

The Story of Prophet Ishmâeel 'alayhis-salaam

Ibn Katheer rahimahullaah
Translated by Muhammad Gemeiah

One day, Abraham woke up and asked his wife Hajar to get her son and prepare for a long journey. In a few days Abraham started out with his wife Hajar and their son Ishmael. The child was still nursing and not yet weaned.

Abraham walked through cultivated land, desert, and mountains until he reached the desert of the Arabian Peninsula and came to an uncultivated valley having no fruit, no trees, no food, no water. The valley had no sign of life. After Abraham had helped his wife and child to dismount, he left them with a small amount of food and water which was hardly enough for 2 days. He turned around and walked away. His wife hurried after him asking: "Where are you going Abraham, leaving us in this barren valley?"

Abraham did not answer her, but continued walking. She repeated what she had said, but he remained silent. Finally she understood that he was not acting on his own initiative. She realized that Allâh had commanded him to do this. She asked him: "Did Allâh command you to do so?" He replied: "Yes." Then his great wife said: "We are not going to be lost, since Allâh Who has commanded you is with us."

Abraham invoked Almighty Allâh thus: **"O Our Lord! I have made some of my offspring to dwell in a valley with no cultivation, by Your Sacred House (the Ka'ba at Mecca); in order, O our Lord, that they may offer prayers perfectly (Iqamat as salat) so fill some hearts among men with love towards them, and O Allâh provide them with fruits so that they may give thanks. O our Lord! Certainly, You know what we conceal and what we reveal. Nothing on the earth or in the heavens is hidden from Allâh."** (Ch 14:37-38)

Ibn Abbas narrated: "The first lady to use a girdle was the mother of Ishmael. She used a girdle so that she might hide her tracks from Sarah (by dragging it). Abraham brought her and her son Ishmael while she was suckling him to a place near the Kaba under a tree on the spot of ZamZam at the highest place in the mosque. During those days there was nobody in Mecca, nor was there any water so he made them sit over there and placed near them a leather bag containing some dates and a small water skin containing some water and set out homeward. Ishmael's mother followed him saying: "O Abraham! Where are you going, leaving us in this valley where there is no person whose company we may enjoy, nor is there anything to enjoy?" she repeated that to him many times, but he did not look back at her. Then she asked him: "Has Allâh ordered you to do so?" He said: "Yes." She then said: "Then HE will not neglect us," and returned while Abraham proceeded onwards. On reaching the Thaniya where they could not see him, he faced the Kaba and raising both hands, invoked Allâh saying the following prayers: **"O our Lord! I have made some of my offspring dwell in a valley without cultivation, by Your Sacred House (Kaba at Mecca) in order, O our Lord that they may offer prayer perfectly. So fill some hearts among men with love towards them, and O Allâh provide them with fruits so that they may give thanks."** (Ch 14:37)

Ibn Abbas's narration continued; "Ishmael's mother went on suckling Ishmael and drinking from the water (she had) When the water in the water skin had been used up, she became thirsty and her child also became thirsty, She started looking at him (Ishmael) tossing in agony. She left him, for she could not endure looking at him, and found that the mountain of As-Safa was the nearest mountain to her on that land. she too on it and started looking at the valley keenly so that she might see somebody, but she could not see anybody. Then she descended for As Safa and when she reached the valley, she tucked up her robe and ran in the valley like a person in distress and trouble till she crossed the valley and reached the mountain of Al Marwa. There she stood and started looking expecting to see somebody, but she could not see anybody. she repeated that running between Safa And Marwa seven times."

The prophet Muhammad peace be upon him said: *"This is the source of the tradition of the Sa'y (rituals of the hajj, pilgrimage) the going of people between them (As-Safa and Al-Marwa). When she reached Al Marwa (for the last time) she heard a voice and she asked herself to be quiet and listened attentively. She heard the voice again and said: "O whoever you maybe! You have made me hear your voice; have you got something to help me?" And behold! She saw an angel at the place of Zam zam, digging the earth with his heel (or his wing) till water flowed from that place. She started to make something like a basin around it, using her hand in this way, and started filling her water skin with water with her hands and the water was flowing out water she had scooped some of it."*

The Prophet peace be upon him added: *"May Allâh bestow mercy on Ishmael's mother! Had she let the zam-zam flow without trying to control it, or had she not scooped from that water to fill her water skin, Zam zam would have been a stream flowing on the surface of the earth."*

The Prophet peace be upon him continued: *"Then she drank water and suckled her child. The angel said to her: "Don't be afraid of being neglected, for this is the House of Allâh which will be built by this boy and his father, and Allâh never neglects His people." The House (Kaba) at that time was on a high place resembling a hillock, and when torrents came, they flowed to its right and left.*

"She lived in that way till some people from the tribe of Jurhum or a family from Jurhum passed by her and her child as they (the Jurhum people) were coming through the way of Kada. they landed in the lower part of Mecca where they saw a bird that had the habit of flying around water and not leaving it. they said: "this bird must be flying around water, though we know that there is no water in this valley." They sent one or two messengers who discovered the source of water and returned to inform them of the water. SO they all came towards the water. Ishmael's mother was sitting near the water. They asked her: "Do you allow us to stay with you?" She replied: "Yes, but you will have no right to possess the water." They agreed to that. Ishmael's mother was pleased with the whole situation, as she used to love to enjoy the company of the people, so they settled there, and later on they sent for their families who came and settled with them so that some families became permanent residents there. The child (Ishmael) grew up and learned Arabic from them and (his virtues) caused them to love and admire him as he grew up and when he reached the age of puberty they made him marry a woman from amongst them."

The Prophet peace be upon him continued: *"After Ishmael's mother had died, Abraham came after Ishmael's marriage in order to see his family that he had left before but he did not find Ishmael there. When he asked Ishmael's wife about him, she replied: "He has gone in search of livelihood." Then he asked her about their way of living and their condition, and she replied, "We are living in misery; we are living in hardship and destitution," complaining to him. He said: "When your husband returns, convey my salutations to him and tell him to change the threshold of the gate (of his house)."*

"When Ishmael came, he seemed to have felt something unusual, so he asked his wife: 'Has anyone visited you?' she replied, 'Yes, an old man of such and such description came and asked me about you and I informed him and he asked about our state of living and I told him that we were living in a hardship and poverty.' On that Ishmael said: 'Did he advise you anything?' She said: 'Yes he told me to convey his salutation to you and to tell you to change the threshold of your gate.' Ishmael said: 'It was my father and he has ordered me to divorce you. Go back to your family.' so, Ishmael divorced her and married another woman from among them (Jurhum).

"Then Abraham stayed away from them for a period as long as Allâh wished and called on them again but did not find Ishmael. So he came to Ishmael's wife and asked her about Ishmael. She said: 'he has gone in search of our livelihood.' Abraham asked her; 'how are you getting on?' asking her about their sustenance and living. she replied: 'we are prosperous and well off (we have everything in abundance).' then she thanked Allâh. Abraham said: 'What kind of food do you eat?' she said: 'meat.' he said: 'what do you drink?' she said: 'water.' he said: 'O Allâh! bless their meat and water.'"

The Prophet peace be upon him added: *"At that time they did not have grain, and if they had grain he would have also invoked Allâh to bless it. If somebody has only these two things as his sustenance, his health and disposition will be badly affected unless he lives in Mecca."*

The Prophet peace be upon him continued: *"Then Abraham said to Ishmael's wife: 'When your husband comes give my regards to him and tell him that he should keep firm the threshold of his gate.' When Ishmael came back he asked his wife, 'did anyone call no you?' she replied: 'yes, a good looking old man came to me,' so she praised him and added: 'He asked about you and I informed him that we were in a good condition.' Ishmael asked her: ' did he give you any piece of advice?' she said; 'yes, he told me to give his regards to you and ordered that you should keep firm the threshold of your gate.' on that Ishmael said: 'It was my father, and you are the threshold of the gate. He has ordered me to keep you with me.'*

Then Abraham stayed away from them for a period as long as Allâh wished and called on them afterwards. He saw Ishmael under a tree near Zam Zam, sharpening his arrows. When he saw Abraham, he rose up to welcome him (and they greeted each other as a father does with his son or a son does with his father). Abraham said: 'O Ishmael! Allâh has give me an order.' Ishmael said: 'Do what your Lord has ordered you to do.' Abraham asked: 'Will you help me?' Ishmael said: 'I will help you.' Abraham said: 'Allâh has ordered me to build a house here,' pointing to a hillock higher than the land surrounding it.

"Then they raised the foundations of the House (the Kaba). Ishmael brought the stones while Abraham built and when the walls became high Ishmael brought this stone and

put it for Abraham who stood over it and carried on building. While Ishmael was handing him the stones, and both of them were saying: "Our Lord! Accept this service from us, verily, You are the All Hearer, the All Knower." (Ch 2:127 Qur'ân)

The Prophet peace be upon him added: *"Then both of them went on building and going round the Kaba saying O our Lord! Accept this service from us, verily, You are the All Hearer, the All Knower."*; (Saheeh al-Bukhaaree).

Ibn Abbas narrated a slightly different version: "When Abraham had differences with his wife (because of her jealousy of Hajar, Ishmael's mother), he took Ishmael and his mother and went away. They had a water skin with them containing some water. Ishmael's mother used to drink water from the water skin so that her milk would increase for her child. When Abraham reached Mecca, he made her sit under a tree and afterwards returned home. Ishmael's mother followed him and when they reached Kada, she called him from behind: 'O Abraham! To whom are you leaving us?' He replied: '(I am leaving you) to Allâh's care.' she said: 'I am satisfied to be with Allâh.' She returned to her place and started drinking water from the water skin and her milk increased for her child.

"When the water had all been used up, she said to herself: 'I had better go and look so that I may see somebody.' she ascended As-Safa mountain and looked hoping to see somebody but in vain. When she came down to the valley, she ran till she reached Al Marwa Mountain. She ran to and for (between the two mountains) many times. Then she said to herself; 'I had better go and see the state of the child.' she went and found it in a state of one on the point of dying. She could not endure to watch it dying and said to herself: 'If I go and look I may find somebody.' she went and ascended al-Safa mountain and looked for a long while but could not find anybody. thus she completed seven rounds of running between As-Safa and Al-Marwa. Again she said to herself: 'I had better go back and see the state of the child.' but suddenly she heard a voice, and she said to that strange voice. 'help us if you can offer any help.' lo! it was Gabriel (who had made the voice) Gabriel hit the earth with his heel like this (Ibn Abbas hit the earth with his heel to illustrate it), and so the water gushed out. Ishmael's mother was astonished and started digging."

Abu Al Qasim, the Prophet peace be upon him said: *"If she had left the water, (flow naturally, without her intervention) it would have been flowing on the surface of the earth."*

Ibn Abbas continued narrating: "Ishmael's mother started drinking from the water, and her milk increased for her child. Afterwards some people of the tribe of Hurhum saw some birds while passing through the bottom of the valley and that astonished them. They said: "birds can only be found at a place where there is water." They sent a messenger who searched the place and found the water and returned to inform them about it. Then they all went to her and said: "O Ishmael's mother! Will you allow us to be with you (or dwell with you)?" Then they stayed there.

"Later on her boy reached the age of puberty and married a lady from them. Then an idea occurred to Abraham, which he disclosed to his wife (sarah). 'I want to call on my dependants I left at Mecca.' When he went there he greeted Ishmael's wife and said: 'where is Ishmael?' She replied: 'He has gone out hunting.' Abraham said to her: 'When

he comes, tell him to change the threshold of his gate.' When Ishmael came she told him the same and whereupon Ishmael said to her: 'you are the threshold so go to your family (you are divorced).'

"Again Abraham thought of visiting his dependents whom he had left at Mecca, and told his wife (Sarah) of his intentions. Abraham came to Ishmael's house and asked: 'Where is Ishmael?' Ishmael's wife replied: 'He has gone out hunting,' and added: 'will you stay for some time and have something to eat and drink?' Abraham said: 'what is your food and what is your drink?' she replied: 'our food is meat and our drink is water.' he replied: 'O Allâh! Bless their meals and their drink.'

Abu Al Qasim (the Prophet) peace be upon him said: *"Because of Abraham's invocation there are blessings in Mecca."*

Ibn Abbas continued: "Once more Abraham thought of visiting his family he had left at Mecca and he told his wife (Sarah) of his decision. HE went and found Ishmael behind the Zam-zam well, mending his arrows. He said: 'O Ishmael, your Lord has ordered me to build a house for Him.' Ishmael said: 'Obey the order of your Lord.' Abraham said: 'Allâh has also ordered me that you should help me therein.' Ishmael said: 'Then I will do so.' So both of them were saying: **"O our Lord! Accept this service of us, verily, You are the All Hearer, the All Knower."** (Ch 2:127)

When the building became high and the old man (Abraham) could no longer lift the stones to such a high position, he stood over the stone of Al Maqam and Ishmael carried on handing him the stones and both of them were saying: "O our Lord! Accept this service of us, verily You are the All Hearer, the All Knower.""

Allâh the Almighty told us of Abraham's affliction with his beloved son: And he said after his rescue from the fire: "Verily! I am going to my Lord. He will guide me! My Lord! Grant me (offspring) from the righteous." SO We gave him the glad tidings of a forbearing boy. And when he (his son) was old enough to walk with him, he said: "O my son! I have seen in a dream that I am slaughtering you (offer you in sacrifice to Allâh), so look what do you think?" "O my father! Do that which you are commanded Insha'Allâh (if Allâh wills), you shall find me of the patient."

Then when they had both submitted themselves to the Will of Allâh and he had laid him prostrate on his forehead (or on the side of his forehead for slaughtering); and We called out to him: "O Abraham! You have fulfilled the dream (vision!" Verily! Thus do We reward those who perform good deeds, totally for Allâh's sake only. Verily, that indeed was a manifest trial and We ransomed him with a great sacrifice (a ram;) and We left for him (a goodly remembrance) among generations (to come) in later times. "Salamun (peace) be upon Abraham!" Thus indeed do We reward the Muhsineen (good doers). Verily, he was one of Our believing slaves. (Ch 37:99-111 Qur'ân)

Time passed. One day Abraham was sitting outside his tent thinking of his son Ishmael and Allâh's sacrifice. His heart was filled with awe and love for Allâh for His countless blessings. A big tear dropped from his eyes and reminded him of Ishmael.

In the meantime, three angels descended to the earth; Gabriel, Israphael, and Michael. they came in human shapes and saluted Abraham. Abraham arose and welcomed them. He took them inside his tent thinking they were strangers and guests. He seated them and made sure that they were comfortable, then excused himself to go to his people.

His wife Sarah arose when he entered. She had become old and white haired. Abraham said to her: "We have three strangers in the house." "Who are they?" she asked. "I do not know any of them," he answered. "What food have we got?" He asked. "Half a sheep." she replied, "Half a sheep! Slaughter a fat calf for them; they are strangers and guests." he ordered while leaving.

The servants roasted and served a calf. Abraham invited the angels to eat and he started eating so as to encourage them. He continued, but when he glanced at his guests to assure they were eating, he noticed that none of them had touched the food. He said to the them: "Are you not going to eat?" He resumed eating, but when he glanced at them again he found that they were still not eating. Their hands did not reach out for the food. HE began to fear them.

Abraham's fears increased. The angels, however were reading his inner thoughts and one of them said: "Do not fear." Abraham raised his head and replied: "Indeed I am in fear. I have asked you to eat food but you do not stretch out your hands to eat. DO you intend me evil?"

One of the angels smiled and said: "We do not eat. We are Allâh's angels." One of them then turned towards his wife and conveyed the glad tidings about Isaac (Ishaaq).

Almighty Allâh revealed: Verily! There came Our Messengers to Abraham with glad tidings. They said: "Salaam (greetings or peace)!" he answered: "Salaam (greetings or peace)!" and he hastened to entertain them with a roasted calf. But, when he saw their hands went not towards it (the meal), he felt some mistrust of them, and conceived a fear of them. They said: "Fear not, we have been sent against the people of Lot." And his wife was standing there and she laughed (either, because the Messengers did not eat their food or for being glad for the destruction of the people of Lot). But We gave her glad tidings of Isaac, and after him of Jacob.

She said (in astonishment): "Woe unto me! Shall I bear a child while I am an old woman, and here is my husband an old man? Verily! This is a strange thing!" They said: "Do you wonder at the Decree of Allâh? The Mercy of Allâh and His Blessings be on you, O the family (of Abraham). Surely, He (Allâh) is All praiseworthy, All-Glorious." (CH 11:69-73).