

The Holy Quran vindicated previous prophets as models of virtue

*Jacob (Israel) called deceiver, usurper and liar in the Bible
but declared pure and innocent by the Quran*

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Hajj based on Abraham's practice

As *Hajj* will be taking place in about one week's time, I will begin this talk with some verses of the Holy Quran about the pilgrimage and about Abraham and his "religion", as the Quran calls it. Then I will connect this with the theme of my talk.

"Say: Allah speaks the truth; so follow the religion of Abraham, the upright one. And he was not one of those who set up partners (with Allah). Certainly the first house appointed for mankind is the one at Bakkah, blessed and a guidance for the nations. In it are clear signs: (It is) the Place of Abraham; and whoever enters it is safe; and pilgrimage to the House is a duty which people owe to Allah — whoever can find a way to it." (3 : 95–97)

"And when We pointed to Abraham the place of the House, saying: Do not set up any partner with Me, and purify My House for those who make circuits and stand to pray and bow and prostrate themselves. And proclaim to mankind the Pilgrimage: they will come to you on foot and on every lean camel, coming from every remote path..." (22 : 26–27)

The Hajj, therefore, in the form that Islam requires Muslims to follow, was actually instituted by Abraham. It commemorates his worship of the One God and certain events in his life showing his submission and utter devotion to Divine commands. The "house" mentioned here is, of course, the Ka'ba in Makkah. The Holy Prophet Muhammad, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, lies buried in Madinah. After he conquered Makkah, he chose to live in Madinah, which ensured that he died there and was buried there, and not in Makkah. Had he been buried in Makkah, the misconception might have arisen that Hajj is undertaken to his tomb. Even the idea cannot now arise.

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The religion of Abraham

I now quote some verses of the Holy Quran about the religion of Abraham:

“And who is better in religion than he who submits himself entirely to Allah while doing good (to others) and follows the faith of Abraham, the upright one? And Allah took Abraham for a friend.” (4 : 125)

Every religion calls itself the “best religion”, or at least the followers of every religion go around declaring that their religion is the best. But the Holy Quran says here that there is no religion better than the “faith of Abraham” (*millat Ibrahim*). Why? Because the fundamental of religion is to submit all one’s desires, wholly and entirely, to the One God, and then do good to all His creation. The best person in religion is not one whose focus is on small details of performance of acts of worship (the main error of the Jews), or one who indulges in discussions on abstract, doctrinal matters (the main error of the Christians). The best person in religion is one who follows the simplicity of Abraham’s beliefs and the devotion underlying his practices.

The following verses show how emphatically it is stated in the Quran that Muslims must follow the faith of Abraham:

“Then We revealed to you (O Prophet Muhammad): Follow the faith of Abraham, the upright one; and he was not from among the idolaters.” (16 : 123)

“Say: As for me, my Lord has guided me to the right path — a right religion, the faith of Abraham, the upright one, and he was not of those who set up partners (with Allah).” (6 : 161)

“And who forsakes the religion of Abraham but he who makes a fool of himself. And certainly We made him pure in this world, and in the Hereafter he is surely among the righteous. When his Lord said to him, Submit, he said: I submit myself to the Lord of the worlds.” (2 : 130–131)

“And they say: Be Jews or Christians, you will be on the right course. Say: Rather, (we follow) the religion of Abraham, the upright one, and he was not of those who set up partners (with Allah).” (2 : 135)

“And strive hard for Allah with due striving. He has chosen you and has not laid upon you any hardship in religion — the faith of your father Abraham.” (22 : 78)

The religion of Islam, as delivered by the Holy Prophet Muhammad, in its basic belief in the oneness of God, is a revival of the religion taught by Abraham, as the Quran clearly states.

In this way Islam has honoured Abraham, the recognised father of two other religions. The Prophet Muhammad had nothing to gain personally by doing so. If Islam had been his own creation, and if his revelation had been his own invention, he would have been promoting his own personality and introducing festivals to commemorate his own life. He would not be describing the religion of a past prophet as the best.

All prophets declared sinless

Islam also honoured all prophets by declaring that they were all pure, righteous, fully obedient to God and free of committing sin. So not only did Islam require Muslims to believe in the earlier prophets — and of course Jews and Christians believed in them too — but also to regard them as models of purity. The Quran taught:

“And We sent no messenger before you (O Prophet) but We revealed to him that there is no God but Me, so serve Me. And they say: The Beneficent has taken to Himself a son. Glory be to Him! **No, they are honoured servants — they do not speak before He speaks, and according to His command they act.**” (21 : 25 – 27)

Strange as it may seem, in the Bible there are incidents in the lives of the prophets, regarded as men of God in the Bible, which show these great men as committing sins and even crimes for which people are sent to prison. As against this, the Quran describes these prophets in such glowing terms that it contradicts these sordid episodes.

Noah and Lot in the Bible as compared to the Quran

Two such prophets are Noah and Lot. In the Quran they are together described as “two of Our righteous servants” (66 : 10), Noah is called “one of the doers of good” and a believing servant (37 : 81), and Lot and his followers are called “a people who would keep pure” (27 : 56). In the Bible they are involved in drunkenness, and it is said that Lot’s two daughters conspired to become pregnant by him and they succeeded in this by making him drunk. To quote: “Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father” (Genesis, 19 : 36). This is utterly false according to the description of Noah and Lot in the Quran. These stories are so disreputable that if a film were to be made depicting these scenes, the film would have to carry an “adults only” certificate!

Biblical story of deceit by Jacob contradicted by the Quran

I would like in particular to refer to the prophet Jacob, grandson of Abraham. According to the Quran, Jacob instructed his sons to serve, and submit to, the One God till their death and to follow the religion of Abraham:

“And the same did Abraham command his sons, and (so did) Jacob: My sons, surely Allah has chosen for you (this) religion, so do not die except as submitting ones. Or were you witnesses when death visited Jacob, when he said to his sons: What will you serve after me? They said: We shall serve your God and the God of your fathers, Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac, one God only, and to Him do we submit.” (2 : 132–133)

The Quran also says:

“And We gave him (i.e., Abraham) Isaac and **Jacob**. Each did We guide.” (6 : 84)

“And We gave him (i.e., Abraham) Isaac; and **Jacob**, a son’s son. And We made them all good.” (21 : 72)

“And remember Our servants Abraham and Isaac and **Jacob**, possessors of power and insight. We indeed purified them by a pure quality, the keeping in mind of the (final) abode. And surely they were with Us, among the elect, the best.” (38:45–47)

The prophet Jacob (Yaqub), son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham, was given the title **Israel**, which is mentioned in the Bible (Genesis, 35 : 10) and the Quran (3 : 93). It is after him that the Jews are called the Children of Israel in the Bible and the Quran.

Jacob, according to the Bible, was born as a twin. His twin brother was called Esau, and as he was born first out of the womb he was the elder brother with birth-right of succession to the father. The story of Jacob in the Bible contains incidents which present Jacob as always trying to rob his older twin brother Esau of his rights by means of **blackmail, deceit and falsehood**.

On one occasion when Esau returned from hard labour in the fields, and was exhausted and famished, Jacob refused to give him food unless Esau gave him his birth-right which he possessed because of being the elder brother. Jacob thus obtained this birth-right by blackmail:

Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary. And Esau said to Jacob, “Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary.” ... But Jacob said, “Sell me your birth-right as of this day.” And

Esau said, “Look, I am about to die; so what is this birth-right to me?” Then Jacob said, “Swear to me as of this day.” So he swore to him, and sold his birth-right to Jacob. And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils;... (Genesis, 25 : 29–34)

Their father Isaac was also a prophet according to the Quran. According to the Bible, when Isaac was on his deathbed, and was blind, he told **Esau** that he wanted to pass on Divine blessings to him and that he should bring him some meat to eat, and he would pass on these blessings to him. It is written that their mother overheard this, and then the story continues:

Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt game and to bring it. So Rebekah spoke to Jacob her son, saying, “Indeed I heard your father speak to Esau your brother, saying, ‘Bring me game and make savoury food for me, that I may eat it and bless you in the presence of the Lord before my death.’ Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to what I command you. Go now to the flock and bring me from there two choice kids of the goats, and I will make savoury food from them for your father, such as he loves. Then you shall take it to your father, that he may eat it, and that he may bless you before his death.” (Genesis, 27 : 5–10)

But there was a snag that had to be overcome:

And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, “Look, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth-skinned man. Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be a deceiver to him; and I shall bring a curse on myself and not a blessing.” (Genesis, 27 : 11–12)

This was solved in the following way:

Then Rebekah took the choice clothes of her elder son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. And she put the skins of the kids of the goats on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. (Genesis, 27 : 15–16)

This is what then happened:

So he went to his father and said, “My father.” And he said, “Here I am. Who are you, my son?” Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn; I have

done just as you told me; please arise, sit and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me.” ...

Isaac said to Jacob, “Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not.” So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, “The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau’s hands; so he blessed him. Then he said, “Are you really my son Esau?” He said, “I am.”

He said, “Bring it near to me, and I will eat of my son’s game, so that my soul may bless you.” (Genesis, 27 : 18–25)

Contrast this alleged use of falsehood, pretence and deceit with the diametrically opposite, good qualities of Jacob mentioned in the Quran as above.

By pretending to be Esau, Jacob obtained the blessings and prayers from his father intended for Esau. When Esau returned, and it was realised what had happened, Isaac said to him:

“Your brother came with deceit and has taken away your blessing” (Genesis, 27 : 35).

This alleged behaviour by Jacob is rejected by the Quran in the qualities that it mentions that Jacob possessed, as mentioned above: he was “guided”, “good”, “purified”, and one of “the elect, the best” in the eyes of God. In the Quran, in the story of Jacob’s son Joseph, Jacob is shown as saying:

“Allah is Guardian over what we say.... Judgment is only Allah’s. On Him I rely, and on Him let the reliant rely.” (12 : 66, 67)

And Allah says about Jacob:

“And surely he was possessed of knowledge, because We had given him knowledge, but most people do not know.” (12 : 68)

Can such a man commit acts of falsehood and deceit, and cheat his own father?

The Prophet Muhammad had nothing to gain by exonerating the prophets of the Bible of these charges. On the contrary, he could have used the above alleged incidents to project himself as being a sinless prophet unlike them. In fact, Christian evangelists **do** use these stories to make the claim that everyone is sinful except Jesus. However, the Holy Prophet Muhammad, being guided by God and following

God's revelation to him instead of following low desires, declared the innocence of all earlier prophets, *despite the fact that these were revered figures of his own opponents.*

Israel's scriptures call Israel a deceitful usurper, Quran calls him righteous

It is perhaps the supreme irony in the religious history of the world that the man, Jacob, *after whom the people and state of Israel are named*, is presented in their own scripture as a deceiver, liar and usurper, but that same man is declared as pure, innocent and an elect of God in the scripture of the Muslims!

Jews, Christians and Muslims should all learn from this that the Quran is far above the pettiness of all national and religious prejudices.

There is an incident reported six times in Sahih Bukhari, in slightly differing versions, which shows the strong feeling of the Holy Prophet Muhammad for the honour of other prophets, *even above his own honour*. One version is as follows:

A man from the Jews, having been slapped on his face, came to the Prophet and said, O Muhammad! A man from your companions from the Ansar has slapped me on my face! The Prophet said, Call him. When they called him, the Prophet said, Why did you slap him? He said, O Messenger of Allah! While I was passing by the Jews, I heard him saying, "By Him Who selected Moses above the human beings," I said, "Even above Muhammad?" I became furious and slapped him on the face. The Prophet said, Do not give me superiority over the other prophets [some versions say, over Moses],... (Sahih Bukhari, Book of *Tafsir*, under Surah 7).

Despite being undoubtedly the greatest of all prophets, the Holy Prophet Muhammad told this Muslim not to declare him as superior over Moses (or over other prophets generally) in such arguments. The heated exchange could get out of hand, and the Muslim might speak disrespectfully about another prophet.

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