸

The people, including Nūḥ's wife and one of his sons, turned away from righteousness and refused Allāh's message. They mocked him and accused him of being simple-minded and a madman. They called him a liar and a troublemaker, and they beat him and threatened to stone him. Yet, he continued his *jihād* for Allāh and bore every hardship with patience.

Because he outlived several generations of his contemporaries, it finally became apparent that besides the few who had already believed in his message, there was no hope for his nation which persisted in unbelief and disobedience. In the words of the Qur'ān: **"And it was revealed to Nūḥ that, 'No one will believe from your people except those who have already believed, so do not be distressed by what they have been doing.'"**¹⁹

Thereupon, Nūḥ turned to Allāh, calling upon Him to rid the earth of the evil nation which prevented His worship. He said: **"My Lord, do not leave upon the earth from among the disbelievers an inhabitant. Indeed, if You leave them, they will mislead Your servants and not beget except [every] wicked one and [confirmed] disbeliever."**²⁰ Allāh comforted His servant and answered

¹⁸*Sūrah Nūḥ*, 71:5-9.

¹⁹*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:36.

²⁰*Sūrah Nūḥ*, 71:26-27.

his prayer, telling him to build an ark²¹ under His divine direction and supervision in order that the believers should be saved from the impending flood: **"And construct the ship under Our observation and Our inspiration and do not address Me concerning those who have wronged; indeed, they are [to be] drowned."**²²

When the people saw that Nūḥ had turned to the construction of this strange structure, their derision increased. They said, "Yesterday you were a preacher, and today you are a carpenter!" But Nūḥ continued his work, replying that there would come a time when those who ridiculed him would themselves be ridiculed, and they would know who would be the object of a humiliating and lasting punishment.

Finally, the ark was completed, and Allāh caused heavy rains to fall and springs to gush forth from the earth. Thereupon, He commanded Nūḥ to take onto the ark a pair of each living thing, his family and the few believers who were with him. Nūḥ said: **"In the name of Allāh [are] its course and its anchorage."**²³ The great ship sailed forth while the water level rose, submerging everything upon the earth. The Qur'ān relates: **"And it sailed with them through waves like mountains, and Nūḥ called to his son who was apart [from them], 'O my son, come aboard with us and be not with the disbelievers.' [But] he replied, 'I will take refuge on a mountain to protect me from the water.' [Nūḥ] said, 'There is no protector today from the decree of Allāh, except for whom He gives**

²¹At that time ships were still unknown to man, so it was through inspiration from Allāh that the first great ship was built.

²²*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:37.

²³*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:41.

mercy.' And the waves came between them, and he was among the drowned."²⁴

Nūḥ's son, who refused to be with the believers and had no faith in Allāh, foolishly relied for protection on an earthly, material object – a mountain, which was itself a creation of Allāh and had no power against His will. This is typical of the unbelievers of every age who turn to material things in their search for security.

Then came the command of Allāh: **"O earth, swallow your water, and O sky, withhold [your rain]."** The verse continues: **"And the water subsided, and the matter was accomplished, and it [i.e., the ship] came to rest on the [mountain of] Jūdiyy. And it was said, 'Away with the wrongdoing people.'"**²⁵

And Nūḥ remembered his son who was drowned with the disbelievers. He called to his Lord, saying: **"My Lord, indeed my son is of my family; and indeed, Your promise is true; and You are the most just of judges!"**²⁶ But Allāh reminded Nūḥ that there can be no compromise between good and evil with the reply: **"O Nūḥ, indeed he is not of your family; indeed, he is [one whose] work was other than righteous, so ask Me not for that about which you have no knowledge. Indeed, I advise you, lest you be among the ignorant."**²⁷ Thus, Allāh pointed out to him that the true family is formed through ties of belief and that the non-believer should not be taken as a close companion, even if there is a blood relationship between them. Nūḥ responded with the humility befitting a true servant of Allāh:

²⁴*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:42-43.

²⁵*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:44.

²⁶*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:45.

²⁷*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:46.

"My Lord, I seek refuge in You from asking that of which I have no knowledge. And unless You forgive me and have mercy upon me, I will be among the losers."²⁸

Allāh completed His favor, saying: **"O Nūḥ, disembark in security from Us and blessings upon you and upon nations [descending] from those with you. But other nations [of them] We will grant enjoyment; then there will touch them from Us a painful punishment."**²⁹ Thus, Allāh promised His blessings only to the righteous of Nūḥ's descendants. The rest would be granted temporary enjoyment on earth, but their final destination will be justice and due punishment.

²⁸*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:47.

²⁹*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:48.

PROPHET HŪD

Hūd is the first prophet mentioned in the Qur'ān after the flood that destroyed the people of Nūḥ. Scholars trace his lineage back to Sām, one of Nūḥ's sons who was saved among the believers. Although Hūd's name is mentioned only seven times in the Qur'ān, parts of his story are told in several *sūrahs*, especially *al-A'rāf* and *al-Aḥqāf*. He is also referred to as "the brother of 'Aad," the name of his people (or tribe). A verse in *Sūrah al-Aḥqāf* begins: **"And remember the brother of 'Aad,"**³⁰ and another in *Sūrah al-A'rāf* begins: **"And to 'Aad [We sent] their brother, Hūd."**³¹ The Qur'ān's mentioning of this quality of brotherhood illustrates that Hūd was not simply a warner, but as well, a brother from among his people who cared for their welfare.

The people of 'Aad lived in the land of the *aḥqāf* (tracts or canals) located between Ḥadhramaut, Oman and the empty quarter of the Arabian peninsula. This area today is only sand after having been once the most prosperous of communities.

The tribe was named after its ancestor, 'Aad, and was a race of extreme body structure and strength. They were known for their skills in construction, building great palaces, fortresses and monuments, and in addition, Allāh had blessed them with fertile valleys and springs – all the means for a good and prosperous life. Instead of being grateful to Allāh for all of their blessings, they were proud, attributing this wealth to their own strength and skill. They became

³⁰*Sūrah al-Aḥqāf*, 46:21.

³¹*Sūrah al-A'rāf*, 7:65.

tyrants steeped in extravagance, waste and conceit, and they erected stone idols to be worshipped for the first time since the flood.

Because of their severe transgressions, Allāh sent them a messenger from among themselves: **"And mention the brother of 'Aad, when he warned his people in [the region of] al-Aḥqāf – and warners had already passed on before him and after him – [saying], 'Do not worship except Allāh. Indeed, I fear for you the punishment of a terrible day.'"**³²

Prophet Hūd was not the first to warn the people of 'Aad as the verse points out. They had been warned before but had continued in their defiance and rebellion against Allāh. Hūd came from a good family and was of noble character, possessing the best moral and mental capacity. So Allāh chose him from among the people to carry His message to them.

Hūd's message was that of all of the prophets: worship Allāh, for you have no other god but Him. He reminded 'Aad of all of the blessings Allāh had bestowed upon them, including their extra size and strength, and the authority Allāh had given them on earth. He reminded them of what had happened to the nation of Nūḥ after they had refused to follow their prophet. But their answer was only this: **"They said, 'O Hūd, you have not brought us clear evidence, and we are not ones to leave our gods on your say-so. Nor are we believers in you. We only say that some of our gods have possessed you with evil [i.e., insanity].'"**³³ And they also said: **"Have you come to us**

³²*Sūrah al-Aḥqāf*, 46:21.

³³*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:53-54.

that we should worship Allāh alone and leave what our fathers have worshipped?"³⁴

This is the argument used against every reformer by the blind followers of tradition. The Arabs of Quraysh used it against Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ), and it is common today among deviant Muslims who have fallen into error by following only that which their parents taught them or that which has been traditionally accepted by their societies. In reality, some of the practices they revere are not Islāmīc at all and may even be a form of *shirk*, the one unforgivable sin. As a rule, the majority prefers to cling to the familiar rather than to admit the possibility of error. Custom becomes a cause to be defended, not a matter to be examined rationally. That is what all prophets had to face from every society. Similarly, it is a problem experienced by those who work in *da'wah* among Muslims as well as among non-Muslims. The task of bringing today's Muslims back to the teachings of the Qur'ān and *sunnah* requires true *jihād* due to the prevalent attitude of those who prefer tradition to the criterion of truth and right. It is stated in *Sūrah al-Baqarah*: **"And when it is said to them, 'Follow what Allāh has revealed,' they say, 'Rather, we will follow that which we found our fathers doing.' Even though their fathers understood nothing, nor were they guided?"³⁵**

Likewise, the reply of 'Aad to their prophet was pride in themselves, in their accomplishments and in their tradition of idol worship, and refusal to recognize the blessings of Allāh (their true God) or follow His guidance. They mockingly accused Hūd of weak-mindedness and poor

³⁴*Sūrah al-A'raf*, 7:70.

³⁵*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:170.

judgement. But he denied it, answering that he was a trustworthy advisor to them and a messenger from their Lord. He also warned them of Allāh's punishment if they continued in their arrogance. But they argued: **"Who is greater than us in strength?"**³⁶ In answer to all proud people who use such an argument, Allāh states: **"Did they not consider that Allāh who created them was greater than them in strength?"**³⁷

They failed to heed the warning, and in their conceit, they challenged Hūd, saying: **"Then bring us what you promise us, if you should be of the truthful."**³⁸ The punishment of Allāh came upon them suddenly after an extended period of drought. The Qur'ān relates: **"And when they saw it as a cloud approaching their valleys, they said, 'This is a cloud bringing us rain!' Rather, it is that for which you were impatient: a wind, within it a painful punishment, destroying everything by command of its Lord."**³⁹ And they became so that nothing was seen [of them] except their dwellings. **Thus do We recompense the criminal people."**⁴⁰ And Allāh sent against them a violent wind for seven nights and eight days in succession until the people were fallen as hollow palm roots. Today there is no trace of their civilization. Hūd and his followers, however, were saved by the mercy of Allāh from the punishment that took the disbelievers. It is said that he spent the rest of his life in Ḥadhramaut.

³⁶*Sūrah Fuṣṣilat*, 41:15.

³⁷*Sūrah Fuṣṣilat*, 41:15.

³⁸*Sūrah al-Aḥqāf*, 46:22.

³⁹All nature is under the command of Allāh, obeying His order as the Qur'ān emphasizes.

⁴⁰*Sūrah al-Aḥqāf*, 46:24-25.

The Qur'ān ends the story of Hūd in *Sūrah al-Aḥqāf* with a final commentary: **"And We had certainly established them in such as We have not established you,⁴¹ and We made for them hearing and vision and hearts [i.e., intellect]. But their hearing and vision and hearts availed them not from anything [of the punishment] when they were [continually] rejecting the signs of Allāh; and they were enveloped by what they used to ridicule."**⁴²

⁴¹This refers to the Quraysh and is addressed to them as a reminder to all whose attitudes resemble those of the 'Aad.

⁴²*Sūrah al-Aḥqāf*, 46:26.

PROPHET ŞĀLIḤ

The people of ‘Aad and Thamūd are often mentioned together in the Qur’ān. As previously stated, the civilization of ‘Aad was located in the southern part of the Arabian peninsula. The cities of Thamūd were located in the northern region. Its ruins are known today as Madā’in ŞāliḤ.

The tribe itself was named after an ancestor, Thamūd, as was the tribe of ‘Aad named after their ancestor, and both prophets Hūd and ŞāliḤ are traced back to Sām, the son of Nūḥ. Scholars speculate that the tribe of Thamūd descended from the survivors of the ‘Aad people who later emigrated to the north. In any case, the similarities between the two societies are not only in their common ancestry but also in their behavior and destinies as well.

In the Qur’ān, Thamūd is also referred to as "*Aṣ-ḥāb al-Ḥijr*" ("Companions of the Rock") because the area between Ḥijāz and Tabūk was called al-Ḥijr. It can be seen even today from various ruins in the area that the people used to carve dwellings and palaces out of the rock itself. This is evident in the ancient city of Petra (which also translates as al-Ḥijr), and this fact is mentioned in the Qur’ān as well.

Like their predecessors, Thamūd reached a high level of prosperity and power. Allāh had given them authority in the land, prohibiting corruption therein, but after they forgot Allāh and turned to sin and idol worship, a prophet was raised among them to remind and to warn them.

A few of the people believed and turned back to Allāh. There arose two opposing factions – the poor class who were

believers and followers of Ṣāliḥ, and the wealthy majority who governed. It was they who saw the prophet and his following as a threat to their established way of life. In the words of the Qur'ān: **"And We had certainly sent to Thamūd their brother Ṣāliḥ, [saying], 'Worship Allāh,' and at once they were two parties conflicting."**⁴³

Their faith in Allāh gave Ṣāliḥ and his followers strength in the face of oppression. They knew that Allāh was with them so they did not fear hardship or even death at the hands of the tyrants. This gave them courage to take a stand. When the arrogant ones tried to discredit the prophet, saying: **"Do you [actually] know that Ṣāliḥ is sent from his Lord?"**⁴⁴ they answered with confidence: **"Indeed we, in that with which he was sent, are believers."**⁴⁵ The Qur'ān continues: **"Said those who were arrogant, 'Indeed we, in that which you have believed, are disbelievers.'"**⁴⁶

⁴³*Sūrah an-Naml*, 27:45.

⁴⁴*Sūrah al-A'rāf*, 7:75.

⁴⁵*Sūrah al-A'rāf*, 7:75.

⁴⁶*Sūrah al-A'rāf*, 7:76.

⁴⁷*Sūrah al-Qamar*, 54:25.

⁴⁸*Sūrah al-Qamar*, 54:26.

They challenged Ṣāliḥ, demanding a miracle. So Allāh sent a great she-camel as a sign for them: **"This is the she-camel of Allāh – [she is] to you a sign. So let her feed upon Allāh's earth and do not touch her with harm, or you will be taken by an impending punishment."**⁴⁹ The sacred she-camel was a sign to Thamūd and an examination for them to see if they would respect Allāh's command. Ṣāliḥ placed the following condition upon them: **"He said, 'This is a she-camel. For her is a [time of] drink, and for you is a [time of] drink, [each] on a known day.'**"⁵⁰ She was to be allowed to share in the people's water supply – one day for them and one day for her – and to roam freely in the pastures and graze therein unharmed. She remained among them, a creature of extraordinary size and beauty, untouched for some time.

Yet, arrogant people typically refuse to back down even when a sign is before them. Thamūd resented the she-camel in their midst and resented having to share their provision with her. They also became increasingly alarmed because more people had joined the small band of believers after witnessing the sign from Allāh. They thought to put an end to the affair by killing the she-camel, but at first, no one dared. Finally, they persuaded the worst of their men, Qudār bin Sālif, to do the deed: **"Thamūd denied [their prophet] by reason of their transgression, when the most wretched of them was sent forth."**⁵¹ He hamstrung the great she-camel with his sword, and when she fell to the ground, the more cowardly of his companions moved in to finish the job. Thamūd exulted in this act of defiance, and when no

⁴⁹*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:64.

⁵⁰*Sūrah ash-Shu'arā'*, 26:155.

⁵¹*Sūrah ash-Shams*, 91:11-12.

punishment was yet apparent, they chided Ṣāliḥ, "Bring it on if you should be truthful!" He warned them that the promised punishment would be upon them after three days: **"But they hamstrung her, so he said, 'Enjoy yourselves in your homes for three days. That is a promise not to be denied [i.e., unfailing].'"**⁵²

Again they were allowed a chance to repent, but instead they plotted to kill Ṣāliḥ, their prophet: **"They said, 'Take a mutual oath by Allāh⁵³ that we will kill him by night, he and his family. Then we will say to his executor, 'We did not witness the destruction of his family, and indeed, we are truthful.'"**⁵⁴ **And they planned a plan, and We planned a plan, while they perceived not. Then look how was the outcome of their plan – that We destroyed them and their people, all."**⁵⁵

Ibn Katheer relates that on the first day after their warning about the appointed punishment, the faces of the Thamūd people turned yellow. Then on the second day their faces became red. And on the third day their faces became black, until upon the following sunrise they were taken by a blast from the sky above them and an earthquake beneath

⁵²*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:65.

⁵³Thamūd admitted the existence of Allāh but refused obedience. Such people exist today as well.

⁵⁴Note the similarity between this plot and the plot of the Quraysh to kill Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ).

⁵⁵*Sūrah an-Naml*, 27:49-51.

Ṣāliḥ and the believers escaped that fate through the mercy of Allāh, and it is said that Ṣāliḥ spent the rest of his days in the area of Palestine. The Qur'ān ends the story of Ṣāliḥ after the destruction of Thamūd with this conclusion: **"And he [i.e., Ṣāliḥ] turned away from them and said, 'O my people, I had certainly conveyed to you the message of my Lord and advised you, but you do not like advisors.'"**⁵⁶ This was another disastrous end for those who refused faith.

It is related among the authentic *ḥadīths* of Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) that when he passed through the ruins of al-Ḥijr on his way to Tabūk with a group of Muslims, they stopped at the dwellings of Thamūd. The people began to draw water from the wells, make dough with it and cook. When the Messenger of Allāh learned of this, he ordered them to empty their pots and feed the dough to the camels. He then moved the people out until they reached the well that the she-camel used to drink from and said, "Do not enter upon those tortured ones except that you be weeping; for if you are not weeping, do not enter upon them in order not to be struck by that which struck them."⁵⁷

⁵⁶*Sūrah al-A'rāf*, 7:79.

⁵⁷Narrated in *Ṣaḥeeḥ al-Bukhārī*.

PROPHET IBRĀHEEM (ABRAHAM)

Prophet Ibrāheem is mentioned 68 times in the Qur'ān. He is a figure of great importance in Islām and is considered to be the founder of Judaism and Christianity by their followers.

Many verses in the Qur'ān order adherence to the religion of Ibrāheem in answer to the claims of the Jews and Christians that theirs is the preferred way. Allāh ordered Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) to adhere to the true religion that was taught by Ibrāheem: **"Then We revealed to you, [O Muḥammad], to follow the religion of Ibrāheem, inclining toward truth."**⁵⁸ Additionally, Allāh states in the Qur'ān: **"The religion of your father, Ibrāheem – it is He [i.e., Allāh] who named you Muslims before [in former scriptures] and in this [revelation] that the Messenger may be a witness over you and you may be witnesses over the people."**⁵⁹

It is understood from this verse that the word "Muslim" is not a new term applied only to the followers of the Final Prophet (ﷺ), rather, it indicates a follower of any of the prophets during his period of prophethood who submitted sincerely to Allāh's religion (as opposed to those who rejected it in preference of another way).

Because the Jews and Christians trace their religions to Ibrāheem, Allāh reminds us that what he preached was the true religion. And since the Arab idol-worshippers also traced their ancestry to Ibrāheem through Ismā'eel, it is fitting that Allāh answers the claims of all three in one Qur'ānic

⁵⁸*Sūrah an-Naḥl*, 16:123.

⁵⁹*Sūrah al-Ḥajj*, 22:78.

verse: **"Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was one inclining toward truth, a Muslim [submitting to Allāh]. And he was not of the polytheists."**⁶⁰

Ibrāheem is called the "father of the prophets" because he was the common ancestor of the Jews, who descended from his son Is-ḥāq, and the Arabs, who descended from his son Ismā'eel. Being that Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) descended from Ismā'eel, Ibrāheem is often referred to as his "grandfather." Ibrāheem is also called "*al-Khaleel*" ("the intimate friend or beloved of Allāh") as well as "*Imām al-Muttaqeen*" ("leader of the God-fearing").

Historians trace the ancestry of Ibrāheem back to Sām, the son of Nūḥ, and the Qur'ān mentions the name of Ibrāheem's father, Āzar. Ibrāheem grew up in the region of Mesopotamia during a period of ignorance and decadence when people had turned away from their Creator to the worship of idols. They were ruled by a tyrannical king named Namrūd, who, upon seeing the ignorance of his people, set himself up as a god to be worshipped, declaring that it was he who controlled their lives.

Allāh had blessed Ibrāheem with exceptional intelligence and wisdom and had guided him to the truth even though he grew up in an age of darkness. He was given special abilities in the art of argumentative reasoning in order to convince others of the truth. Several examples of this are cited in the Qur'ān. One of these is a debate which occurred when the king claimed divinity for himself and demanded of Ibrāheem, "Who is your Lord?" Ibrāheem answered: **"My Lord is the one who gives life and causes death."**⁶¹ The

⁶⁰*Sūrah Āli 'Imrān*, 3:67.

⁶¹*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:258.

king asserted: **"I give life and cause death."**⁶² To demonstrate this he brought two condemned prisoners and ordered one to be executed and one to be freed. In this superficial way he tried to demonstrate that he had qualities that are particular to Allāh alone. Upon observing this simple-mindedness, it became necessary for Ibrāheem to make a point that could not be refuted. He said: **"Indeed, Allāh brings up the sun from the east, so bring it up from the west."**⁶³ And the tyrant could only be silent.

Ibrāheem was steadfast in *da'wah* to his people and especially to his father, who fashioned the idols which the community worshipped. Using reason again, Ibrāheem asked: **"O my father, why do you worship that which does not hear and does not see and will not benefit you at all?"**⁶⁴ He warned him against following Shayṭān (Satan), but his father in turn only threatened him with stoning. Ibrāheem prayed for forgiveness for his father. But after his father persisted in his way of refusing faith in Allāh and providing idols for the people to worship, Ibrāheem was bound to free himself of all ties with him. The Qur'ān relates: **"And the request of forgiveness of Abraham for his father was only because of a promise he had made to him. But when it became apparent to him [i.e., Abraham] that he [i.e., the father] was an enemy to Allāh, he disassociated himself from him. Indeed was Abraham compassionate and patient."**⁶⁵

This event in the life of Prophet Ibrāheem is mentioned in the Qur'ān once again as a repetition of the lesson

⁶²*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:258.

⁶³*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:258.

⁶⁴*Sūrah Maryam*, 19:42.

⁶⁵*Sūrah at-Tawbah*, 9:114.

presented in the story of Nūḥ and his disbelieving son – that the true believer disassociates himself from enemies of faith, even though they might be the closest of kin.⁶⁶

After they had failed to heed his advice, Ibrāheem went on to prove to everyone the impotence of the idols they worshipped. He announced openly that he was going to plot against the idols, and after the people had left he broke all of the statues except the largest of them upon which he hung the ax he had used to break the others. When the people returned to this scene, they remembered the promise of Ibrāheem and his mention of their idols. They brought him forward, saying: **"Have you done this to our gods?"**⁶⁷ He answered sarcastically: **"Rather, this – the largest of them – did it, so ask them, if they should [be able to] speak."**⁶⁸ The people received no reply from the stone, and they began to doubt, feeling shame for their stupidity. Then, turning suddenly in anger to Ibrāheem for weakening their position, they said: **"You have already known that these do not speak!"**⁶⁹ This was the admission the prophet had been waiting for, seizing upon it to complete his argument. He asked: **"Then do you worship instead of Allāh that which does not benefit you at all or harm you?! ...Then will you not use reason?"**⁷⁰

⁶⁶This severing of ties was only required after much effort by Ibrāheem. The initial promise of Ibrāheem to request forgiveness for his father is referred to in *Sūrah al-Mumtaḥinah*, 60:4, and the essence of this ruling is found in the same *sūrah*, verses 8-9. The attitude of a Muslim toward a non-Muslim is one of politeness and kindness as long as the latter is not himself an enemy of Islām or in alliance with an enemy.

⁶⁷*Sūrah al-Anbiyā*, 21:62.

⁶⁸*Sūrah al-Anbiyā*, 21:63.

⁶⁹*Sūrah al-Anbiyā*, 21:65.

⁷⁰*Sūrah al-Anbiyā*, 21:66-67.

The wrongdoers had no further words with which to defend themselves, so fearing defeat, they turned to physical aggression, saying: **"Burn him and support your gods – if you are to act!"**⁷¹ They built a raging fire of a temperature equaling the animosity and hatred within their hearts for the truth and for the prophet who had come with the truth. Seizing him, they threw him into the fire with great satisfaction. But Ibrāheem was under the care and protection of his Lord, and the words of Allāh came forth: **"O fire, be coolness and safety upon Ibrāheem."**⁷² Thus, the great miracle took place – the deliverance of Ibrāheem.

After his deliverance from the fire, Ibrāheem traveled to the area of Palestine where he found people worshipping celestial bodies instead of Allāh. Again he used a form of dialogue to show the people their mistake. He stood before them, and as they witnessed a planet, followed by the moon and then the sun, he said each time: **"This is my lord."**⁷³ And then, when each disappeared, he showed his dissatisfaction with such deities, announcing finally his disassociation from any *shirk* as an example to them.⁷⁴

Ibrāheem married a pious woman named Sarah, but she was unable to bear children. Later in life they traveled to Egypt where Sarah was given a personal servant named Hājar. The three of them then returned to Palestine. Because they longed for a child, Sarah encouraged Ibrāheem to marry Hājar, and he complied with her wish. Hājar gave birth to a son, Prophet Ismā‘eel. It is related that Sarah later became jealous and asked Ibrāheem to take Hājar and her

⁷¹*Sūrah al-Anbiyā’*, 21:68.

⁷²*Sūrah al-Anbiyā’*, 21:69.

⁷³*Sūrah al-An‘ām*, 6:78.

⁷⁴See the entire narrative in *Sūrah al-An‘ām*, 6:76-78.

son far away from her home. It was the will of Allāh that Ibrāheem abided by her wish.⁷⁵ Allāh directed Ibrāheem to travel with them through the desert until they reached the isolated valley which is now Makkah.

The story of Ibrāheem continues through his son, Ismā'eel. The Qur'ān relates his obedience and extraordinary patience in his willingness to sacrifice his long-awaited son to prove faithfulness to Allāh. It was these qualities which caused him to be chosen as *al-Khaleel*. This is a special position accorded to him alone. It is stated in the Qur'ān: **"And Allāh took Ibrāheem as an intimate friend."**⁷⁶

Throughout the Qur'ān it is emphasized that all of the prophets taught the *tawḥeed*⁷⁷ of Islām, and this is especially evident in the story of Prophet Ibrāheem. Allāh says:

"O People of the Scripture, why do you argue about Abraham while the Torah and the Gospel were not revealed until after him? Then will you not reason?"⁷⁸

"Indeed, the most worthy of Ibrāheem among the people are those who followed him [in submission to Allāh] and this prophet [i.e., Muḥammad (ﷺ)] and those who believe [in his message]. And Allāh is the ally of the believers."⁷⁹

⁷⁵This is mentioned by Ibn Ḥajar in his explanation of *Ṣaḥeeḥ al-Bukhārī*. See *Fat-ḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 6, p. 400.

⁷⁶*Sūrah an-Nisā'*, 4:125.

⁷⁷Confirmation of Allāh's oneness, monotheism.

⁷⁸*Sūrah Āli 'Imrān*, 3:65.

⁷⁹*Sūrah Āli 'Imrān*, 3:68.

PROPHET ISMĀ‘EEL (ISHMAEL)

Ismā‘eel was the firstborn son of Prophet Ibrāheem. In the Qur’ān, Allāh refutes the Jewish and Christian claim that Is-ḥāq was born first. In *Sūrah aṣ-Ṣāffāt* the story of Ibrāheem's intended sacrifice of Ismā‘eel is told and then followed by the statement: **"And We gave him good tidings of Is-ḥāq, a prophet from among the righteous."**⁸⁰ It is known through history as well that an animal was sacrificed in place of Ismā‘eel and that this sacrifice is still commemorated in the area of Minā during ḥajj. Therefore, it was Ismā‘eel, not Is-ḥāq, who was brought to the region and who became the ancestor of the present Arab race. In another verse is the following statement: **"Then We gave her good tidings of Is-ḥāq and after Is-ḥāq, Ya‘qūb."**⁸¹ Since Is-ḥāq's son, Ya‘qūb (Isrā‘eel), is mentioned in this tiding, Is-ḥāq could not then be the one intended for sacrifice. This is evident in the fact that Allāh would not have ordered the sacrifice of someone who was destined by Him to have a son. Other arguments supporting the Islāmic position are based on the Old Testament itself, but for Muslims, the words of Allāh are sufficient.

As mentioned earlier in the story of Ibrāheem, he was ordered by Allāh to travel with Hājar and Ismā‘eel and to settle them in the desolate valley in which the House of Allāh⁸² was to be built. It is irrelevant whether or not his wife Sarah had any role in his decision to leave home at that time, as some commentators relate. The fact is that all

⁸⁰*Sūrah aṣ-Ṣāffāt*, 37:112.

⁸¹*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:71.

⁸²This is the *Ka‘bah* in Makkah. (It is not to be taken as the literal home of Allāh, but rather, a place consecrated for the worship of the one, true God.)

things are accomplished by the will of Allāh, and it was He who directed Ibrāheem to that valley for a purpose known to Him. Upon learning that it was Allāh who had brought them to that particular place void of any life or vegetation, Hājar accepted to remain there alone with her baby, saying, "Allāh will never cause us to be lost." The deep faith and understanding of Ibrāheem is also illustrated when he called upon his Lord, saying: **"Our Lord, I have settled some of my descendants in an uncultivated valley near Your sacred House, our Lord, that they may establish prayer. So make hearts among the people incline toward them and provide for them from the fruits that they might be grateful."**⁸³

Hājar submitted faithfully to the will of Allāh, nursing her child and living on the provisions left to her by Ibrāheem until finally, the supply ran out. She then patiently bore her own hunger and thirst, but this affected her baby as well, and she could not as easily bear the agony of her child. Hoping to locate any source of water or life, she ascended the nearest hill (aṣ-Ṣafā) and looked into the distance but saw nothing. Then crossing the valley, she ascended a hill on the opposite side (al-Marwah). In desperation she repeated this effort seven times, until exhausted, she returned to her child. At that moment her faith was rewarded, and the mercy of Allāh descended upon them, causing water to spring forth from the ground in abundance. Mother and son quickly quenched their thirst. This was the well of Zamzam which continues to flow abundantly to this day. Soon afterwards, birds were attracted to the spring, and a tribe called Jurhum passing through the area noticed the birds. Upon discovering the spring, they decided to settle beside it. Thus did Allāh

⁸³*Sūrah Ibrāheem, 14:37.*

provide for Hājar and her son, Ismā‘eel, who in time married a woman from that tribe.⁸⁴

Allāh had already tested the patience of Ibrāheem by leaving him childless until old age and then by ordering him to leave his long-awaited son in the desert. But he was to be tested again. After returning to Ismā‘eel years later and finding him an excellent youth, his love for him increased even more. It was then that Ibrāheem had the vision in which Allāh ordered him to sacrifice his son. In spite of the pain he felt, Ibrāheem did not waiver in faithfulness to his Lord, again demonstrating that obedience to Allāh must take priority over all earthly desires. Ibrāheem, in turn, sought to test his son as well and give him a chance to share in this great event rather than taking him by surprise or force. He said to him: **"O my son, indeed I have seen in a dream that I [must] slaughter you, so see what you think."**⁸⁵ Ismā‘eel replied with the true spirit of Islām: **"O my father, do as you are commanded. You will find me, if Allāh wills, of the steadfast."**⁸⁶

Here is a unique example of the complete submission of two souls to the will of Allāh and the cooperation of both in order to carry out a difficult task. As they walked towards the appointed place of sacrifice, Satan appeared to them three different times trying to dissuade them from obedience. Each time they responded by stoning him and driving him away. At Ismā‘eel's request, his father tied him firmly so that he might not hinder the sacrifice by struggling. Then Ibrāheem laid him face down so as not to see any expression of his son's, putting the knife to his throat. In the words of

⁸⁴*Ṣaḥeeḥ al-Bukhārī, ḥadīth number 3363.*

⁸⁵*Sūrah aṣ-Ṣāffāt, 37:102.*

⁸⁶*Sūrah aṣ-Ṣāffāt, 37:102.*

the Qur'ān: **"And when they had both submitted and he put him down upon his forehead, We called to him, 'O Ibrāheem, You have fulfilled the vision.' Indeed, We thus reward the doers of good."**⁸⁷

The voice of Allāh intervened at the moment when father and son had proven their sincerity, saving them from harm. The mercy of Allāh which had saved Ibrāheem from the burning revenge of the idol worshippers and saved his family from thirst in the desert had again come to them at that crucial moment. The human sacrifice was replaced by a ram provided by Allāh, showing that Allāh is satisfied by human submission and obedience to Him and does not always demand the extreme sacrifice of life.

These events in the life of Prophet Ismā'eel – his mother's search for water between the heights of Şafā and Marwah, the stoning of Satan, and the sacrifice of an animal representing human submission – are all commemorated in the *ḥajj* rites performed in the tradition of Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ).

Allāh ordered Ibrāheem to build His House, expressly as a center of worship, and again Ibrāheem enlisted the help of his son, Ismā'eel. As they erected the structure, Ibrāheem prayed: **"Our Lord, accept [this] from us. Indeed, You are the Hearing, the Knowing. Our Lord, and make us Muslims [in submission] to You and from our descendants a Muslim nation [in submission] to You."**⁸⁸ And he supplicated: **"Our Lord, and send among them a messenger from themselves who will recite to them Your verses and teach them the Book and wisdom and purify**

⁸⁷*Sūrah aṣ-Şaffāt*, 37:103-105.

⁸⁸*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:127-128.

them."⁸⁹

Allāh answered the supplication of Ibrāheem in the person of the final prophet, Muḥammad (ﷺ), who was to bring the true religion of Ibrāheem and Ismā‘eel, the religion of Allāh, back to mankind once again.

⁸⁹*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:129.

PROPHET IS-ḤĀQ (ISAAC)

The second son of Ibrāheem, Is-ḥāq, was born to Sarah when she was long past the age of childbearing and in spite of the fact that she had been infertile in her younger years. This was a sign to them from Allāh, who is able to do all things. They were given the good news of this event by the same angels that were sent to Prophet Lūṭ, a nephew and contemporary of Ibrāheem. This news came to Ibrāheem after Allāh had tested his faith by ordering the sacrifice of his first and then only son, Ismā'eel. He would be blessed with a second son, who was to be a prophet in the area of Palestine.

The Qur'ān explains how the angels came to Ibrāheem as guests in human form. When he presented them with a feast of roasted calf, he became apprehensive when they did not eat, thinking that perhaps they had come for an evil purpose. But they reassured him, saying: **"Be not afraid,"**⁹⁰ and they gave him good tidings of a knowledgeable son. Sarah laughed in amazement and was informed not only of Is-ḥāq but of Ya'qūb to come after him: **"And his wife was standing, and she smiled. Then We gave her good tidings of Is-ḥāq and after Is-ḥāq, Ya'qūb. She said, 'Woe to me! Shall I give birth while I am an old woman and this, my husband, is an old man?!' "**⁹¹ But the angels answered her: **"Are you amazed at the decree of Allāh? May the mercy of Allāh and His blessings be upon you, people of the house. Indeed, He is Praiseworthy and Honorable."**⁹²

⁹⁰*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:70.

⁹¹*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:71-72.

⁹²*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:73.

Is-ḥāq spent his life in the land of his birth as a prophet to that nation. The line of Jewish prophets is descended from him through his son, Ya‘qūb (Jacob), who was also called Isrā’eel.

PROPHET LŪṬ (LOT)

Prophet Lūṭ is mentioned a number of times in the Qur'ān in several different *sūrahs*. Lūṭ was a nephew of Prophet Ibrāheem (his brother's son), and in the earlier part of his life he was closely associated with Ibrāheem, believing in his message and accompanying him in some of his travels. Later he was chosen by Allāh to be a prophet to the corrupted people of Sadūm (Sodom) located in the area that is now eastern Jordan. Lūṭ was not related to this tribe and was not raised among them, unlike Prophets Hūd and Ṣāliḥ who were raised among their tribes. He settled among them only at the appointed time of his prophethood.

Prophet Lūṭ was sent to a people who not only refused belief in Allāh but exceeded all previous nations in evil and immorality. Their arrogance had reached such a degree that they no longer recognized even the ordinary moral standards of society. They made no attempt to cover up their shameful deeds, but instead established evil as a way of life, enforcing it upon the society as a whole.

The crime for which the people of Sadūm are remembered in the Qur'ān and in the earlier scriptures is one that they had invented in their depravity – homosexuality, or as it is still known, sodomy. One understands the severity of this crime through the realization that it is not only a rebellion against the moral standards⁹³ of human society, but it is also a rebellion against the Creator Himself. For Allāh gave everything its due proportion and purpose, and He established the means for populating the earth and maintaining life by the creation of male and female, not only among man but among all living things. A deliberate effort

⁹³Along with other major crimes such as adultery, killing or stealing.

to change the *fiṭrah* (natural inclination that Allāh placed in mankind) for this purpose is certainly an open declaration of war against Allāh. In the words of Lūṭ: **"Do you approach males among communities and leave what your Lord has created for you as mates? But you are a people transgressing."**⁹⁴ But with such a people one might expect their answer: **"They said, 'If you do not desist, O Lot, you will surely be of those evicted.'"**⁹⁵ And they said: **"Expel the family of Lot from your city. Indeed, they are people who keep themselves pure."**⁹⁶

This is an example of the reaction in every age of the evildoers who detest the presence of anyone who reminds them of morality. They see it as a threat to their freedom – a threat which must be disposed of as quickly as possible. And in their eyes, purity becomes a crime in itself. Not only had Satan succeeded in corrupting their natures, but he had subjected them to their passions so thoroughly that reasoning with them was no longer possible.

After Allāh had given them sufficient warning through His prophet and sufficient time to repent, He finally sent angels to carry out a just punishment. Before doing so, the angels went to Prophet Ibrāheem to inform him of the coming birth of Is-ḥāq. They also told him that they had been sent to destroy the people of Lūṭ, but that Lūṭ and his family would be saved – except for his wife who had collaborated with the disbelievers against her husband.

The angels came to Lūṭ in the form of exceptionally handsome young men asking to be received as guests, and

⁹⁴*Sūrah ash-Shu‘arā’*, 26:165-166.

⁹⁵*Sūrah ash-Shu‘arā’*, 26:167.

⁹⁶*Sūrah an-Naml*, 27:56.

immediately he feared for their safety. Soon his fears were confirmed when the evil men began to pound on his door after being informed of the guests by Lūṭ's wife. Lūṭ made a last effort to reason with them, asking them not to commit the additional sin of violating the rights of visitors, and telling them that it would be better for them to marry the girls of the town. But they only answered shamelessly: **"Indeed, you know what we want."**⁹⁷ Fearing that they would break into his house, Lūṭ said to his guests in despair: **"If only I had against you some power or could take refuge in a strong support."**⁹⁸ At this, the angels made themselves known, reassuring Lūṭ that the perverted ones would not reach them and ordering him to take his family out of the city by night to avoid the destruction that was to occur in the morning. When the intruders at last succeeded in entering the house, they were blinded and turned back, unable to carry out their evil intention.

Lūṭ and his family emigrated from the city at night, and the next morning came the punishment of Allāh: **"So the shriek seized them at sunrise. And We made the highest part [of the city] its lowest and rained upon them stones of hard clay."**⁹⁹ Lūṭ's wife was punished along with the disbelievers. Being the wife of a prophet did not save her from the justice of Allāh because by her treason she removed herself from the realm of the prophetic family.

Lūṭ's wife is one of two examples of disbelieving women mentioned in the Qur'ān. Allāh states: **"Allāh presents an example of those who disbelieved: the wife of Nūḥ and the wife of Lūṭ. They were under two of Our**

⁹⁷*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:79.

⁹⁸*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:80.

⁹⁹*Sūrah al-Hijr*, 15:73-74.

righteous servants but betrayed them, so they [i.e., those prophets] did not avail them from Allāh at all, and it was said, 'Enter the Fire with those who enter.' "¹⁰⁰

Islām emphasizes personal responsibility. Being the dependent of a pious believer will be of no avail on the Day of Judgement, for each person will be judged according to his own deeds and intentions.

¹⁰⁰*Sūrah at-Taḥreem*, 66:10.

PROPHET YA'QŪB (JACOB)

Ya'qūb was the son of Is-ḥāq and the grandson of Ibrāheem. Scholars of the Old Testament say that Allāh named him Isrā'eel, which means "Spirit of God" in Hebrew. In the Qur'ān as well, Allāh refers to him as Isrā'eel: **"All food was lawful to the Children of Israel except what Isrā'eel had made unlawful to himself."**¹⁰¹

Ya'qūb was the father of the twelve tribes of Israel, for each tribe descended from one of his sons. These tribes or communities are called "*al-Asbāt*" in the Qur'ān.

Allāh tested the faith and patience of Ya'qūb through the disappearance of his son, Yūsuf (Joseph), for many years and the later disappearance of his youngest son, Binyāmeen (Benjamin). During Binyāmeen's absence, Ya'qūb lost his sight due to his extreme sadness, but he never gave up his trust in Allāh. He said: **"I only complain of my suffering and my grief to Allāh, and I know from Allāh that which you do not know."**¹⁰² His faith was rewarded by the mercy of Allāh – his sight was restored, and he was reunited with his sons.

When Ya'qūb neared death, he called his sons together, wishing to be reassured about their religion: **"He asked them, 'What will you worship after me?' They said, 'We will worship your God and the God of your fathers, Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac – one God. And we are Muslims [in submission] to Him.'"**¹⁰³

¹⁰¹*Sūrah Āli 'Imrān*, 3:93.

¹⁰²*Sūrah Yūsuf*, 12:86.

¹⁰³*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:133.

PROPHET YŪSUF (JOSEPH)

The story of Prophet Yūsuf is told in one complete *sūrah* named after him in the Qur'ān. This is in contrast to the information about other prophets which occurs in various *sūrahs* arranged according to the subject or lesson intended in each *sūrah*. Thus, Allāh arranges the sequence of these stories according to His will in order to serve His purpose.

Sūrah Yūsuf was revealed in Makkah during a most difficult time in the life of Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) known as "the year of sadness." After the loss of his dear wife and companion, Khadījah, and his protecting uncle, Abū Ṭālib, the persecution of the believers by the Quraysh increased until it became almost unbearable. During this time of extreme hardship for the Prophet and his followers, Allāh chose to reveal *Sūrah Yūsuf* as a comfort to them and as a reminder that all of the prophets had to endure adversities. The *sūrah* encouraged them to be patient and to not despair because Allāh's plan was in effect and victory was to come. The many hardships and trials that Prophet Yūsuf endured were actually the means of his victory in the end, and the Qur'ān used the following words of Yūsuf to assure Prophet Muḥammad that he also would be victorious: **"Indeed, my Lord is Subtle in what He wills. Indeed, it is He who is the Knowing, the Wise."**¹⁰⁴

When he was young, Yūsuf told his father, Prophet Ya'qūb, of a dream he had had, and knowing it to be a sign that Allāh had chosen him, his father advised Yūsuf not to tell his jealous brothers for fear that they would harm him.

¹⁰⁴*Sūrah Yūsuf*, 12:100.

However, due to Ya‘qūb's excessive love of Yūsuf, the brothers plotted to get rid of him anyway. Not wanting to kill him, they decided to leave him in a well to be picked up by passersby. A caravan on its way to Egypt stopped to draw water, and upon finding Yūsuf in the well, they rejoiced at their good fortune, for they could sell him as a slave in Egypt. In the meantime, his brothers returned to tell their father that Yūsuf had been eaten by a wolf, producing his shirt which they had stained to look like blood. Ya‘qūb, sensing that they were lying, chose patience, turning only to Allāh.

Yūsuf was sold for a meager price to the king's minister. The minister told his wife to treat Yūsuf well and sent him to their home. Yūsuf reached maturity, and because of his righteous character, Allāh granted him wisdom and knowledge.

Overcome with the noble character and exceptional handsomeness of Yūsuf, the minister's wife tried to seduce him, but when he refused and fled, she grasped his shirt from behind and it tore. When confronted by her husband, she claimed that it was Yūsuf who had approached her, but the tear in his shirt was evidence that she was lying. Since the tear was in the back and not the front of his shirt, Yūsuf had obviously fled from her and not vice-versa. In spite of his youth and the opportunity before him, Yūsuf's awareness of Allāh and loyalty to his master prevented him from falling into sin.

The news soon reached the city's society women, who seized the opportunity to gossip about the minister's wife. In turn, she arranged an invitation for them that they might see for themselves the beauty of Yūsuf and no longer blame her.

They, too, were overcome by the sight of him, and in the presence of the women, the minister's wife threatened to imprison Yūsuf if he did not give in to her. But Yūsuf turned to Allāh, preferring imprisonment over sin, and he asked Allāh to protect him from the scheming women. Although he knew Yūsuf was innocent, the minister thought it best to imprison Yūsuf for awhile until the scandal was forgotten.

Yūsuf became acquainted with two servants of the king who were his companions in prison. They recognized that Yūsuf had wisdom and asked him to interpret their dreams. After declaring to them that it was Allāh who had given him knowledge and after inviting them to worship Allāh alone, Yūsuf informed them that one of them would be executed and the other would be freed.

Some years later the king had a dream that disturbed him, and he was searching for someone to interpret it. The servant who had been freed then remembered Yūsuf and his knowledge in this field, so he went to Yūsuf, asking the meaning of the king's dream. Yūsuf told him that there would be seven prosperous years followed by seven years of drought and famine. He not only informed him of the coming crisis but also of the solution to the problem: to store grain during the good years in preparation for the bad years in order to save Egypt from the disaster.

Upon hearing this, the king was so impressed that he ordered Yūsuf to be brought to him. But preserving his honor, Yūsuf refused to leave prison until his innocence was confirmed. Upon investigation, the women admitted that Yūsuf had done no wrong, and the minister's wife could finally only confess that the sin was hers. The king then

brought Yūsuf to him as a special advisor, telling him that he would live in honor and security. Knowing that he could benefit the people, Yūsuf asked to be put in charge of the economy and to oversee the storage in order to help the country through its years of hardship. He requested this power knowing he could fulfill its responsibility. This is the only case in which power is sought by the righteous – for the service and benefit of others and not for that of one's self.

The neighboring lands suffered tremendously as a result of the famine, not having been prepared for it as Egypt had been. Ya'qūb and his sons were among those affected. Ya'qūb requested his sons (except Binyāmeen, who was Yūsuf's only full brother) to seek provisions in Egypt, sending money and goods to be traded for food.

Yūsuf recognized his brothers, though they did not know him due to the change in his appearance. He treated them well as guests and gave them an extra measure of grain, telling them to return again accompanied by their half-brother. He then returned what they had brought as payment, hiding it in their bags so that they would discover it later and be encouraged to make a second trip.

Ya'qūb reluctantly agreed to send Binyāmeen in spite of his fear for him at the hands of his brothers who had previously taken Yūsuf. Upon the brothers' arrival, Yūsuf took Binyāmeen aside, made himself known to him, and comforted him. In order to keep him behind, Yūsuf planted the king's official measuring cup among Binyāmeen's belongings. When a search revealed this, Binyāmeen was held as a thief and prevented from returning in the caravan. Thus did Allāh bring about the reunion of the two righteous brothers.

At loss for any explanation, Yūsuf's half-brothers were forced to tell their father that his son had stolen the king's valuable measuring cup and was being held as a thief. Ya'qūb's sadness at the loss of Yūsuf was renewed by this further loss of Binyāmeen, and once again he was suspicious that the brothers were responsible. Ya'qūb became blind as a result of his extreme distress and sadness. The brothers worried that their father might grieve himself to death, but Ya'qūb again turned only to Allāh with his complaint, with the patience and hope that only faith can produce.

Ya'qūb ordered his sons to return to Egypt in search of their two brothers, so they returned to where Binyāmeen was being held. Upon seeing their wretched condition, Yūsuf made himself known to them. Remembering how they had treated him, they felt shame, but Yūsuf told them that Allāh would forgive them because of their regret. When the brothers returned to their father and cast the shirt of Yūsuf over his face, his sight was restored and he rejoiced, knowing that they would soon be reunited.

One can imagine the joyful reunion of the whole family in Egypt. Yūsuf lifted his parents up onto his throne, and all of them bowed before him in respect (not worship). Yūsuf then knew that this was the meaning of the dream he had had as a boy and the happy ending it had promised.

The story of Yūsuf is a series of trials, one after the other, for both Prophet Yūsuf and his father Ya'qūb. But just as this story was a comfort for Prophet Muḥammad, so also is it a lesson for all believers in patience, forbearance and trust in Allāh, even in the darkest hours. One learns that these hours will pass, *in-shā'-Allāh*, and the plan of Allāh will be revealed.

Also mentioned in *Sūrah Yūsuf* is the trait of *iḥsān* (the additional generosity one shows to others above and beyond justice or duty). Yūsuf recognized this generosity in Allāh's treatment of him, and it was reflected in his treatment of the brothers who had wronged him and in his forgiveness of them. It is important to note that there are positive results of *iḥsān* in both this life as well as in the next.

PROPHET SHU‘AYB

Shu‘ayb was one of the four Arab prophets, the others being Hūd, Šāliḥ and Muḥammad (ﷺ). His story is one in which Allāh points out the path to be followed by the reformer in any society, as reflected in Shu‘ayb's speech to his people.

The people of Madyan were from the early Arab tribes that had settled in the area between Ḥijāz and Palestine. They were known for their prominence in business activities, and their town was a commercial center for passing caravans. Most Qur’ānic commentators are of the opinion that the Companions of the Wood mentioned in *Sūrah ash-Shu‘arā’*, whose land was fertile and green, were the same people of Madyan. Others say it was a different place to which Shu‘ayb took the message of Allāh. In any case, the community, lacking faith in Allāh and in the reckoning of the Hereafter, had fallen into sin, especially (as might be expected) into cheating and injustice in their business dealings. So widespread was this that it was considered the norm in society. No one could question this apparently successful and prosperous way of life.

So to the Madyan people Allāh sent their brother, Shu‘ayb. He said: **"O my people, worship Allāh; you have no deity other than Him. And do not decrease from the measure and the scale. Indeed, I see you in prosperity, but indeed, I fear for you the punishment of an all-encompassing Day."**¹⁰⁵ Shu‘ayb also pleaded: **"And O my people, give full measure and weight in justice and do not deprive the people of their due and do**

¹⁰⁵*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:84.

not commit abuse on the earth, spreading corruption. What remains [lawful] from Allāh is best for you, if you would be believers."¹⁰⁶

Shu‘ayb's message was straight to the point. He not only condemned the obvious sin of cheating in business, but he also warned against depriving people of things that were theirs by right. This had a wider and more general meaning, including not only measurement, price and estimate, but also non-material concepts such as appreciation and respect. Shu‘ayb emphasized an order from Allāh including all that is just and good – that anything due to a person for any reason should not be withheld. He stressed that failure to give anyone his due would result in bad feelings which would harm personal and social relationships.

The disbelievers not only refused the message but also sat along the roadside preventing access to the prophet and threatening those who sought him. Shu‘ayb advised them against this, reminding them of the blessings Allāh had bestowed upon them and of what had befallen nations before them that had rejected faith. They said: **"O Shu‘ayb, does your prayer [i.e., religion] command you that we should leave what our fathers worship or not do with our wealth what we please?"**¹⁰⁷

The people noticed the effect of prayer upon Shu‘ayb and upon his followers, and they noticed the awakening of the their consciences so that the believers were no longer able to worship the traditional false deities. Rather, they turned in obedience to Allāh. Feeling His presence, they could not accept injustice in dealing with others, for as Allāh

¹⁰⁶*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:85-86.

¹⁰⁷*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:87.

points out: **"Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing."**¹⁰⁸

This was the fruit of the believers' communion with their Creator, but the ignorant could not understand the relationship between faith and correct moral behavior. There are people today with the same mentality who say, "What does religion have to do with economics? or government? or society? or dress? or practical daily living?" There are those who claim to believe and even perform prayer but feel free to live their lives according to any way other than the law of Allāh. This is *shirk* as it has existed in both ancient and modern times, even today among those who call themselves Muslims.

Although the disbelievers continued in *shirk*, Shu'ayb never deserted them. In order to emphasize his position among them as merely an advisor, he constantly reminded them that he, too, was bound by the laws of Allāh: **"And I do not intend to differ from you in that which I have forbidden you; I only intend reform as much as I am able."**¹⁰⁹

The reformer must be a model for others. He must be the first to obey the law and never consider himself above the law. In the Qur'ān, Allāh blames a certain people, saying: **"Do you order righteousness of the people and forget yourselves."**¹¹⁰

The response to Shu'ayb's message was the typical one of the establishment when threatened by the truth: "Either return to our way or be evicted from our city."¹¹¹ This was

¹⁰⁸*Sūrah al-'Ankabūt*, 29:45.

¹⁰⁹*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:88.

¹¹⁰*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:44.

¹¹¹As related in *Sūrah al-A'rāf*, 7:88.

the alternative given to the believers who could no longer be tolerated by the majority. Shu‘ayb was belittled and told: **"And if not for your family, we would have stoned you [to death],"**¹¹² to which he answered: **"O my people, is my family more respected for power by you than Allāh? But you put Him behind your backs [in neglect]."**¹¹³

Because of their rejection of Allāh, the order was given for the destruction of the transgressors. They were taken by the punishment of a black cloud, a violent blast and a final earthquake.¹¹⁴ Turning away from the terrible spectacle of devastation before him, Shu‘ayb could only say: **"O my people, I had certainly conveyed to you the messages of my Lord and advised you, so how could I grieve for a disbelieving people?"**¹¹⁵

¹¹²*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:91.

¹¹³*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:92.

¹¹⁴These three things have been said to occur simultaneously or nearly so and have been said to indicate a volcanic eruption, but Allāh knows best.

¹¹⁵*Sūrah al-A‘rāf*, 7:93.

PROPHET AYYŪB (JOB)

Among the prophets mentioned in the Qur'ān is Ayyūb, whose outstanding quality was patience. Most of what is related by historians about him is taken from Jewish sources which are unreliable. The Qur'ān simply states that Ayyūb was afflicted by great harm or distress and that he called upon his Lord while patiently enduring. Therefore, Allāh answered his prayer and returned and even increased what he had lost – his health, his property and his family. The Qur'ān relates: **"And [mention] Ayyūb, when he called to his Lord, 'Indeed, adversity has touched me, and You are the most merciful of the merciful.'"**¹¹⁶

In a polite manner Ayyūb showed patience before Allāh, mentioning only his distress and the mercy of his Lord in his *du'aa*'. He did not even suggest anything more, for he knew that Allāh was well aware of all that grieved him and that Allāh's mercy encompasses all things. In answer to his prayer, Allāh lifted the afflictions from him, giving him additional blessings as well. He increased his family, and most importantly, He increased the great reward of the Hereafter: **"Indeed, the patient will be given their reward without account [i.e., limit]."**¹¹⁷

In *Sūrah Ṣād*, Ayyūb calls upon his Lord, saying: **"Indeed, Satan has touched me with hardship and torment."**¹¹⁸ Ayyūb's statement illustrated the fact that when he became ill and lost everything, Satan continually whispered to him, exaggerating in his mind what had befallen him, trying to make him panic or lose faith in

¹¹⁶*Sūrah al-Anbiyā*, 21:83.

¹¹⁷*Sūrah az-Zumar*, 39:10.

¹¹⁸*Sūrah Ṣād*, 38:41.

Allāh's mercy. Instead of yielding to the suggestions of Satan, Ayyūb sought refuge with Allāh and received mercy.

Ayyūb's wife was the only one who remained patient and faithful in service to him throughout all of his misfortunes. However, at one time during his illness, he became annoyed with her and swore to beat her 100 lashes if he recovered. In His mercy to both of them, Allāh allowed him to fulfill his oath by instructing him to strike her with 100 blades of grass at one time. This caused her no harm and did not break Ayyūb's oath.

Allāh speaks about the lesson in the example of Prophet Ayyūb twice in the Qur'ān. He states that the lesson is **"a reminder for those of understanding"**¹¹⁹ and also **"a reminder for the worshippers [of Allāh]."**¹²⁰ It is important to understand from this instruction that true worship includes acceptance and patience throughout the hardships one faces as a test from Allāh.

¹¹⁹*Sūrah Ṣād*, 38:43.

¹²⁰*Sūrah al-Anbiyā'*, 21:84.

PROPHETS MŪSĀ (MOSES) AND HĀRŪN (AARON)

Prophet Mūsā is one of the most eminent of the prophets and messengers of Allāh and is referred to as "*Kaleemullāh*" ("recipient of Allāh's words") because Allāh spoke to him directly. A holy scripture was revealed to him (i.e., the law, known as the Torah), and he is the most frequently mentioned prophet in the Qur'ān. The details of his life are given in several *sūrahs*, mainly *al-Baqarah*, *al-A'rāf*, *ash-Shu'arā'*, *al-Qaṣaṣ*, *Ghāfir* and others. The emphasis given to Prophet Mūsā in the Qur'ān is due to the many similarities between him and Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon them). Although he was sent to only his own people, the Children of Israel, Mūsā (like Prophet Muḥammad) was not only a messenger of Allāh but was the founder of a nation and a conveyor of the law revealed by Allāh.

Hārūn was the elder brother of Mūsā and was also honored by Allāh, being given prophethood as the result of Mūsā's prayer: **"And appoint for me a minister [i.e., assistant] from my family – Hārūn, my brother."**¹²¹

One remembers from the story of Yūsuf that Yūsuf brought his family (i.e., the sons of Isrā'eel [Ya'qūb] from which the twelve tribes were descended) to Egypt under the king's protection. In the years that followed, the reigning family was overthrown and replaced by another who feared the increasing numbers of Bani Isrā'eel. Hence, the ruling family separated the Israelites into factions in order to weaken them, enslaving them in hard labor, and every other year killing their newborn male children.

¹²¹*Sūrah Ṭā Hā*, 20:29-30.

It happened that Hārūn was born in a year that the sons were allowed to live, but Mūsā's birth took place in a year in which all newborn males were to be slaughtered. Therefore, his mother kept him hidden for several months.

The story of Mūsā's early life is related in *Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ*. Mūsā's mother, fearing the discovery of her child, was inspired by Allāh to place Mūsā in a box and cast him into the river. He was discovered and taken from the river by the family of Fir'aun (Pharaoh). Fir'aun's wife persuaded him not to kill Mūsā but rather to raise him in their household. When Mūsā reached manhood, Allāh gave him wisdom and knowledge. In the Qur'ān, Allāh reveals His purpose for saving Mūsā: **"And We wanted to confer favor upon those who were oppressed in the land and make them leaders and make them inheritors."**¹²²

One day Mūsā went into town and found two men fighting – one from his people and one from the ruling Egyptian class. The Israelite called for help, and Mūsā struck the Egyptian to protect the Israelite. The Egyptian died as a result of the blow. Mūsā regretted his deed and asked Allāh for forgiveness, which was accepted. The following day Mūsā found the same man fighting with another Egyptian and became angry at him. When he stepped in to interfere, the Israelite, fearing that Mūsā in his anger might strike him, said: **"Do you intend to kill me as you killed someone yesterday?"**¹²³ Upon hearing this, the Egyptian informed his people that it was Mūsā who was responsible for the death that occurred the day before. With no hope of a just hearing, Mūsā was advised by a loyal believing man to leave the city and go into exile. He took

¹²²*Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ*, 28:5.

¹²³*Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ*, 28:19.

that advice, left Egypt and traveled until he reached the outskirts of Madyan. There Mūsā assisted two women in watering their flocks. Through the favor of Allāh, Mūsā was hired by their father, Prophet Shu‘ayb, to work in exchange for his marriage to one of the daughters.

After having completed his period of work in Madyan, Mūsā was traveling with his wife and saw a fire in the distance. Upon approaching it, he heard the voice of Allāh telling him that he had been chosen as Allāh's messenger to Fir‘aun and his people. Mūsā was fearful to return to Egypt after having fled their earlier injustice. He asked Allāh to support and help him in this overwhelming task, and he also requested that his brother, Hārūn, be sent with him to assist. Allāh had given Mūsā certain miracles as a sign to Fir‘aun, and now He granted Mūsā's request through His mercy, making Hārūn a prophet in support of his brother. Allāh ordered Mūsā and Hārūn to approach Fir‘aun with gentle speech, in spite of his tyranny and injustice. That was more likely to affect a change in Fir‘aun. Thus Allāh pointed out the correct method for *da‘wah* to others.

Mūsā confronted Fir‘aun, supported by the signs that Allāh had given him – the staff and the white hand. He invited Fir‘aun to the worship of Allāh, the true God, and requested the release of the Children of Israel from their bondage. Fir‘aun's response was first to remind Mūsā of his favor to him by raising him in his court, but Mūsā put the matter in proper perspective by saying, "What is this 'favor' compared to the enslavement and oppression of my entire people?!"¹²⁴

¹²⁴Refer to *Sūrah ash-Shu‘arā’*, 26:22.

Sūrah ash-Shu‘arā’ contains examples of debates and discussions between Mūsā and Fir‘aun in which Mūsā used arguments of reason, pointing out that Allāh, the Creator of all things, the All-Powerful and Absolute, is the only one worthy of worship. But Fir‘aun, obstinate in his conceit, refused to acknowledge Allāh, believing that the people should worship and obey him instead. He sarcastically suggested building a tower to observe the God of Mūsā if what Mūsā was saying was the truth.

Assuming the miracles given to Mūsā by Allāh were merely skillful magic, Fir‘aun ordered a competition between his own magicians and the prophet, promising the magicians a great reward if they should win. Mūsā asked them to throw their sticks and ropes, and when they appeared as writhing snakes, the people became afraid. Allāh calmed Mūsā, directing him to throw his staff, and it became a genuine serpent swallowing all of the illusions which had been created by the magicians. At that point the magicians realized that Mūsā’s miracle was not an illusion of the type they had practiced but rather, a reality – a sign from Allāh in support of His prophet. They fell down in prostration, saying: **"We believe in the Lord of the worlds, the Lord of Mūsā and Hārūn."**¹²⁵

Then certain that his power had been undermined and his claim to divinity unmasked, Fir‘aun still held fast to his authority, saying: **"Said Pharaoh, 'You believed in him'¹²⁶ before I gave you permission?!"**¹²⁷ He threatened to cut off their arms and legs and to crucify the magicians. But when it has occupied the heart, true faith cannot be removed

¹²⁵*Sūrah al-A‘rāf*, 7:121-122.

¹²⁶i.e., in Mūsā, avoiding the mention of Allāh (*subhānahu wa ta‘ālā*).

¹²⁷*Sūrah al-A‘rāf*, 7:123.

by any physical force. The magicians found comfort in the fact that soon they would be with Allāh. They asked only that He would give them patience to endure the trials and torture they were to face, and that they would die as Muslims (in submission to Allāh). In their expression of true belief they were determined to undergo whatever was necessary rather than to return to disbelief.

Thus threatened by "corruption upon earth,"¹²⁸ the establishment of Fir'aun vowed to put an end to the followers of the prophet, saying: **"We will kill their sons and keep their women alive."**¹²⁹ This was in order to degrade and humiliate them. Fir'aun and his advisors also plotted to kill Mūsā. At this time a believer from among the people of Fir'aun who had concealed his faith up to that point stepped forward in defense of Mūsā and the religion of Allāh. But Allāh protected him from the people of Fir'aun, and he endured no harm.

When Fir'aun refused all counsel and exceeded himself in conceit, tyranny and persecution of the believers, Mūsā turned to Allāh in supplication against them, Hārūn reinforcing it with the word "*āmeen*." ("O Allāh, respond.") Allāh answered their prayer by bringing one disaster after another upon the Egyptians. Each time they were tested, they promised to believe and release the Children of Israel, but as soon as Allāh lifted the punishment, they returned to oppression once again.

Finally, the command came from Allāh for Mūsā to lead the Children of Israel out of Egypt. Fir'aun learned of

¹²⁸Referred to in *sūrah* 7:127, i.e., the regime's view of the people's awakening.

¹²⁹*Sūrah al-A'raf*, 7:127.

this and gathered a huge army to prevent their escape. When the Israelites saw the army of Fir'aun coming upon them as they stood before the sea, they were certain of destruction. However, Allāh inspired Mūsā to strike the sea with his staff, whereupon the waters separated, allowing them to pass through the sea on a dry path by the power of Allāh. The army led by Fir'aun, having left behind all of their material wealth in pursuit of the believers, followed on the path taken by the Israelites through the water. As they did so, Allāh restored the sea to its original state. The two bodies of water merged once again, drowning the agents of Fir'aun in their evil pursuit. As he drowned, Fir'aun professed his belief, but it was too late. Allāh caused his body to be preserved as a sign and example for future generations, as mentioned in *Sūrah Yūnus*. Thus was Allāh's punishment for the tyrants in this world. As for the Hereafter, they will be ordered to enter into the place of severest punishment in the Hellfire – a punishment compatible with the crimes they committed: claiming the divinity of Fir'aun, preventing freedom of belief and thought, refusing the truth, dividing the people in order to control and weaken them, enslaving and persecuting them, killing their children, humiliating them through their women, and the countless other injustices accompanying such a situation which can only be known by Allāh. But Allāh is ever aware and swift to take account.

A people which has lived under tyranny, has been treated with injustice and persecution, and has suffered humiliation inevitably shows a change in its moral fiber as a result. This was evident in the Children of Israel, who, after being oppressed themselves, adopted some of the values of their oppressors, such as materialism and idol worship. No sooner had they escaped the trials of slavery in Egypt, than

they asked Mūsā to make for them a material god to worship as they saw others doing. After being rebuked for that, they complained about various hardships, forgetting the great blessing of freedom which Allāh had bestowed upon them. Although they were ungrateful, Allāh still continued to provide for their needs and comfort.

Having chosen to speak with His prophet, Allāh ordered Mūsā to go to the mountain of Ṭūr and prepare himself by fasting and worshipping for 30 days. After the 30 days were completed, he was ordered to fast an extra 10 days. During Mūsā's absence, Hārūn was left in charge of the people. At the end of the 40-day period Allāh spoke to Mūsā. The Prophet was overcome with the desire to see his Lord but was shown that the mountain itself could not withstand such exposure, and Mūsā fell unconscious when the mountain crumbled before him. Upon awakening, he asked Allāh for forgiveness. Thereafter, Allāh gave him the Torah, the complete law for his people to follow.

The Children of Israel, who had been impatient and were prone to idol worship, quickly fell under the influence of one called as-Sāmiriyy during the absence of Mūsā. He collected gold jewelry from the women, melted it down and formed out of it the image of a calf. He then told them to worship it. Hārūn tried in vain to prevent this outrage but was unable to do so. Allāh informed Mūsā of this, and he returned to them in sadness and anger. Mūsā first blamed Hārūn, but then he realized that Hārūn had only feared causing further problems by dividing the people against each other or by leaving them. The rightful blame was to be on as-Sāmiriyy who had led them astray, and his punishment began even before his death when he was afflicted with a

disease in which any touch was extremely painful to him. As a result, he fled from anyone approaching him.

The Children of Israel regretted their sin, so Allāh told them through their prophet that the expiation for it was to kill the guilty ones among them. This was a severe trial for them. Mūsā then asked Allāh to accept their repentance, which He did. Even after that a group of doubters asked to see Allāh as proof of His existence, so Allāh struck them with a thunder bolt and then restored them to life. Again they neglected Allāh's guidance and were threatened by the falling of the mountain upon them. But every time that Allāh saved them from disaster, they turned away from the law once more.

One of the traits which the Children of Israel had acquired through the years under Fir'aun's rule was cowardice. When they found that their entry into the promised land required *jihād*, they refused, telling Mūsā: **"So go, you and your Lord, and fight. Indeed, we are remaining right here."**¹³⁰ As a result of their refusal of this sacred duty, Allāh forbade the holy city to them for forty years in which they wandered throughout the land. The purpose of the hardships endured during that period was to restore in them the strength of character and self-reliance they had lost so that a new generation would grow in a healthier atmosphere, learning righteousness and courage. In this divine wisdom are lessons for those who reflect upon society today.

Although he was a prophet chosen by Allāh, Mūsā did not hesitate to seek knowledge. *Sūrah al-Kahf*¹³¹ relates an incident where Mūsā submitted himself humbly to a teacher.

¹³⁰*Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:24.

¹³¹Refer to *sūrah* 18:60-82.

This teacher was a righteous servant of Allāh, referred to in *ḥadīths* as al-Khadhir (or in English, Khidhr). During his brief apprenticeship, Mūsā learned certain lessons of wisdom. These lessons were not immediately obvious to Mūsā, causing him to become impatient until an explanation was given by the teacher, illustrating that the methods of Allāh are not always clear to man.

PROPHET DĀWŪD (DAVID)

Dāwūd was a prophet of the Children of Israel who was blessed by Allāh with authority and dominion as well as prophethood. He was also among those to whom a divine scripture, *az-Zabūr* (the Psalms), was revealed.

In the Qur'ān, Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) is ordered by Allāh to remember Dāwūd and to take him as an example: **"And remember Our servant, Dāwūd, the possessor of strength; indeed, he was one who repeatedly turned back [to Allāh]."**¹³²

Dāwūd had the power of kingship and the strength of character which enabled him to face all hardships. But in spite of this, he was humble, always returning to Allāh in repentance, in need and in gratitude.

The Qur'ān mentions that Allāh gave Dāwūd certain gifts and miracles. Iron was made soft and pliable in his hands, enabling him to make coats of mail for protection in war, giving his soldiers this advantage for the first time in history. Allāh instructed him in this art, at the same time commanding him to do righteousness, since morals and ethics should not be disregarded even in times of war. Allāh also gave Dāwūd control of the mountains and the birds, which joined him in praising Allāh. Additionally, He strengthened his kingdom and endowed him with wisdom, talent in speech, and skill in judgement.

Once a man complained that his brother wished to take his only sheep and add it to his flock of ninety-nine. After judging in favor of the owner of the single sheep, Dāwūd felt that his position as a judge and its heavy responsibility

¹³²*Sūrah Ṣād*, 38:17.

was a trial for him from Allāh. He bowed in sincere repentance for any mistakes he might have made in judgement or pride he may have felt – an example of piety for all who carry authority.

Another example of Dāwūd's modesty and humbleness is in the case where a certain people's sheep had entered a field, destroying the crops. Dāwūd was asked to give judgement and ruled that the sheep should be given to the owners of the field as compensation for their loss. His son, Sulaymān (who later became a prophet as well), was a young boy and was present at the time of judgement. Allāh had also gifted him with intelligence and a sense of justice, and he suggested to his father another alternative: that the owners of the field should take the sheep temporarily to benefit from the flock while the owners of the sheep be given the field to replant and restore the damage done. Once the field was restored to its former condition – the crops having reached the stage of maturity they were at when they were destroyed – each party would then take back its own property. Dāwūd recognized that Sulaymān's solution was more farsighted than his own and accepted it in spite of the boy's age and his own position.

Allāh addressed Dāwūd, saying: **"O David, indeed We have made you a successor upon the earth, so judge between the people in truth and do not follow [your own] desire, as it will lead you astray from the way of Allāh."**¹³³ This was a warning to Dāwūd to beware of the inclination of emotion which might lean toward revenge, partiality or any injustice due to personal motives. Allāh continued: **"Indeed, those who go astray from the way of**

¹³³*Sūrah Ṣād*, 38:26.

Allāh will have a severe punishment for having forgotten the Day of Account."¹³⁴ This reminder was to the God-fearing and conscientious Prophet Dāwūd who considered his position a trial from Allāh, fearing the slightest mistake and repenting even for those misdeeds which only occurred in his mind. How much more are we ordinary believers in need of this guidance?

¹³⁴*Sūrah Ṣād*, 38:26.

PROPHET SULAYMĀN (SOLOMON)

Prophet Sulaymān was the son of Dāwūd. Even as a boy he was known and respected for his intelligence and knowledge of the divine law. Both father and son were grateful to Allāh for His blessings upon them. They both said: **"Praise [is due] to Allāh, who has favored us over many of His believing servants."**¹³⁵

From among Dāwūd's sons, only Sulaymān was chosen by Allāh to be a prophet. Allāh gave him a special ability to understand the language of the birds and the animals. The Qur'ān relates that when Sulaymān heard an ant telling the others: **"Enter your dwellings that you not be crushed by Solomon and his soldiers while they perceive not,"**¹³⁶ he smiled, showing mercy in his power toward the weakness of the ants; and he turned to Allāh, asking Him for the means to be thankful and righteous in return for the blessings which Allāh had bestowed upon him. Among these were dominion and authority upon the earth, control of the wind, and power over the *jinn* (to confine them or put them to work in his kingdom as builders, divers, and masters of various trades).

The Qur'ān mentions various occasions where Allāh tested Prophet Sulaymān through his wealth and position. There are several interpretations of these verses by different commentators, but the Qur'ān does not go into detail. The pertinent fact is that he was found to be sensitive and repentant, as his father had been, always alert to avoid temptation and mindful of his duty to turn back to Allāh.

¹³⁵*Sūrah an-Naml*, 27:15.

¹³⁶*Sūrah an-Naml*, 27:18.

Allāh relates in *Sūrah an-Naml* the story of Sulaymān and the Queen of Saba' (Sheba).¹³⁷ A certain bird from among the subjects of Prophet Sulaymān discovered a rich kingdom called Saba' that was ruled by a woman, and he informed the king about it. The bird also told Sulaymān that instead of being thankful to Allāh for their many blessings, the people and their ruler worshipped the sun, not realizing that it was merely another of Allāh's creations and not something worthy of worship. So Sulaymān sent a letter to the queen in which he warned her people not to be arrogant and to come to him in submission to Allāh. She then consulted her advisors in the matter. They told her that if she opted for war, they were ready, powerful and valiant, but that the decision was hers.

The queen was a woman of wisdom who knew the results of war and was familiar with the nature of conquerors who do not fear Allāh. She replied: **"Indeed kings – when they enter a city, they ruin it and render the honored of its people humbled. And thus do they do."**¹³⁸ This sad fact has indeed been witnessed by history in every age and every place on earth – with the sole exception of conquests by prophets and their sincere followers. Only in Islām does a conqueror enter a city in humility, showing mercy to the people, thanking Allāh for victory and fearing Him. He realizes the heavy responsibility for those now under his control and knows that on the Day of Judgement he will be held accountable for any harm or injustice caused by his forces. Is there a conqueror today who will prevent destruction and cruelty and return to the morals of Islāmic warfare? Allāh is a witness of all things...

¹³⁷The Qur'ānic commentators mention that her name was Bilqees.

¹³⁸*Sūrah an-Naml*, 27:34.

Instead of war the queen chose to send a valuable gift to the king to thereby determine whether he was true in his professed religion or merely another ruler who could be appeased by an offering. When the prophet sent back her gift in anger at the perceived bribery and threatened to invade, she then knew he was no ordinary king, and she set out to meet him as he had demanded.

When Sulaymān learned of her approach, he was determined to show her a miracle so that she might observe the exceptional power granted him as a prophet of Allāh. He ordered that her throne be transported to him before her arrival, and partially disguising it, he waited to see if she would recognize it and thereby be capable of recognizing the truth. After some thought, she understood that she had witnessed a miracle from Allāh.

Then Sulaymān wished to show the queen that realities are not always as they first appear. She was asked to enter a palace, the floor of which was transparent with water flowing beneath it. Thinking she must pass through the water, she raised her skirt. Upon being told that the floor was actually solid glass, she exclaimed: **"My Lord, indeed I have wronged myself, and I submit with Sulaymān to Allāh, Lord of the worlds."**¹³⁹

Thus did Sulaymān stop her from the false worship of Allāh's creation that had been her custom. Her intelligence and sensitivity enabled her to recognize the truth and the true object of worship. Her strong character did not allow pride to prevent her from admitting her previous error and changing her position. Upholding truth and principle is a rare type of courage, yet she possessed that courage.

¹³⁹*Sūrah an-Naml*, 27:44.

Verses of the Qur'ān have illustrated in three powerful personalities (i.e., Prophets Dāwūd and Sulaymān, and the Queen of Saba') the modesty and humility of the true believer who recognizes that all wealth and ability is due to the favor of Allāh. Through gratitude to Him alone, blessings are increased. Allāh promises: **"If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in favor]."**¹⁴⁰

The Qur'ān mentions the death of Sulaymān.¹⁴¹ The *jinn* who were in subjugation to him did not realize that he had died for quite some time; therefore, they continued in service until the staff upon which he had been leaning was partially eaten by a small creature of the earth and collapsed under his weight. This confirmed to the *jinn* that the great king and prophet was no longer alive and in power. The verse is proof that the *jinn* do not have knowledge of the unseen. Such knowledge belongs only to Allāh.

¹⁴⁰*Sūrah Ibrāheem*, 14:7.

¹⁴¹See *Sūrah Saba'*, 34:14.

PROPHET ILYĀS (ELIAS)

Prophet Ilyās is briefly mentioned twice in the Qur'ān. History based upon earlier scriptures relates that after the death of Prophet Sulaymān, the kingdom of the Children of Israel dispersed, and the people eventually fell back into corruption and idol worship – in particular, the worship of one called Ba'1. In *Sūrah aṣ-Ṣāffāt*, Allāh mentions that Ilyās was one of those sent by Him to warn the people to fear their Creator who was their true Lord, as well as the Lord of their forefathers (whether they recognized that fact or not). But the people, with the exception of certain sincere servants chosen by Allāh, denied Ilyās and persecuted him, incurring Allāh's punishment.

Because of his faithfulness in the face of severe hardship, Allāh blessed Ilyās and kept his memory alive among those who came after him that they may remember his example and pray for him. In the words of the Qur'ān: **"Peace be upon Ilyās and his followers. Indeed, We thus reward the doers of good."**¹⁴²

¹⁴²*Sūrah aṣ-Ṣāffāt*, 37:130-131.

PROPHET YŪNUS (JONAH)

Prophet Yūnus is also referred to in the Qur'ān as *Dhun-Noon* (the Man of the Fish). In *ḥadīths* narrated by Muslim, Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) said, *"I do not say that anyone is better than Yūnus, son of Mattā."* He also said, *"No servant should say, 'I am better than Yūnus, son of Mattā.'"*

After reaching the peak of material progress and political influence, the Assyrian people of Ninevah fell into sin and idol worship. So Prophet Yūnus was sent to invite them back to the worship of Allāh alone and to repentance. When the people refused his message, he became angry, and warning them of the punishment that Allāh would send upon them for their disobedience, he fled to a ship that was loaded and prepared to set out to sea.

Due to human weakness, Yūnus made the mistake of leaving his people before Allāh had given him permission to do so, thinking that he had done all that he could do to save the obstinate nation, and that Allāh would not blame him. But Allāh knew otherwise, and the people were given a second chance. After their prophet had left them, they realized that Allāh would punish them if they did not repent. They regretted their sins and left their homes, gathering outside the city, crying and pleading to Allāh to have mercy upon them. Because they were sincere, Allāh diverted the punishment from them and later enabled Prophet Yūnus to return and teach them His religion. Allāh states in the Qur'ān: **"Then has there not been a [single] city that believed so its faith benefited it except the people of Jonah? When they believed, We removed from them the punishment of disgrace in worldly life and gave them enjoyment [i.e.,**

provision] for a time."¹⁴³

Meanwhile Yūnus boarded the ship and went out to sea. Allāh sent a strong wind causing the ship to be hit by heavy waves, and the passengers feared that the ship would sink because it was overloaded. So they decided to draw lots, and the loser was to be cast overboard in order to save the rest. That lot fell upon Prophet Yūnus who had realized his mistake in abandoning *da'wah* prematurely. He felt that he had committed a grave sin worthy of blame. Allāh gave this example to Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) in *Sūrah al-Qalam* telling him to be patient with the people and not to make the same mistake of giving up too soon.

Yūnus threw himself into the sea, and a huge fish swallowed him alive. While in the dark confines of the fish's belly, he called out in earnestness: **"There is no deity except You; exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers."**¹⁴⁴ This *du'aa'* has become well known, as Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) said that Allāh responds to any Muslim supplicating Him with it during a crisis.

Although Yūnus was too humble and guilt ridden to ask to be saved, Allāh, in His mercy, chose to deliver him because he had admitted and deeply regretted his error. Allāh caused the fish to disgorge him, ejecting him onto a beach. He also caused a vine to grow over Yūnus in order to give him shade and fruit until he recovered from his affliction. Then Allāh ordered Yūnus to return to his people to complete His message to them. He fulfilled this duty, earning the mercy of Allāh upon himself and upon the people who had repented and followed their prophet in submission to Allāh.

¹⁴³*Sūrah Yūnus*, 10:98.

¹⁴⁴*Sūrah al-Anbiyā'*, 21:87.

PROPHETS ZAKARIYYĀ (ZECHARIAH) AND YAḤYĀ (JOHN)

Zakariyyā was a prophet of Allāh who spent his life in *da'wah* and in service to the Temple in Jerusalem. He hoped to have a righteous son who would inherit the prophethood and continue as a spiritual leader of his people, since he feared their corruption at the hands of those in line to take authority after his death. He was also the guardian of the pious young girl, Maryam, who would become the mother of Prophet 'Īsā. Observing Maryam at worship and the way in which Allāh provided for her needs, Zakariyyā knew that although he was now very old and his wife was barren, Allāh, in His mercy, could give them a son if He so willed. So he turned to his Lord in sincere supplication with no thought of worldly benefit, asking for a son only that he might serve Allāh – a son that would be pleasing to Him.

Allāh answered the prayer of Zakariyyā and sent angels to inform him that he would have a son to be named Yaḥyā – a name which had never been given to anyone before. They informed him that as a sign this was true, he would not speak for three days.

The promise of Allāh was realized, and Yaḥyā was born. Allāh says in the Qur'ān: **"'O Yaḥyā, take the Scripture [i.e., adhere to it] with determination.' And We gave him judgement [while yet] a boy and affection from Us and purity, and he was fearing of Allāh and dutiful to his parents, and he was not a disobedient tyrant. And peace be upon him the day he was born and the day he dies and the day he is raised alive."**¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵*Sūrah Maryam, 19:12-15.*

PROPHET 'ĪSĀ (JESUS)

Maryam (Mary), the mother of Prophet 'Īsā, was dedicated by her own mother to the service of Allāh. As a young girl she was given to the care of her uncle, Prophet Zakariyyā, to be raised in the temple. When she reached maturity, Angel Jibreel (Gabriel) appeared to her, bringing news that Allāh had chosen her to bear a son named 'Īsā al-Maseeh (Jesus the Messiah) who would be a messenger to the Children of Israel. Since no man had touched her, she wondered how this could be, but the angel replied that when Allāh intends something, He has only to say "Be," and it is. In the Qur'ān the creation of 'Īsā without a father is compared to the creation of Ādam from the earth without either a father or a mother, as all things are possible when willed by Allāh. When the Jews accused Maryam of immorality, Allāh caused 'Īsā, who was still in the cradle, to speak in defense of his mother.

'Īsā was sent to the Children of Israel to petition them to return to the guidance given by Allāh through the earlier prophets. He did not claim to be anything more than a prophet and a servant of Allāh. Allāh supported 'Īsā in his prophethood by enabling him to perform certain miracles, but most of the Jews rejected his message.

In the Qur'ān, Allāh gives less importance to the life story of Prophet 'Īsā than to the refutation of the false doctrines developed in the generations after his prophethood, especially the claim of his divinity. The following verses explain:

"Never would the Messiah disdain to be a servant of Allāh, nor would the angels near [to Him]."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶*Sūrah an-Nisā*, 4:172.

"They have certainly disbelieved who say that Allāh is Christ, the son of Maryam. Say, 'Then who could prevent Allāh at all if He had intended to destroy Christ, the son of Maryam, or his mother or everyone on the earth?' "147

"They have certainly disbelieved who say, 'Allāh is the Messiah, the son of Maryam' while the Messiah has said, 'O Children of Israel, worship Allāh, my Lord and your Lord.' Indeed, he who associates others with Allāh – Allāh has forbidden him Paradise."148

"They have certainly disbelieved who say, 'Allāh is the third of three.' "149

"The Messiah, son of Maryam, was not but a messenger; [other] messengers have passed on before him. And his mother was a supporter of truth."150

"That is Jesus, the son of Maryam – the word of truth about which they are in dispute. It is not [befitting] for Allāh to take a son; exalted is He! When He decrees an affair, He only says to it, 'Be,' and it is. [Jesus said], 'And indeed, Allāh is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him. That is a straight path.' "151

The Qur'ān also mentions that 'Īsā informed the people of a messenger named Aḥmad, who would come after him. This is a direct reference to Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ).152

147 *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:17.

148 *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:72.

149 *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:73.

150 *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:75.

151 *Sūrah Maryam*, 19:34-36.

152 See *sūrah* 61:6.

The Children of Israel rejected ‘Īsā and were increasingly angered by his exposition of their ungodly ways, so they plotted against him. They went to the Roman governors, accusing ‘Īsā of treason against the state. Only a few of his companions (i.e., disciples) professed to be his helpers in the cause of Allāh. It was then that Allāh revealed to His prophet: **"O ‘Īsā, indeed I will take you and raise you to Myself and purify [i.e., free] you from those who disbelieve."**¹⁵³

The enemies of Allāh prepared to have Prophet ‘Īsā crucified, but Allāh caused him to ascend to heaven, and a criminal resembling him was executed in his place. In their belief that they had succeeded in ridding the world of Allāh's messenger, they boasted openly that they had killed him. But although the Children of Israel had killed other prophets in the past, Allāh willed that ‘Īsā should be saved and raised to heaven before his death.

Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) related that ‘Īsā will return to the earth to restore truth and justice before the Day of Judgement. Allāh refutes the claims of ‘Īsā's enemies as well as those of the Christians, stating: **"...And [for] their saying, 'Indeed, we have killed the Messiah, ‘Īsā the son of Maryam, the messenger of Allāh.' And they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but [another] was made to resemble him to them. And indeed, those who differ over it are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it except the following of assumption. And they did not kill him, for certain. Rather, Allāh raised him to Himself."**¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³*Sūrah Āli ‘Imrān*, 3:55.

¹⁵⁴*Sūrah an-Nisā’*, 4:157-158.

Thus the Qur'ān provides the proper perspective concerning the person of 'Īsā. The Jews rejected him as an impostor, and the Christians raised him to a superhuman level, even directing worship to him. The Islāmic view of him as a human prophet like all of the others (to be held in honor but not in worship) is consistent with the unity and exclusiveness of the Creator of mankind. Allāh provides the final refutation to their claim in the following *sūrah*: **"Say, 'He is Allāh, [who is] One, Allāh, the Eternal Refuge.¹⁵⁵ He neither begets nor is born, nor is there to Him any equivalent.'"**¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵The one sought out in times of difficulty and need; the one depended upon by all.

¹⁵⁶*Sūrah al-Ikhlāṣ*, 112:1-4.

PROPHET MUḤAMMAD

As has been illustrated throughout this book, Allāh chose that only glimpses of the lives and teachings of some of His prophets be revealed through the Qur'ān. And concerning some of these, further information has come down to us through the authentic *sunnah* of the final messenger, Muḥammad (ﷺ).

In contrast, the biography of Prophet Muḥammad himself is known as a part of recorded history along with large authentic collections of his sayings, actions and reactions in every situation (i.e., the *sunnah*), which are the second source of Islāmic law and conduct. Allāh states in the Qur'ān: **"He who obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allāh."**¹⁵⁷ This information, conscientiously collected and thoroughly analyzed for accuracy by later scholars, now fills hundreds of volumes, not to mention the studies which have developed around it.

Fifteen centuries after the Qur'ān was revealed, its text has indeed been guarded from any change or loss as Allāh, the Almighty, had promised. Allāh insured the preservation of His word for all time, and the time has now arrived when man has the ability to make it known in every corner of the earth, making any additional prophet unnecessary. Thus, in the Qur'ān, Allāh refers to Muḥammad as "The Seal of the Prophets."

As a further mercy, this prophet, through whom the final message was revealed, was to be a living example of the practical application of Allāh's teachings upon the earth.

¹⁵⁷*Sūrah an-Nisā'*, 4:80.

He serves as a pattern for those who would live their lives in the way ordained by their Creator, seeking His acceptance and pleasure in preparation for the greater life of the Hereafter. Allāh directs us in the Qur'ān: **"There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allāh an excellent pattern [of conduct] for anyone whose hope is in Allāh and the Last Day."**¹⁵⁸ So He has willed that the Prophet's life be an open book, and that his *sunnah* be known to Muslims and practiced by them.

As Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) undertook to follow the directives that came to him through revelation, great changes came about in a people who otherwise would have been unnoticed by history. The resulting historical events in themselves are given less importance by Muslim scholars than the human factor that caused them, i.e., the direct relationship between the positive attitudes and efforts of men and the result bestowed upon them by Allāh in the form of success and blessing in this world, even before those of the Hereafter.¹⁵⁹ The essence of the study of the Prophet's biography (*seerah*) is to understand the lessons contained in it and to benefit from those lessons as individuals and societies. One cannot do justice to this subject in a few pages. Any brief outline of facts cannot include the details of personal conduct which would comprise a complete biography. It can only serve as an introduction.

¹⁵⁸*Sūrah al-Aḥzāb*, 33:21.

¹⁵⁹For example, when the Muslims obeyed Allāh and the Prophet (ﷺ) and had pure intentions, desiring to be victorious only for His cause, they were granted victory and success; yet when their human weakness prompted them to be more concerned with material gain, they were denied victory, as in the Battle of Uḥud. See also *Sūrah an-Nūr*, 24:55.

Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) was born of the tribe of Quraysh in Makkah. This city was built up around the *Ka'bah*, the House of Allāh, which was originally erected in response to His command to prophets Ibrāheem and Ismā'eel (to whom Muḥammad's ancestry is traced). It was dedicated by them to the worship of Allāh alone. But as centuries passed, the tribes of Arabia filled and surrounded the *Ka'bah* with statues and idols that they worshipped besides Allāh. Some of the Quraysh claimed that these idols were intermediaries between the people and Allāh, while others worshipped Allāh as merely one of their many deities. At the same time, as in previous societies, the people were steeped in immorality and injustice of all kinds and were often occupied by bloody tribal feuds.

In the year before the birth of the Prophet, a Christian army from Abyssinia accompanied by a great elephant marched to the outskirts of Makkah with the intention of destroying the *Ka'bah*. At that time the *Ka'bah* was what had made the city a center for commerce as well as worship and what had given honor to its people among the neighboring tribes. In desperation, and defenseless against the huge army, the Makkans called upon Allāh directly to protect His House. As described in *Sūrah al-Fīl*, Allāh sent flocks of birds carrying stones which they released over the army, causing its defeat and withdrawal. It was into this corrupt and tradition-centered society that Prophet Muḥammad was born.

Prophet Muḥammad grew up as an orphan, as his father, 'Abdullāh, had died before his birth, and his mother, Āminah, died when he was only six years old. His grandfather, 'Abdul-Muṭṭalib, who had taken the boy following the death of his mother, himself died after two

years, and the guardianship then went to his son, Abū Ṭālib, who was an honorable but very poor man. Muḥammad was raised by his uncle with love and care within his meager circumstances. As a boy Prophet Muḥammad tended sheep and later made a living through trade and commerce. He had no formal education, but his intelligence, honesty and sincerity made him widely respected as a young man. The high moral character of such a man in a corrupt society attests to Allāh's will in preparing him for the prophethood. When he was twenty-five, his employer, a noble lady of forty who was impressed by his character, proposed marriage. He remained contentedly married to Khadījah for 25 years until her death.

Although he was then free from financial need, Muḥammad had little interest in worldly affairs. He had always had an instinctive aversion to the traditional idol-worship of his society, and in the period following his marriage, he turned more and more to contemplation and longing for the truth. The first signs of prophethood came in the form of dreams, which inevitably came true shortly after their occurrence. He then took to the practice of retiring to a solitary cave far outside the city for meditation and prayer to Allāh alone, unaware of the great event which was soon to take place.

Then at the age of forty as he was worshipping as usual in the cave of Ḥirā', Angel Jibreel (Gabriel) appeared to him, commanding him to "recite."¹⁶⁰ Muḥammad replied, "I am not one who can recite." After repeating the command three times, the angel delivered the first of the revelations from Allāh which he was to receive over a period of twenty-three years:

¹⁶⁰The word "*iqra* " may also be translated as "read."

**"Recite in the name of your Lord who created –
Created man from a clinging substance.
Recite, and your Lord is the most Generous –
Who taught by the pen –
Taught man that which he knew not."**¹⁶¹

Terrified at what he had experienced, Muḥammad fled to the comfort of his wife, Khadījah, who reassured him that because of his kindness and righteousness, Allāh would never harm him. Her aged cousin, who had knowledge of the earlier scriptures, recognized that Muḥammad was to be the awaited prophet of Allāh.

From that time on Prophet Muḥammad's life was one of continuous struggle to carry out the great duty placed upon him by Allāh, the Exalted. The message he carried was that of every prophet before him: there is no divinity except the one, true God, Allāh, who created the universe and mankind and who sustains all things. All worship and obedience is due to Him alone.

The first believers in his message were those nearest to him – his wife Khadījah, his young cousin ‘Alī who was raised in his home, his servant Zayd, his closest friend Abū Bakr, and later a few others who knew him.

Then Allāh ordered him to warn the people in general and make the message public. The revelations which came to the Prophet during the Makkan period dealt mainly with matters of belief – the oneness and exclusiveness of Allāh, His absolute power and ability, and His mercy. It informed of the judgement, the rewards and punishments of the

¹⁶¹*Sūrah al-‘Alaq*, 96:1-5.

Hereafter, and the personal responsibility of every soul. It taught morality, piety, patience, the spirit of sacrifice and dependence upon Allāh. It comforted the believers in hardship, giving examples of the difficulties faced by the earlier prophets in their struggle to re-establish the worship of Allāh on earth. And finally, it reassured them that Allāh in His wisdom does what is best. The early *sūrahs* came in powerful language aimed at awakening the hearts of men who had long been unaware.

The reaction among the Quraysh in Makkah was first ridicule and then open persecution of the small but growing group of Muslims. This was because the polytheistic traditionalists felt a threat to their established way of life and to the authority which was derived from that social order. The Prophet restrained his followers from striking back and counseled patience and forbearance in the face of hardship until such a time as Allāh would show them the way. Complete trust in Allāh and the reward of the Hereafter disciplined the Muslims and strengthened their will. In spite of increasing problems, the Prophet never ceased to seek out and speak to any who would listen. Hoping to put an end to the disruption of their established social order, the influential people of Makkah attempted to dissuade the Prophet by offering him wealth and authority in return for the abandonment of his call for worship of one God and criticism of their traditions, in particular, polytheism. When this attempt failed, they renewed persecution, torturing some of the believers, even to death, in the hope of making them renounce their faith.

The Prophet then gave permission for his followers to seek refuge in Abyssinia, where they were received sympathetically by the Christian ruler who refused to return

them to the Quraysh. Frustration at the failure to stop the Muslims led the Quraysh of Makkah to boycott the extended family of Muḥammad and any who supported them. Deprived of food and supplies for over two years, they endured extreme hardship. After the boycott was lifted, many of those who had been in Abyssinia returned, only to face renewed persecution later.

Having also suffered great personal loss at the death of his protecting uncle, Abū Ṭālib, and his wife and companion, Khadījah, the Prophet made a journey for the purpose of *da'wah* to the neighboring city of Ṭā'if. He was treated badly and driven out of the city. Exhausted and injured, his only fear was that Allāh might be displeased that he had somehow failed in his obligation.

In order to test the faith of those who had professed belief in the Prophet and in order to show His favor upon Muḥammad after the severe trials he had endured, Allāh chose to honor Prophet Muḥammad through the miracle of the *Isrā'* (night journey) and the *Mi'rāj* (ascension). It is mentioned thus in the Qur'ān: **"Exalted is He who took His Servant [i.e., Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ)] by night from al-Masjid al-Ḥarām to al-Masjid al-Aqṣā, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs."**¹⁶²

From Jerusalem the Prophet (ﷺ) was raised up through the heavens during the same night. It was there that he was shown some of the greatest signs of Allāh and there that five daily prayers were made obligatory upon Muslims. Details of the journey were related to the people the following morning. Muḥammad was asked by the disbelievers to

¹⁶²*Sūrah al-Isrā'*, 17:1.

describe Jerusalem, which he did accurately, also informing them of a caravan on its way to Makkah, which arrived at the predicted time. In spite of that evidence, most of them refused to believe. However, knowing that nothing is difficult for Allāh, the true believers had no doubt about this event. After it was to come the turning point for the Muslims.

During the pilgrimage season some people from the northern city of Yathrib heard the Prophet speaking, accepted Islām, and swore allegiance to him. They returned with the message to their city, where more people entered the faith. The following year Islām spread further in Yathrib, and a delegation was sent to pledge that they would defend the Prophet just as they would their own families.

The Muslims who had endured unbearable conditions in Makkah were at last given permission to emigrate to Yathrib. They moved quietly in order to avoid confrontation as much as possible, most being forced to abandon everything they owned. The Prophet remained behind, awaiting an order from Allāh, for the primary concern was not his safety but to insure the continuation of *da'wah*. The Quraysh plotted to assassinate him by night just as he was finally preparing to emigrate from Makkah, but they failed in their attempt. Under divine inspiration Prophet Muḥammad and his close companion, Abū Bakr, eluded their enemies and began their journey of migration (*hijrah*) to Yathrib. The city later came to be known as "*Madīnat ar-Rasūl*" ("City of the Messenger") or simply, al-Madīnah.

After thirteen years of oppression in Makkah, the faithful now had a community of their own, which became an Islāmic state under the leadership of Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ). The divine law was eagerly awaited and immediately established in the community of believers. Here, different

matters were dealt with in the revelation. Relationships with other people were defined. The believers were warned by Allāh against both external enemies and internal weaknesses. This meant that the style of the revelations in Madīnah was different from that of the Makkan *sūrah*s. The Qur'ān sent down by Allāh as guidance to all mankind until the end of time was, moreover, revealed to the Prophet in portions according to the needs and requirements of specific circumstances, giving certainty to the believers that Allāh was indeed with them in every situation and aware of all things. The Qur'ān was the constitution of the first Islāmic state but at the same time is applicable to every age. It is the lasting miracle of Allāh's final prophet.

One of the first things the Prophet did upon settling in Madīnah was to establish a bond of brotherhood between the Anṣār (literally, "the helpers," i.e., the Muslims from Madīnah) and the Muhājireen (the emigrants from Makkah) on an individual basis which surpassed the ties of tribe or class in the Islāmic community. Treaties were made with the Jews of Madīnah and others with the aim of maintaining peace and security in the area. Plans were made for the defense of their city against attack. During this period the people were again tested by an order from Allāh changing the direction of prayer from Jerusalem back to the sacred *masjid* (i.e., the *Ka'bah*) in Makkah.

Muslims who were unable to emigrate from Makkah had become the object of increasing vengeance of the Quraysh, but still no order to defend or retaliate had come from Allāh. In desperation, the oppressed people called out to Allāh to save them from the ever-increasing persecution. Finally, permission was given for the Muslims to fight because of the injustice done to them.

Thus began *jihād* – the struggle to liberate mankind from the tyranny of other men and establish the will of Allāh upon the earth. The Muslims planned to strike at Makkan caravans which were essential to the continued prosperity of the Quraysh, hoping at the same time to recover a small portion of what they had been forced to leave behind. Apprehensive of the danger, the Quraysh sent out an army from Makkah. The result was the Battle of Badr. Seeing the Muslims vastly outnumbered, the Prophet beseeched Allāh for help, and as Allāh revealed in the Qur’ān, He supported them with a thousand angels. The victory at Badr established the Muslim community as a political entity and gained it prestige among the neighboring tribes.

One year later, burning with the desire for revenge, the Prophet's enemies amassed an army three times larger than before. The Prophet decided it was best to face them in his own territory, so the armies met at Mount Uḥud. Again the Muslims, whose numbers were small in comparison, fought valiantly. They were on the verge of victory when a section of the army, using their own judgement and disobeying the Prophet's orders, caused a weakness in the ranks which was exploited by the enemy. This led to a setback for the Muslims, the loss of many lives, and the wounding of the Prophet (ﷺ) – a costly mistake but a valuable lesson for the believers.

Two years later the Quraysh amassed an even larger force and made alliances with Jewish and other tribes. News of this reached the Muslims. In defense of Madīnah the Prophet and his companions spent many days and nights digging a trench around the city which kept the attacking armies at bay for three weeks. However, there were enemies from within – hypocrites professing Islām but secretly working against the state. After a tense and difficult period

in which their defense was nearly broken, the Muslims turned in fervent supplication to Allāh. Finally, the enemy was forced to withdraw after Allāh sent a devastating wind which destroyed their camp. This encounter, known as the Battle of al-Khunduq (or al-Aḥzāb), was the last attempt by Quraysh to destroy the Muslim base.

In the following period it was necessary to subdue the Jews, who had violated their treaty with the Muslim state, as well as the polytheistic tribes which were a continuing threat. During this time as well, many of the neighboring tribes, hearing of the "new" religion and sending emissaries to inquire about it, embraced Islām. This active period also witnessed several of the Prophet's marriages, all of which were contracted for political and social reasons and out of mercy for widows who had suffered for the cause of Islām.

In the sixth year after the *hijrah* the Prophet and a large company of his companions set out for Makkah with the intention of performing *‘umrah*. Fearing the growing Muslim influence, the Quraysh sought to prevent them. Following negotiations, they established the ten-year truce of al-Hudaybiyyah in which in return for certain guarantees, the Prophet agreed to postpone the *‘umrah* until the following year. Reluctant at first, the companions followed the example of their prophet, sacrificing their animals and shaving their heads to release them from *iḥrām*. This truce was, in fact, a formal recognition of the Muslim state and of the right of all to practice and invite others to their religion. In the Qur’ān, Allāh referred to it as a "clear victory,"¹⁶³ and the companions who had first considered it a concession came to understand its benefit and wisdom thereafter.

¹⁶³See *Sūrah al-Fath*, 48:1.

The next year Makkah was temporarily evacuated, and the Prophet and 2,000 of his followers were allowed to perform the rites of *‘umrah*. Observing from the surrounding hills, the Makkans were impressed by the sight, and many conversions to Islām took place.

In the Qur’ān, Allāh makes it known that Islām (submission to Him) is the desirable way of life for all mankind. The Prophet himself was the initiator of *da‘wah* (invitation to Allāh) among non-Arab peoples. He sent messages with emissaries to rulers of neighboring nations and empires, some of whom responded favorably while others refused.

Not even three years had passed following the truce of al-Hudaybiyyah when the Quraysh violated their obligations. Their attempts to deceive the Prophet about the matter failed, and a Muslim army of 10,000 led by Prophet Muḥammad marched towards Makkah. Nearing the city, the Prophet's uncle, ‘Abbās, encountered Abū Sufyān, the leader of the Quraysh, and advised him to avoid bloodshed and join the Prophet. Abū Sufyān then accompanied him to the Prophet's campsite and declared his acceptance of Islām. In a gesture of generosity the Prophet promised that anyone who entered the house of Abū Sufyān would be safe, as well as those who entered the sacred Ḥaram. The leader of the Quraysh returned to Makkah, warning the people that resistance would be of no avail against the powerful Muslim army. So the Quraysh apprehensively awaited the army's approach.

The army had been divided into two factions, one led by the Prophet and the other by Khālīd bin al-Waleed. Khālīd's faction was met by allies of the Quraysh who tried to prevent them from entering the city but were overcome. The Prophet met no resistance. In a manner so unlike that of

an arrogant conqueror, he entered the city whose people had been the source of abuse and injury for twenty years. Bowing humbly, he gave thanks to Allāh for His great favor and for the victory for Islām. He then addressed the people, saying, "What should I do with you?" In spite of their former animosity, they knew him. They replied, "What is good. You are a generous brother and the son of a generous brother." Said the Messenger of Allāh, "Go, for you are free."

Thus Allāh, the Almighty, opened the hearts of the people to Islām. After observing that justice was truly established, the former enemies came to the Prophet, asking for forgiveness and declaring their Islām. And he accepted them all. Even those who had joined the Muslims initially for material gain now accepted the religion from their hearts, dedicating themselves to Allāh.

Upon entering Makkah, Prophet Muḥammad proceeded to the *Ka'bah* where he performed *ṭawāf*. He then entered it, removing all pictures and destroying all idols, thereby purifying the House for the worship of Allāh alone as it was always meant to be. The Prophet remained in Makkah for nineteen days during which he sent deputies to destroy the temples of the pagan gods in the area surrounding the city and received delegations and individuals pledging loyalty to Allāh and His Messenger (ﷺ).

However, the city of Ṭā'if remained hostile to Islām and was determined to defend its idols. Due to their now greater numbers, the Muslims became overconfident and were somewhat careless in this encounter. This led to losses and the wounding of the Prophet. Yet, in the end they were victorious by the will of Allāh. Again, no retribution was carried out against the people of Ṭā'if.

Fearing the expansion of the Prophet's influence and authority in Arabia, the oppressive Roman Empire amassed troops in preparation for an attack. In response to this the Prophet organized a march to the north. This long and difficult journey was another test of the believers' sincerity. Upon finally reaching Tabūk, they found that the Romans had withdrawn. Not long after the Prophet's death, the mighty empires of Rome and Persia were defeated, liberating the peoples under their occupation who sought refuge in the justice of Islām.

In the tenth year of the *hijrah* a great multitude of Muslims accompanied the Prophet from Madīnah to perform the rites of *ḥajj*. It was then that Allāh revealed *Sūrah an-Naṣr*, which alluded to the fact that Prophet Muḥammad's mission on earth was completed and that the time of his death was near. It was then that he gave what is known as his "farewell address" in which he clarified and confirmed many aspects of the law and in which he called for justice to all people. He requested those present to pass on what he had said to those who were absent, asking them, "Have I conveyed the message?" Upon hearing their unanimous reply in the affirmative, he said, "O Allāh, witness [this]." After the *ḥajj* the Prophet remained in Makkah for ten days and then returned to Madīnah.

Early in the eleventh year of the *hijrah* the Prophet became ill. Pain and fever so weakened him that he finally ordered Abū Bakr to lead the people in prayer. He died in the month of Rabee' al-Awwal of that year.

The companions were deeply grieved not only by the loss of the Prophet himself but because they knew that there would be no further revelation from Allāh. But as Abū Bakr said to those still in shock and disbelief of the news, "If any

worshipped Muḥammad, Muḥammad is dead. But whoever worshipped Allāh, Allāh is the Ever-living, who will never die." Then he recited the following verse: **"Muḥammad is not but a messenger. [Other] messengers have passed on before him. So if he was to die or be killed, would you turn back on your heels [to unbelief]?"**¹⁶⁴

The teachings of Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) live on through the authentic *sunnah* which takes precedence over the opinions of all men, even Islāmic scholars. After the Qur'ān, it is considered proof in any cases of doubt or disagreement about what is allowed, prohibited or preferable, since the Prophet's authority is derived from the divine will. The Qur'ān has made obedience to the Prophet incumbent upon every believer.

Muḥammad (ﷺ) was sent to mankind as a mercy from Allāh to teach and to demonstrate the true worship of Him. The Muslims' reverence for Prophet Muḥammad in no way lessens that for the previous messengers. All were sent to fulfill a purpose, and all are held in high esteem by true believers. Muslims do, however, reject any claims to prophethood after him as false. Allāh said: **"Muḥammad is not the father of [any] one of your men, but [he is] the Messenger of Allāh and seal [i.e., last] of the prophets. And ever is Allāh, of all things, Knowing."**¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴*Sūrah Āli 'Imrān*, 3:144.

¹⁶⁵*Sūrah al-Aḥzāb*, 33:40.