

Story 1074 1980 Tape 1)

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Ishmael as Intended Sacrifice

After ~~Abraham~~ had had no children by his first wife, he married a second wife. He also prayed to God, "O my God, if you will give me a son, I shall sacrifice him to you."¹ God accepted his prayer, and Abraham's second wife bore him a son whom he named Ishmael.

Abraham's two wives were so jealous of each other that could not get along very well together. Therefore, Abraham took his second wife, whose name was Hacerullah,² to a plot of ground near Mecca. From time to time he took food and other provisions to them there. But for one brief period Abraham was unable to go there, and so Hacerullah and her son went hungry. Hacerullah left Ishmael on the sand and went in search of food. When she returned, she saw a splendid man standing near the baby. This puzzled her, and she was not certain what she should do. But the man spoke, saying,

¹There is considerable debate among Arab writers and scholars concerning the identity of the son to be sacrificed. Some accept the Biblical story of Isaac; more feel that the victim was to be Ishmael. This tale gives the role to Ishmael, the patriarch of the Arabs.

²Biblical Hagar.

Story 1074

"O Hacerullah, be not afraid of me! I am Gabriel,"³

Before Gabriel had come there, Hacerullah had spun around on her heel and gouged out a place in the ground. From that place water had begun to flow. Using her hands, she had made retaining walls of mud to contain the water that flowed from that spot. When Gabriel saw this, he said, "If you had not made those retaining walls, the whole earth would have become a sea." That is the place from which the Zemzem Spring flows.⁴

And so Ishmael survived and grew up to become a healthy boy. One night, however, Abraham had a dream that involved the boy. In the dream a voice said to Abraham, "You once vowed to make a sacrifice to God, but you have not carried out your promise."

On the following day Abraham said to Ishmael's mother "Have Ishmael take a bath, and see to it that he is clean. I shall take him with me to show him around." Hacerullah did as Abraham had directed, and then Abraham and Ishmael left home.

³Gabriel is obviously sent there to assist them, though this is not said.

⁴The Zemzem Spring is the source of the best-known holy water in Islam. It is one of the stopping places on the pilgrim trail through the environs of Mecca. The pilgrims drink its water and carry home with them a bottle or two for friends. Zemzem water is used in religious and in pseudo-magic rituals.

Story 1074

They began to walk toward the Mine Mountains. Ishmael ahead of his father--playing along the way, jumping, and singing. Abraham was so sorrowful about what he was preparing to do that he could not bear to watch the boy. He said, "Ishmael, you come along behind me." After that, Ishmael followed his father as they walked along. When they reached the place where the sacrifice was to be made, Abraham said, "O my Ishmael, come here. We must consider something together. I once made a vow to God that if He gave me a son, I would sacrifice that son here." Then he laid Ishmael upon the ground to slaughter him.

Ishmael said, "Oh, father, tie my hands and arms before you sacrifice me. If you don't do that, I may try to protect myself."

Abraham tied his son's hands and arms and covered his face with a handkerchief. He then tried to cut the boy's throat, but the knife would not cut it. He tried a second time to cut throat, and again the knife had no effect. The third time the knife failed to cut Ishmael's flesh, Abraham threw it to the ground, where it cut in half a stone that it struck.

At that same moment God said to Gabriel, "O Gabriel, take this sacrificial animal⁵ to Abraham, and tell him to sacrifice

⁵Both Biblical and Moslem sources indicate that the animal sent was a ram, but the exact nature of the animal is not specified here.

Story 1074

this creature for me. Go quickly!" Thus a sacrifice sent from the sky, and Ishmael's life was saved.

If that knife had cut Ishmael's flesh, then all sacrifices from that day onward would have been human beings.⁶

⁶The narrator actually says, ". . . would have been Moslems," but he is not making a religious distinction. He is simply referring to people as opposed to animals.